

STORY PAPER

VOL 38

No 450

COLLECTORS DIGEST

JUNE
1984

4

5

0

NOT OUT

42p



HW

CHAMPION. 1922. First 16 copies £30.

FILM PICTORIALS. Original file copies (2 vols.) - contents mint. July - December 1938, 332 - 358: £55; 176 - 201, July - December 1935. Spine of this one, lower part, damaged but repaired: £50, otherwise very good, contents mint.

Bound Vols. Old Series Nelson Lees. Lots of loose copies and other series.

THOMSON's pre-war; large stock of Skippers and Rovers at present but expect delivery of most of the others: Adventure, Wizard, Hotspur. Also lots of post-war from 1944.

Keep in touch. Please chase me for your wants! SOLS, Magnets, Gems: huge stocks. Have purchased some more second-hand H. Baker Book Clubs and Facsimiles, as new but 2nd hand prices. List your wants and I'll send.

MONSTER LIBRARIES. A few available. Largest stock of Old Boys' Books in the country. Visitors always welcome by appointment.

N O R M A N S H A W

84 Belvedere Road, Upper Norwood
LONDON, S.E. 19 2HZ
Telephone 01-771-9857
(Nearest Station Crystal Palace)

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by
W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

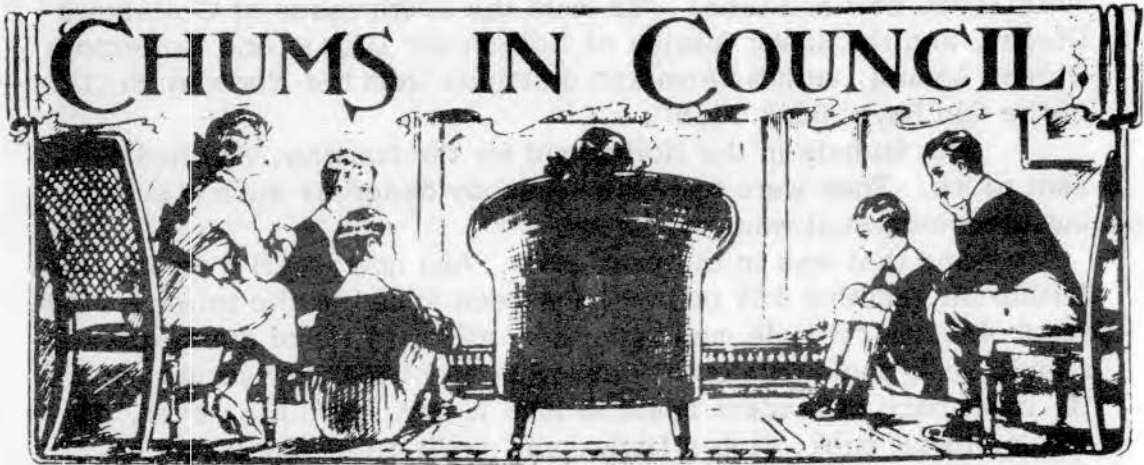
Vol. 38

No. 450

JUNE 1984

Price 42p

(COPYRIGHT. This magazine is privately circulated. The reproduction of the contents either wholly or in part, without written permission from the Editor, is strictly forbidden.)



FOUR HUNDRED & FIFTY - NOT OUT!

On the walls of our little dining room at Excelsior House hang three frames. The first contains a picture of Tom Merry, specially drawn for me by the artist Macdonald, including the message "St. Jim's sends Greetings to the Modern School, Surbiton". It was sent to me with the best wishes of Martin Clifford, R. J. Macdonald, and C. M. Down. A lovely picture which has never faded with the passing of nearly 50 years. Long years ago we reproduced the picture on a C.D. cover.

On the second wall, the second frame contains another

picture of Tom Merry, this time in the red and white blazer of St. Jim's - a cricket picture. A glorious study, copied from another Macdonald picture by our own superb artist - the incomparable Mr. Bob Whiter. Bob gave it to me, oh, so very long ago, way back when the clubs were very young.

On the third wall, over the mantelpiece, a third frame contains a scroll or a testimonial, or whatever you call it. It is most beautifully planned and executed, and it was, I think, the work of our splendid Northern artist, Mr. Alf Hanson. Our movement is most fortunate with its exceptionally gifted artists.

Even now, when I read the words, I somehow get a little moist-eyed now and then. "To mark the 300th issue of Collectors' Digest, and the Silver Jubilee of Collectors' Digest and Collectors' Digest Annual, with esteem and gratitude from the Northern Section of the Old Boys' Book Club".

Our friends in the North paid for the framing, and had it sent to me. They were too kind - nobody deserves such a eulogy - but the words still warm my heart.

And that was in the year 1971. And now, well over 12 years further on, another 150 issues have been added to the total, and we reach 450. A "li'l ole mag" which by all the laws of averages, should have packed up long, long ago, is still going strong, and its loyal band of readers seem to love it even more than ever. It is nice to sit back, sigh a little, and meditate on the figure. Four-Hundred-and-Fifty. Our own great artist, Mr. Henry Webb, has drawn us this month's special cover to mark the occasion.

THE RED MOUNTAIN

Danny, this month, reminds us that, 50 years back, in 1934, he bought a new Sexton Blake Library which contained the Pierre Quiroule novel "The Red Mountain". The editor of the Sexton Blake Library had taken my advice and brought back reprints of the author's old stories. They had started in January 1934, and "The Red Mountain" was the fifth to appear. It had originally been published at the end of 1921 under the title "The Secret of the Red Mountain".

I have all the P.Q. stories bound in my bookcase, though it was very many years since I had read one. After reading Danny's entry, I decided to read, after all the long years, "The Red Mountain". I wondered how it would strike me now.

In fact, it reads remarkably well, and holds the interest throughout. And that cannot be said of so many detective stories which first saw the light of day in 1921.

W. W. Sayer ("Quiroule") is inclined to be a trifle wordy at times, but he is also noteworthy for much charming prose and some quite beautiful pen-pictures. Most of his stories are part detective, part adventure, with, for me, the detecting sections being the most attractive. Nobody offered better characterisations of Blake and Tinker.

A dying man is found, near a railway bridge, way down in rural Kent. He is mumbling about a "grey car", and it is assumed that he is the victim of a hit-and-run driver. But Blake discovers that the man has fallen from a passing train. In the lining of the man's pockets are small white flakes of some kind of metal.

The secret of the Red Mountain consists of deposits of osmiridium or osmium, part of the platinum group. According to the story, osmiridium, at £40 an ounce, is more precious than gold.

"It is used in the manufacture of fountain-pens", explained Sexton Blake.

And that remark carried me back to my childhood, when one used to see fountain-pens advertised as "osmiridium-tipped". And you could get a special John Bull fountain-pen by sending four coupons and a bob - or something like that.

I wonder whether they still use osmiridium in the making of ball-pointed pens today. They don't make fountain-pens any more, do they? Pierre Quiroule was always original with his plots, and I do not recall coming across any other novel based on the discovery of osmiridium.

THE EDITOR

Danny's Diary

JUNE 1934

The first Test Match has been played. This was at Nottingham. The game lasted for four days, and Australia won by 238 runs. Woe is me! But I'm sure the Australians are pleased.

I rather like the new covers on Modern Boy. The old ones were much more dignified, with a smack of quality, but the new style is certainly more eye-catching and colourful.

There is a new serial about Robin Hood in the paper, and the editor says it is the greatest story ever written. I bet the author agrees with him. It is called "Outlaws of Sherwood" and it is written by John Bredon. The life story of the great cricketer, Don Bradman, has continued through the month. The Captain Justice tales carry on and I enjoy them. The new series is about the Emperor of Darkness. He is a Master-Mind and in the great World-Darkness, with civilisation blinded and at a standstill, this Emperor plans to rule the earth.

Biggles continues in his adventures of the Great War, and Clev, the Boy Inventor has a farcical tale every week. There is a cricket picture competition with two cricket bats, autographed by the entire Australian team, as prizes.

It has been an exciting Wimbledon Tennis fortnight, and Fred Perry is the Wimbledon singles champ for the men, and Dorothy Round is the ladies' champion.

There has been a most gruesome happening during the month. A thin man dressed in blue deposited a strangely shaped trunk at Brighton Railway Station. When it was opened ten days later it was found to contain the torso - that's the body without arms, legs, or head - of a woman. At the same time the legs were found in a suitcase left at King's Cross Station in London. The pathologists say the legs are from the same body found at Brighton, and give it as that of a woman of about 30, who was particular about her appearance, and had her feet pedicured. The police,

particularly in Brighton, are going into the matter of women who had been reported missing in recent times, but so far they have no idea who the woman is.

The Gem opened this month with another story about Lumley - Lumley entitled "Outsider and Hero". Lumley wins Cousin Ethel's good opinion, but the St. Jim's chums do not share her views.

Next story is "The Mystery of the Mill". Gussy thinks there is a nest of coiners at the mill, but it's only a hiding place for the Grammarians. Then "Gussy's Cricket Party" in which Gussy gets permission to take a friend or two to Eastwood House where they are holding a cricket week - and finds he has lots and lots of friends. The next week's story is a sequel entitled "The Demon Bowler", which introduces a mysterious guest at Eastwood House named Lovell. Final of the month is "The River Raggars", in which Tom Merry & Co. have a day out by the river, and meet up with their old rivals of the Grammar School.

Tip-top month at the local cinemas. Victor McLaglan starred in "Dick Turpin", a British film, and good. McLaglan is an Englishman, who was born at Tunbridge Wells, and he has made any amount of films in both America and England. Kay Francis is in "The House on 56th Street", about a woman who was in prison for 20 years for a crime she didn't do. But it is more the story of the house.

Laurel and Hardy are tip-top in one of the funniest of their full-length films "Fraternally Yours". They belong to a society like the Masons or the Oddfellows - I think they give weird signs to show their membership - and the prize pair go to a Convention without telling their wives. Good old Charley Chase is also in this one.

"Going Hollywood" stars Marion Davies and Bing Crosby and it is a nice Musical. Ginger Rogers and Jack Oakie are in "Sitting Pretty" which is another lovely little Musical about two song-writers who go to Hollywood. And what lovely songs we get nowadays, since pictures started to talk and sing.

Yet another Musical is "The Cat and the Fiddle" starring Jeanette Macdonald and Ramon Novarro. A marvellous film is "The Sign of the Cross" starring Fredric March, Elissa Landi, Claudette

Colbert, and Charles Laughton. It is rather harrowing, but truly wonderful.

Excellent is "Lady Killer" starring my favourite James Cagney with Mae Clarke, about an usher in a cinema who takes up crime, flees to Hollywood, and becomes a film star. "Design for Living" stars Gary Cooper, Fredric March, and Miriam Hopkins, about two men in love with the same woman. My Mum loved this one.

There has been a tragic happening at Whipsnade Zoo. A man's hat fell into the lions' enclosure, and, rather foolishly, he climbed over to get it. The lions set on him, and he was killed. Whipsnade is comparatively new. A large piece of countryside where the animals can roam around much more than in ordinary zoos.

It has been a great month in the "monthlies". In the School-boys' Own Library "The Schoolboy Sheik" continues the adventures of the Greyfriars chums in Hollywood. Harry Wharton stars as a Sheik in a film. I thought Sheiks had harems but I don't expect Wharton had one. It's a lovely tale. The other S.O.L. is "The Boy Who Hated St. Jim's". He is a new boy, Victor Cleeve. He had been expelled from Barcroft for theft, but his uncle, Mr. Railton, pulled the strings so he was admitted to St. Jim's. Tom Merry becomes his friend, but Cleeve hates St. Jim's. A splendid story of cricket and school life.

In the Boys' Friend Library there is "The Haunted Island", a story of King of the Islands. It was the island of Loya in the Pacific. Great tale, which I also have in Modern Boy. Also in the B.F.L. is "The Schemer of St. Frank's". Bernard Forrest was not a good cricketer, but he wanted a place in the First Eleven. Chance gave Forrest a hold over Vivian Travers, the captain. So Travers was faced with expulsion unless he gave Forrest a place in the team.

In the Sexton Blake Library there is a story entitled "The Red Mountain" by Pierre Quiroule. They name the writers of the stories now in the S.B.L. It is an exciting story about Granite Grant and Mlle. Julie (though she doesn't come in till the very

end), and Doug bought it and lent it to me.

Fredric Delius, the composer, is dead. In his later years he was completely blind, and a dedicated young Yorkshireman named Eric Fernley went to Switzerland, where Delius lived, and became the composer's "eyes". A lovely real life story. And now Delius is dead.

The Magnet is glorious this month as always. The last two stories of the Smedley Series are "The Worst Master in the School", and "Rivals for a Fortune". The Form-master who came to Greyfriars to ruin the Bounder - and win a fortune for himself - is exposed at last as Mr. Vernon-Smith's own nephew. There have been 14 stories in this series, and it has been grand.

Then came the start of a new series with "The 'Bunking' of Billy Bunter". Somebody has squirted ink on Mr. Prout, and Bunter was stupid enough to boast that he was the one who did it. Then "Backing Up Bunter!". The chums believe that Bunter is innocent of the ink business, and they stand by the Owl when he gets the bullet. Finally, "Bunter the Dodger". Bunter has been expelled - but he keeps turning up. Glorious fun. The series continues next month.

And before I put my pen down, one last entry. The 2nd Test Match against Australia has been played at Lord's. It lasted for three days, and England won by an innings and 38 runs. Hooray!

- - -

NOTES ON THIS MONTH'S "DANNY'S DIARY"

The 1934 Gem story "Outsider and Hero" had been "Lumley-Lumley - Hero" in the Autumn of 1910. "The Mystery of the Mill" had had the same title in the following week in 1910. "Gussy's Cricket Party" and "The Demon Bowler" had been respectively "D'Arcy's Party" and "D'Arcy's Cricket Week" way back in the summer of 1910. (It is interesting to note that the latter part of the first tale and the whole of the second tale had been used, under the title "D'Arcy's Cricket Week", to form S.O.L. No. 80. An indication of the great length of the blue Gem tales of 1910.) Finally "The River Riggers" had been "Tom Merry's Master-Stroke" in the Spring of 1910. In this St. Jim's story, Sir Hilton Popper appears as the irate and vinegary owner of the island in the Ryll near St. Jim's. In the 1934 version the name Sir Hilton Popper was changed to Sir Francis Fortescue. This is surely an answer to those people who think that Hamilton must have kept records. It is pretty obvious from this, and other instances, that he never did! (In passing, in "The History of the Gem and Magnet" which Roger Jenkins and I contributed to long ago Annuals, I commented inaccurately that "Tom Merry's Master-Stroke" was not reprinted. I apologise for the slip. The "History" was later published in one volume by the Maidstone Museum Press.)

The Laurel and Hardy film "Fraternally Yours" was called "Sons of the Desert" in the States.

S.O.L. No. 221 "The Schoolboy Sheik" was the fourth helping from the 16-story Hollywood Series of

the Magnet of 1929. S.O.L. No. 222 "The Boy Who Hated St. Jim's" was the Victor Cleeve series from the Gem summer of 1928. This was the only series Hamilton wrote for the Gem in 1928, one of the Gem's worst years, though the Cleeve series is a splendid story and among Hamilton's finest work.

Boys' Friend Library No. 434 "The Haunted Island" was a series within the Fourth Series to appear in Modern Boy, dating from 1930. B.F.L. "The Schemer of St. Frank's" was advertised as a "new" story, so presumably it was specially written by Brooks for the B.F.L. Our St. Frank's experts can confirm or refute this.

The Sexton Blake story, S.B.L. No. 435 "The Red Mountain" had been "The Secret of the Red Mountain" in the S.B.L. of Christmastime 1921.

So it is just 50 years since the composer Delius died. I wonder how many readers remember an excellent production on B.B.C. TV a dozen or so years ago which related the story of Delius and the dedicated young Yorkshireman who went to Europe to be the eyes of the blind man.

Nelson Lee Column

A LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S

by An Old Boy

Heavy rains had postponed many sporting fixtures of late and consequently the juniors had found time on their hands during half days and weekends.

At such periods, which fortunately were not often, other forms of entertainment were sought and used to while away the time.

So it isn't surprising some of these pastimes revert back to former channels of interest.

For some strange reason the one-time junior, Ezra Quirke, has never really left St. Frank's. His 'presence' continues to be felt and the other rainy afternoon two Modern House juniors, Skelton and Ellmore of Study 7 might have been seen gazing at a crystal-Scrying they called it - in an effort to foretell the future.

The crystal ball, they told me, was a 'left over' from the time Quirke stayed at the School, and somebody found it in one of the cellars.

A few other juniors were occupied in similar vein, and one wonders if a new wave of Occult fever which Quirke had organised would return.

Though Quirke was exposed as a cheat and a fraud and left St. Frank's, and the esoteric adventures into the Unknown had dwindled, yet some of the weaker-minded juniors were ever ready

to recall the visions and mysterious happenings Quirke brought about.

Thus the advent of the lost crystal ball had revived memories and, with nothing to do on that rainy afternoon, more juniors became interested and, in a short space of time, strange words were being used such as Triskaedekaphobiac - a person who dreads the 13th falling on a Friday. Nobody could tell me where they dug that word up, but probably the more knowledgeable ones had found it somewhere.

St. Frank's has had many vicissitudes over the years and may probably have more in the fullness of time. But there is a timeless quality about the old School, and whatever occurs to bring about changes St. Frank's will see it through.

My visit to St. Frank's had me in pensive mood about the time Ezra Quirke came to the School and created a wave of superstition and ghostly presentiments. Juniors were to be seen avoiding walking under ladders or uncrossing knives and putting their right shoe on first, etc.

It was a trying time for Nipper, the captain of the Remove, who tried to expose Quirke and stop the nonsense. But Quirke had many adherents and the Remove was divided into two camps; one for Quirke and the other for Nipper.

But are we far removed from those juniors who believed in Quirke's superstition? Do we still remove crossed knives and walk round ladders and throw a pinch of salt over our shoulders and dread Fridays the 13th and so on?

Do we still worry about seeing a new moon through a window?

Or visit those fortune tellers at Shows?

HANDFORTH in the UNION JACK? NEVER!

by C. H. Churchill

It's true, you know! Believe it or not, St. Frank's, including E. O. Handforth, appeared in the Union Jack in late 1918.

Owing to the kindness of our popular Sexton Blake librarian, Mrs. J. Packman, I have recently read Union Jack No. 794, dated

28/12/18 "Waldo the Wonderman". This was the first story of the many Mr. Brooks wrote over the years featuring Rupert Waldo the so-called Wonderman. There were some 35 in all in the Union Jack. As Lee readers will recollect, Waldo's son, Stanley, was introduced in the later Lees as a member of the St. Frank's juniors.

Returning to the U.J. No. 794 referred to above, it was one of a number of U.J. stories written by E. S. Brooks in 1918/1919. These featured both Blake and Tinker and also Nelson Lee and Nipper. In this one Blake and Tinker are in Helmsford, near St. Frank's, on the trail of law breakers. Blake has to return to London suddenly so Tinker, with nothing to do, decided to go over to the school to call on Nipper and the other St. Frank's juniors whom he has met on earlier occasions. From page 12 onwards St. Frank's is featured and Nelson Lee helps Blake by managing to capture Waldo and hand him over to the police. The next morning, however, Waldo escapes from his cell and disappears. By the way, Waldo here was not the "Robin Hood" crook as stressed in the later years but was accused of a murder in this case. Whether he was cleared in subsequent stories I do not know.

Round about this time it seems that Mr. Brooks was keen to stress the link between the two great Detectives as Blake and Tinker were introduced or mentioned in several stories in the Lee in the late autumn of 1919 as recounted by yours truly in an article in the C. D. recently.

VINTAGE BRITISH COMICS, ANNUALS and STORY PAPERS bought and sold. Send 25p in stamps for an introductory set of sales lists (the best of their kind anywhere!) giving full details of my extensive and ever-changing stock of thousands of the aforementioned items. (Overseas collectors send seven International Reply Coupons or \$3 for despatch by Air Mail.) A. CADWALLENDER, 63 Green Street, Middleton, Manchester, M24 2HU.

FOR SALE OR EXCHANGE: Magnets, Gems, Annuals, Story Paper Collector, S.O.L.'s, S.B.L.'s, Nelson Lees, etc.
MARRIOTT, 27 Greenview Drive. Tel. NORTHAMPTON (0604) 711874.

BLAKIANA

conducted by Josie Packman

Unless some of my readers have not heard that I have had to hand over the running of the lending Library to someone else I am saying here that will any borrowers now return the books to Mr. Chris Harper who has kindly taken on the task. His address is 23 Algiers Road, Loughton, Essex, IG10 4NG, and I have no doubt he will be pleased to do his best to let you have the books you would like to borrow. I hope to be able to continue with Blakiana so any articles can still be sent to me.

THE MYSTERY BOX

by Eric Fayne

Nearly 54 years ago, in September, 1932, there appeared in the Nelson Lee Library a story entitled "The Mystery Box", a detective yarn starring Nelson Lee and Nipper.

This was a strange choice for the Nelson Lee Library. It was written up from a Sexton Blake Library of the same title which had appeared somewhere about 1921 in that monthly. For one thing, the S.B.L. version was a very long novel. The Lee version can only have been about a third of the length. In addition to Sexton Blake and Tinker, the original version introduced Granite Grant and Mlle. Julie. Whether the shorter revised version was written up by the author, Pierre Quiroule, or whether (as I suspect) some editorial figure was given the job, it is impossible to say with certainty.

The settings and backgrounds, and many of the characters remained the same, but, whoever revised it must have had a complicated task beyond all reason.

Sexton Blake became Nelson Lee. Tinker became Nipper. In the story, Blake adopts the guise and personality of a stage American golfer, under the name "Vincent Sterne". He remains "Sterne" in the Nelson Lee reprint. Pedro, the bloodhound, becomes Wolf, an alsatian. Granite Grant becomes James Stone, the King's Spy, and Mlle. Julie becomes Mlle. Marie. Quite a mix-up, and a record job for any revising typist. The Nelson Lee version, of course, is only a revised section of the original tale. But the choice is inexplicable.

"The Mystery Box" story had rather a curious history altogether, and it surely must be the most frequently reprinted of any Blake adventure. As I said earlier, it appeared originally in the S.B.L. in the very early twenties. It is my personal favourite of all Sexton Blake novels, containing some fine prose, and an excellent plot of intrigue and detection, which starts off in the year 1894, then coming forward to the then present day.

And now we turn to the Union Jack for a story entitled "The Clayton Moat Mystery". This is a much shortened version of "The Mystery Box", and, though Granite Grant appears in it, Mlle. Julie does not. Thoughtlessly, one could assume that Pierre Quiroule wrote "The Clayton Moat Mystery" for the Union Jack, and then extended it into the much longer and far, far better "Mystery Box".

But that can hardly have been the case, for "The Mystery Box" appeared about three years before "Clayton Moat". Unless, of course, "Clayton Moat" had been written earlier and never published, or perhaps was published at a much earlier date, either under another title in the Union Jack or, possibly, elsewhere.

So we find the "Mystery Box" in the S.B.L. about 1921; a short and diluted version of it in the U.J. in late 1924; and another short and diluted version, a different one, in the Nelson Lee in 1932.

Then, in mid-1934, "The Mystery Box" in its fine original version was re-published under the same title in the Sexton Blake Library. The start of the tale had been updated from 1894 to 1904. I may add (I have told the story before) that I was responsible for the return to the S.B.L. of "The Mystery Box" and many other Pierre Quiroule novels of the twenties, and, later, for the return of that fine author himself to writing up the adventures of Sexton Blake.

In passing, Pierre Quiroule wrote a good many tales for the Union Jack and much longer versions of the same plots can be found in some of his S.B.L. novels. I always assumed that the Union Jack stories were written first, and that later he extended those good plots into excellent ones for the S.B.L. But, after discovering that "Mystery Box" appeared some years ahead of

"Clayton Moat" I begin to wonder which came first - the chicken or the egg.

The author, W. W. Sayer (Pierre Quiroule, the Rolling Stone) died recently, so it may be impossible, at this late date, to clear up the mystery of the Clayton Moat story, and the equally mysterious business of how "The Mystery Box" got a small chunk of itself transferred to the Nelson Lee Library.

Many years later, in the fifties or sixties, "The Mystery Box" appeared yet again, published by Mr. Howard Baker. This time the title was "The Case of the Bismarck Memoirs", and in this case there was some pruning towards the end. Probably whoever was revising the story for fresh publication did not realise at first how long it actually was, so the blue pencil was not used until the closing few chapters. In this version, the stage Americanisms of the disguised Blake were toned down a little, which may have been more convincing though the original version was amusing.

DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 195 - Magnets 197-1307 - Valentine Series

There was nothing novel in the idea of a series about a schoolboy crook, Talbot and Erroll and Lancaster all being representative of this theme, and all developed in various ways. What was original about the Valentine series was that the hero was fleeing from a gang of crooks in the opening chapter, when he fell off his motor bike in the snow and appeared more than a little disgruntled. The Famous Five later gave him shelter and from this time onwards the reader began to warm to him, until the famous episode when Mr. Quelch lost his way on an icy, foggy night, on his way to Wharton Lodge, and called out "Help! If you are a Christian, come to my aid!" Jim Valentine saved his life by helping him to shelter, and from that incident flowed Mr. Quelch's decision to assist him, without knowing the full facts about his past, and Valentine eventually became a member of the Greyfriars Remove.

In the Magnet's Golden Age, no series was ever really a

self-contained unit: the Valentine series had many echoes from the immediate past: Mr. Quelch kindly accepted an invitation to spend Christmas at Wharton Lodge to show that the events of the Rebel series were forgotten, though when term began Wharton did indeed show some signs of rebellious obstinacy. Another feature of the Golden Age was the sheer variety of incidents: everything was new and nothing repeated, like Hoskins' musical composition and Bunter's tray of articles he was hawking at half a crown a time, both not merely entertaining but directly relevant to the plot - to say nothing of the exuberance of the linguistic puns when the juniors asked Bunter to try selling in Latin (which has no articles) or in German (a language in which the article may be declined).

Jim Valentine was a clever forger known as Dick the Penman, and for this reason the gang were anxious to get him to return to them, though it was never made really clear why a burglar and pickpocket and fence should need the services of a forger. At one stage it was stated that Nosey Clark hated to be defied, but they were still an odd combination of crooks, and the only explanation offered was when Nutty Nixon, the cracksman, opened the Head's safe and thought of extracting a cheque for use in forgery later on.

There were some interesting aspects to the Valentine series. The gang never tried the same trick twice, whether it was posting him stolen property or landing him with counterfeit money, and though Valentine was never able to anticipate their moves, luck did enable him to escape from their results. Wharton became suspicious of Valentine, thinking he had relapsed, which highlighted the isolation of Dick the Penman in his predicament, though the Famous Five later rallied round. Perhaps the most fascinating aspect, however, was the pen picture of Mr. Quelch who was shown at his best in this series, with his character rounded out beautifully. When he offered to help Valentine and the boy asked him if he meant it, we were told that Mr. Quelch's face grew grim for a moment since he was not accustomed to being asked if he meant what he said. The slightly frosty kindness, loyalty, and thoughtfulness which he showed to the boy whom he had befriended allowed us to see the Remove master in a most attractive light, and as the series wound to its

inexorable climax the interplay of character between master and boy rose to a similar degree to make the Valentine series one of the most memorable and satisfying at the tail end of the Golden Age.

TOM MERRY CAVALCADE (Serialised from a Long-Ago C.D. Annual)

1921

The gay sunblind was shielding the shop window from the August glare and heat. The newspaper placards read 'Fierce Fighting in Dublin'.

Through the glass, the passer-by could see a neat window-display of dozens of periodicals - Magnet, Boys' Friend, Popular, Nelson Lee, Union Jack, School Friend, and the like. Every week, whether by accident or design, the shop proprietor always gave pride of place to the Gem, right in the centre. There it was today, its white cover showing a crowd of boys on a steamer, all watching a boy who was diving off a pier some hundreds of yards away. The title of the story was "The St. Jim's Swimmers"; the caption under the picture, "Tom Merry's Gallant Attempt to Swim the Channel".

But the shop was not open. On the door was a typewritten announcement: "This establishment will be closed all day on Friday, 6th August, when the proprietor, Mr. Leslie Chadley, is being married to Miss Elizabeth Bland. The shop will re-open as usual at 7.30 on Saturday".

1922

A few weeks to Christmas, and Chadley's shop was decorated with paper garlands, Chinese lanterns, and artificial frost which glittered under the electric lights.

Faith Lessing was serving a customer when Chris Venner entered the shop. After the customer had gone, Chris said:

"You're new here."

"I've been here a month."

"I mean you're new since I was last in the shop. That's six months ago."

Faith did not reply. She spread out her varnished finger-nails and regarded them thoughtfully.

"The 'Gem', please", ventured Chris.

"Sold out. I'm sorry." She did not look sorry.

"Mr. Chadley saves a copy for us every week. Venner is the name", persisted Chris.

Miss Lessing turned round, and pressed a bell button on the panel behind her. A moment later Lizzie Chadley came behind the counter.

Faith said: "Mrs. Chadley, this young man says you reserve a copy of some paper for him every week".

"Why, it's Mr. Chris!" ejaculated Lizzie. She turned to Faith. "The reserved copies are under the counter, as you know quite well, Miss Lessing. Get Mr. Venner the 'Gem'".

With knitted brows Faith obtained the Gem, and took twopence in exchange.

"Thanks", she said.

"Do you like the new red, white, and blue covers, Mr. Chris?" asked Lizzie.

"I do - they're very smart indeed. I hope to catch up with a bit of reading this week-end. I've been neglecting Tom Merry."

"It's called 'The Cup-Winners' this week. Last story of the Cardew Cup series. Very good!" Lizzie informed him.

"Give me an 'Evening News'", said Chris. "I want to see how they're getting on at Luxor - the excavations at Tutankamen's tomb, you know".

"Don't hold with disturbing graves", said Lizzie. "I'll jog along with Tom Merry, Mr. Chris, and leave King Tut to you."

After Chris had gone, Lizzie spoke sharply to Faith.

"I've told you before, Miss Lessing, to say 'sir' when you speak to a customer."

"I forgot", said Faith, sulkily.

"You shouldn't forget. That gentleman is training to be a doctor, at Guy's Hospital. His family are amongst Mr. Chadley's oldest customers."

"I daresay I'm as good as they are", replied Miss Lessing.

Later that evening, Lizzie confided to her husband: "Those flappers are all alike, Leslie. No breeding - and paint and powder where their brains ought to be. How the world's changed since I was her age!"

1923

"We got back from Deal yesterday", said Mrs. Venner. "We always spend the last two weeks of August in Deal."

"Very nice, too", observed Leslie Chadley. His eyes twinkled. "I can think of only one better way of spending a holiday."

"Indeed?" said Mrs. Venner. "Not, I hope,

visiting Japan, where they've just had that shocking earthquake at Yokohama."

"Shocking", agreed Chadley. "Appalling loss of life. No, I mean sailing the Thames in the 'Old Bus', with Tom Merry and Co. Second story of the new series here, Mrs. Venner." He tapped the current issue of the Gem, containing 'Trouble on the Thames'. He added: 'The best holiday series that Martin Clifford has ever given us'.

Mrs. Venner paid for her Gem, and bought ten cigarettes for fivepence. "I smoke a cigarette now and again, Mr. Chadley", she confided.

"Not in public, of course."

They chatted inconsequentially for a few minutes, and then Mrs. Venner asked: "How is Lizzie?"

"Fairly fit, madam, thank you."

"And have you decided on the name for that lovely baby?"

Chadley burst into a laugh. He said: "Her Mum and Dad are both 'Gem' fans - and you have to ask me that. We've called her Ethel, or course".

Next month: 1924.

REVIEWS

"TOM MERRY & CO. ON STRIKE"

Martin Clifford
(Howard Baker: £9.95)

This volume comprises seven Gems from the early reprint period of 1931. The stories run consecutively, with the omission of several numbers, probably because they may have appeared in other volumes. All come from the very early halfpenny period of the Gem, and they are particularly satisfactory because, being shorter, the stories suffered none of the pruning which spoiled many later stories.

"The Schoolboy Tecs" (originally entitled "The Detective's Pupils") was the story in which Ferrers Locke was first created. Locke appeared often in the early Gem, and one wonders whether Tom Merry was being groomed to be the "boy assistant" which Jack Drake became many years later. Jack Blake says: "There's a detective here. I don't know whether it's Stanley Dare or Frank Ferrett". These were two popular detective characters in 1907. In 1931, the name of Sexton Blake was substituted.

"The St. Jim's Menagerie" (originally "High Jinks at St. Jim's") is a trifling but charming little tale of the pets kept by different boys. "Tom Merry & Co. on Strike" (originally "Tom Merry's Washing-Day") is a novel bit of delight when the juniors, dissatisfied with the catering and laundry services, decide to fend for themselves for a time. Herr Schneider, the choleric German master, played a big and humorous part in these early yarns.

"Tom Merry - the Boy Tec" (originally "Honours Divided") has Tom Merry once again as Locke's assistant in London. And Gussy, going by train from St. Jim's to London, arrived at Euston. Mr. Clifford did not decide very early where St. Jim's was situated, but by 1931 everybody knew, though nobody corrected the terminus.

"The St. Jim's Speed-Cops" (originally "Tom Merry's Day Out") has Tom Merry driving Lord Eastwood's Daimler car, which was a false note with a vengeance. Even in 1907, a boy of barely 15 would have been breaking the law if in charge of a car on the roads. This is the very first tale to introduce Cousin Ethel. She was called Ethel Maynard in 1907, but the surname was changed to Cleveland in the re-print.

Possibly the most delightful tale of all is "The Japer of St. Jim's" (originally "The Return of Monty Lowther".) For some time Tom Merry and Manners had been "The Terrible Two" - Lowther had long periods of absence in those times - but now he comes back to make the fur fly. Finally comes "The Gunpowder Plot at St. Jim's" ("Spoofed" in November 1907). Almost certainly Hamilton's first November the Fifth story, of guys, sparks, and bangs, and a lovely pattern for heaps yet to come.

A book not to be missed by those who love stories packed with charm, and a lifting of the curtain on Gem history.

- - -

Thanks to all Readers who have written enquiring after the Princess Snowee. She is doing fine, and her Corner will be back soon.

THE ROAD TO GREYFRIARSG.R. SAMWAYS
(Howard Baker: £8.95)

This is the Autobiography of George Richmond Samways, a man whose name is associated for ever with Greyfriars, the creation of one, Charles Hamilton. Samways wrote substitute stories of Greyfriars and St. Jim's, and he wrote verse connected with life at those schools. Not everyone is enamoured of his sub stories, but it would be a strange reader indeed who did not love the verse which remains unsurpassed of its type.

Samways was a schoolboy when the Red Magnet was new. Clearly he had a deep affection for Greyfriars, and he knew his Red Magnet Greyfriars - a point which is obvious in a good many of his yarns.

This is a pleasant and well-written autobiography. It holds the interest throughout, is amusing and touching at times, and, on a number of occasions, absorbing.

Samways tells of the tragedy which struck his very early life, and the happy years he enjoyed when he was brought up by his grand-parents. His school life at King Edward School, Witney, in Surrey, is fascinating, and is particularly interesting to us at Excelsior House, for, when the Surbiton Modern School was partly evacuated into rural Surrey during the Second World War, we had regular fixtures on the football and cricket fields with King Edward's. As Samways says, King Edward's is a soccer school, otherwise we could not have met them in the winter months. This was long after Samways' days there, of course, but we still found them a grand lot of sportsmen, impeccably well-mannered. We have happy memories of King Edward's.

The book is not well dated, which makes it difficult at times to place events in their proper place in the writer's history.

He relates how, as a very young chap, living in digs at Southsea, he sent to the Magnet editor a number of verses in praise of Greyfriars. These were published, and the writer received a postal-order as a reward. Encouraged, he submitted a dozen poems on Greyfriars characters and a further dozen on St. Jim's characters. These were accepted and paid for, and, naturally, the writer was delighted.

Then, out of the blue, came a telegram asking Samways to call at the Fleetway House. There he met Down and Hinton who strongly urged him to write a story of Greyfriars. Hamilton was away somewhere - nobody seemed to know where he was, and the Magnet folk were afraid the paper might be left high and dry. This seems a little odd, for, though Samways does not pinpoint the date, it must have been in the early autumn of 1914, and substitute writers were far from unknown in the Magnet and Gem circles. Down and Hinton themselves both wrote sub tales, E. S. Brooks was writing plenty of them, and there were other writers. As Hamilton related in his Autobiography, he was in Europe, and had got caught up with the outbreak of war. It seems a bit strange that Hinton and Down called in the services of a young unknown, on the assumption that, because he wrote wonderful verse, he could also write stories.

Samways does not name his first story - in fact he mentions all too few by name, which is a pity, but it would seem to have been "The Reign of Terror" of November 1914.

Samways gives a number of interesting cameos of various personalities at Fleetway House during his years there. His remarks on Hinton are particularly apt - a rebel who refused to conform to the Hamilton style. "Pentelov's stories were not necessarily bad, but they differed greatly from those of Hamilton, being more sentimental and lacking the priceless quality of humour."

It would seem to the reader of Samways' book that Hamilton never really tried to sympathise with and understand the sub writers, while the subs themselves were jealous of the great man. No doubt it was inevitable.

Speaking of Hamilton's own Autobiography, Samways observes that it was disappointing, a view with which we would all agree, but Samways does not believe that Hamilton wrote it, which is surely absurd.

Samways speaks of writing the Greyfriars Herald supplements in the Magnet (always tip-top entertainment for young readers), and the St. Jim's Gazette in the Gem (which I cannot place. If Mr. Samways means "The St. Jim's News", then that one always seemed to me rather stodgy and inferior to the Greyfriars one).

An item which might have been omitted advantageously concerns the death of Hamilton. Mr. Samways regarded the death as a happy release. "Who would have wished him to struggle on against blindness, increasing infirmities, and the weariness of the weight of years? It was a timely and merciful deliverance."

Somebody - I believe it was Mr. Samways - made the same claim years ago, and we challenged it in C.D. At the time of Hamilton's death he was half-way through "Just Like Bunter". Hamilton was writing brightly and cheerily to the C.D. office regularly. I asked Miss Hood whether Hamilton's death was, indeed, a "merciful deliverance". Her answer was certainly not. Death came suddenly, and he had been bright and cheery with his work right till the last.

A delightful chapter describes Samways' work as a writer of solutions for competitors to enter for the John Bull 'Bullets' Competition. After his work at Fleetway House ended, Samways became a line-writer. He was paid ten shillings for a hundred, plus ten per cent commission on all wins of £5 or over. He composed a thousand a week. Then, one week, he found he had one or two left over, and entered them himself in the contest. He got 1st Prize for one of them - £750 - which set him up for the future.

I have enjoyed this Autobiography. Naturally, here and there, one comes on a comment with which one disagrees, but they are few, and they only add to the interest. Well-written and intriguing, it should be very popular.

News of the Old Boys' Book Clubs

SOUTH WEST

There were eleven members present at our meeting at Tim Salisbury's home on Sunday, 15th April, 1984, and this included Darrell Swift who had travelled all the way from Leeds.

Bill Lofts was also with us and conducted the meeting introducing Charles Skilton whom Tim had invited. Members will remember him as the publisher of the first Bunter hardbacks and who now lives in a village near Tim. After Bill had spoken of Mr. Skilton's publishing career we were able to ask questions and received some very interesting answers.

For his second talk Bill took the theme of 'Annuals' and this was illustrated by some of Tim's own collection.

As we had not met altogether since last October, the time after tea was spent talking and enjoying each other's company until the meeting closed at 6.30 p.m.

MIDLAND

At the April meeting, though the attendance of only seven was disappointing, it was a splendid little gathering in its way.

Nine club members still have not paid their subs. If they wish to remain members, they should send their subscriptions at once to Ivan Webster, 24 Highmoor Road, Rowley Regis, Warley, West Midlands, and NOT to Tom Porter who is chairman. Pat Hughes has sent £20 as a donation - a magnificent gesture.

Refreshments were provided by Joan Golen and Joan Loveday, and Vince Loveday paid for the tea and coffee.

Your correspondent provided a quiz of 15 questions. It was easy, and was won by Joan Golen. I was surprised how few knew the name of the fat boy of Rookwood, Tubby Muffin, of course.

Vince Loveday, acting chairman, gave a game "Take a Letter". Ivan Webster was the winner.

The discussion piece was a proposal by local authorities to drive a road through Kent, wiping out Greyfriars and its environs in the process. This disgusted all our members, for the background to the Greyfriars stories is half their charm. It reminds us of the kind of world older people used to know. Some local authorities, if they had their way, would turn Britain into one giant metropolis.

The next meetings are on 26th June and 25th September. To all O.B.B.C. members everywhere, may you have an enjoyable summer - great holidays - hours of glorious reading.

JACK BELLFIELD (Correspondent)

CAMBRIDGE

The Club held its monthly meeting on 29th April, 1984, at 16 Crossways, Linton, near Cambridge, the home of Roy Whiskin.

Following the general business meeting, Bill Lofts gave an interesting and amusing talk on three eccentric characters he had met in his early collecting days. Neville Wood, who had also come from afar, from Suffolk in fact, gave the club a musical quiz, and, after a sumptuous tea provided by Mrs. Whiskin, Tony Cowley helped everyone to wallow in Nostalgia with a trip back in time as he played a tape of an episode from the radio serial 'Journey Into Space'. Tony went to considerable length to recapture the atmosphere of that original 1953 broadcast, complete with old radio set, and the appropriate page out of the Radio Times.

The meeting closed at 5.50 p.m. in order to tear back to Cambridge station to see Bill Lofts off back to London. Thanks were given to Roy and his wife for their hospitality and the excellent tea.

NORTHERN

Saturday, 12th May, 1984

OUR OPENING item was a 'Browse through old papers' by Keith Smith. Keith had chosen number 16 (1944) of the 'Story Paper Collector' and read from it an appreciation of Charles Hamilton written by that stalwart of the Hobby, Herbert Leckenby.

One realizes that hobbyists of those days started off with very little knowledge of their subject, and that the wealth of information available to us today is the result of the painstaking research of our founding fathers - among them Herbert Leckenby.

In his article of 1944 writes that less than five-per cent of the Magnet stories were written by sub-writers'. Today we know that it is almost twenty-per cent!

It was Mollie's turn to continue with our series 'My Choice' for which members bring along some item which is meaningful for them, and talk about it.

Mollie had brought along the 'Little Folks' Annual' for 1928. The title, said Mollie, made it seem that the tales were for tiny tots, but in fact most of the stories were for up-to-sixteen-year-olds. There were six long complete stories, including 'The Captain's Fag' by Peter Martin and 'Castle School' by Nancy M. Hayes. There was also a lot of short stories and a series of 'Novels in a Nutshell' - precis of the classics.

A vast and exciting volume, beautifully produced. What would a book cost like that today? We can't tell, because there aren't any!

The secretary produced the encaptivating autobiography by Samways, and read passages from it. We must not forget, said Geoffrey, that the Magnet was not wholly Hamilton. Others - such as Samways - were immersed in Greyfriars lore, and played their part in creating - and perpetuating - the legend.

LONDON

A very successful gathering at the Loughton residence of Chris Harper, who combined the office of chairman and Sexton Blake

librarian besides being an ideal host ably assisted by Suzanne and Duncan, enjoyed a very good programme.

Mark Jarvis exhibited his plastic cover scrap book and some of the first items to be placed therein and followed this up with a reading from the Anthony Buckeridge book "Jennings Goes To School".

During the tea interval, Roy Parsons distributed his acrostic quiz for members to solve. Eric Lawrence and Leslie Rowley tied for first place. Maurice Corkett and Bill Lofts were joint thirds.

Winifred Morss read the Memory Lane feature from Newsletter number 197 which was distributed in February 1967.

Bill Lofts gave his excellent treatise on the Cockney and its relation to the old books and some of the characters that were employed at the old Fleetway House.

From Union Jack No. 794 Bill Bradford gave a synopsis of the first chapters and then read the last chapter. The title of the story was "Waldo the Wonder Man" and it dealt with Sexton Blake, Nelson Lee and their two assistants Tinker and Nipper.

Duncan Harper has drawn up a new catalogue for the Sexton Blake section of the club's library and copies will be available at the next meeting which will be held at Greyfriars, Hollybush Ride, Wokingham, Berks., on Sunday, 10th June. Tea will be provided but bring own viands. Telephone number is 0344 774626. Kindly let Eric Lawrence if intending to be present.

Roy Parsons proposed the hearty vote of thanks to Chris and Suzanne for their hospitality.

BEN WHITER.

OUT NOW: Golden Fun No. 14; Features Interview with Ken Reid (Artist of Roger the Dodger, etc.); the story of Hugh McNeill ("Our Ernie", etc.); Profile of Louis Briault (pre-war comics artist). If you like British comics, especially the vintage variety, you'll like Golden Fun! 40 pages/£2.50 + 27p post FROM: Alan & Laurel Clark, 24 Arundel Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN1 1TE.

The Postman Called

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

STAN KNIGHT (Cheltenham: I was thrilled, along with Ian Bennett, at the Captain Justice cover of the January S.P.C.D. I only discovered these grand tales in later years, while Ian had read them in Modern Boy. Between us we had the set of B.F.L.s of these stories complete, and, when I had to get rid of all my collection of the old papers, I was able to give Ian the one copy of B.F.L. he needed to complete his own set. When the stories first appeared in the Modern Boy, Capt. Justice was shown as clean-shaven, but he soon grew his celebrated beard.

I was pleased to see in the Annual a page of drawings by Geoff. Harrison.

HORACE DILLEY (Biggleswade): My memory was pleasantly jogged by "the Mystery of Boz" in the Nelson Lee column of the April edition of the C.D.

I can so vividly recall and it has always stood out in my recollections of the N.L. on the front cover portraying Nelson Lee in a frame or the like. A boulder was suspended over him held by a rope over a beam by Nipper. I seem to remember that Nipper was holding on like "grim death". After a time, the Villain of the piece became impatient and was about to make Nipper let go of the rope when on to the scene came Boz and he kept the villain at bay. Good for Boz!

You will see that I live in the town of Biggleswade. I often wonder whether the character "Biggleswade" in the N.L. was sparked off from our town.

I seem to remember that E.S.B. once mentioned that he used to call in at a shop in Biggleswade when passing through.

MRS. MARY CADOGAN (Beckenham): I loved the Arthur Clarke cover to the April issue. How beautifully he conveyed the very best qualities of young people in his pictures.

ERNEST HOLMAN (Leigh-on-Sea): I have childhood remembrance of Roger Jenkins' trips on the trams with a sixpenny All-Day ticket. A

friend and I did just that in the summer holidays around 1928. What simple pleasures we had in those days!

JOHN LOOK (Southall): Thank you for the pleasure given to me by your paper. For myself I think that "Danny's Diary" alone is well worth every penny of the subscription, bringing back, as it does, reminiscences of those music hall and cinema favourites of my youth, when a visit to the Shepherd's Bush Empire was a regular weekly event.

Your comment on Ben Whiter's letter in the May issue about Cricket Weeks at local grounds brought to mind an annual event of those between war days of the twenties and thirties when Kent always used to play Surrey at Blackheath - and invariably, beat them. The trip to see that match was a 'must' for me, although I was a Middlesex supporter and in my opinion Hearne and Hendren were the greatest. But then I was biased. I remember a couplet from those days -

When Surrey set out for lovely Blackheath,
They knit their brows and grind their teeth.

EDWARD SABIN (Birmingham): The Oxford University Press, I see, has just published another of its famous "Companion" books. This one is entitled, "The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature", a rather hefty tome of 537 pages, priced at £15. It had an extensive review in the "Sunday Telegraph" of 29/4/84, by Auberon Waugh. He remarks that is is surprised that whereas John Keats gets 300 words, and W. B. Yeats 500 words, Charles Hamilton, the creator of Billy Bunter gets no less than 1500 words. I don't know why he should be surprised at that at all. He goes on to say, "it seems that the O.U.P., may risk the accusation of lowering its standards when it asks us to compare the two". Lowerings its standards? I can't see where its standards are lowered by giving Charles Hamilton 1500 words. Mr. Waugh was evidently not a reader of the Companion papers in his youth.

C. BULLOCK (Doncaster): I was a signalman on the railway for a good many years, so was very interested in the April cover of the Digest, although I have not read the story. Modernisation has

made the job very different now from what it was years ago, although the old methods still linger on in some parts of the country.

LEN WORMULL (Romford): It's amazing how snooker has caught the public imagination; a far cry to the days when it had a seedy image, though it was mostly billiards then. I am one who has caught the TV-Snooker fever, even to learning the game on my son's table! Steve Davis and others may have given it a respectability, but give me the Bounder and Loder types, like Jimmy White and Alex Higgins, for real spice and entertainment. £44,000 for the world title winner, and tons of money for runners-up. No wonder some of the old 'uns are coming out of retirement.

Many congratulations on your magnificent 450 break - sorry, score. Equally amazing is your wonderful record of untiring commitment and dedication. Without any shadow of doubt, Collectors' Digest has cast a magic spell over us all, a quite indispensable monthly tonic. My heartfelt thanks, and let's hope we shall all be celebrating No. 500.

JOHN GEAL (Hampton): The C.D. goes on - year by year - keeping its freshness, even though the period that it most reflects recedes further and further into the past. When you think that the Magnet and Gem ceased publication over 44 years ago one wonders where the years have gone. Glad to have reminders, too, of Music Halls and the Kingston Empire. I agree - a crime to have allowed it to be destroyed. Kingston Council could easily have acquired it as a Civic Theatre. Also the reminder of Nat Mills and Bobbie and Caryll and Mundy. C. & M. were one of my favourite acts at the time.

There's nothing in today's Television to replace the anticipation and excitement in the Theatre before "Curtain Up" with the orchestra tuning up, and opening overture, and the magic switched on as the Curtain rose. Happy Days. At the Empire, as a boy and teenager, I saw all the topacts, week by week, for 6d in the Gallery.

JOHN JARMAN (Mansfield): "The Schoolboy Castaways" (Gem & BFL) is a great story, but I often wonder what R. L. Stevenson would have thought of it. I would like to see the 1924 Holiday Annual

republished. In my opinion it is the greatest of them all.

MRS. IRENE JARMAN (Mansfield): I, too, read and enjoy the Digest, especially when you write about the Princess Snowee. I also enjoy and look forward to the Mr. Buddle stories.

EDITORIAL POLICIES ON ARTISTS

by W. O. G. Lofts

It was certainly not the usual policy for Amalgamated Press editors to hand over the manuscript of a story, then instruct him to illustrate six incidents from the tale as well as the outside cover. Maybe they did this simply because they had regular artists week in and out, and it saved The Companion Papers editorial staff a lot of time - though as far as I know this practice was confined purely to the Magnet/Gem/and Boys' Friend - at least the Rookwood stories. Certainly Terry Wakefield, son of G. W. Wakefield, himself a great Jimmy Silver fan remembers, how he had a great advantage over other boys at school by reading the instalments several weeks prior to publications.

The editor of The Union Jack, H. H. W. Twyman, took a great pride in instructing his artists on exactly what illustrations he wanted. Being artistically inclined, he used to sketch out roughly a drawing - and if their work did not conform to his standard, or contained any error of fact it was sent back to them for revision. As an editor of a detective paper one could say he was meticulous for detail, and even Eric Parker himself no slouch when it came to detail called him at times a 'hard taskmaster'. I can well remember Twyman telling me that he used to study other artists work in the Amalgamated Press papers - when taking a special interest in Warwick Reynolds he once noticed he had drawn a large pair of pincers incorrectly. He could not resist showing this to Noel Wood-Smith who was then editing The Gem - whose thoughts on the matter he did not elaborate! Actually Twyman went too far at a later stage when a well known artist submitted a drawing then could not be contacted for some urgent revision. 'Twy' rubbed out the error and re-drew the offending

part. When the artist eventually saw the printed version in a proof in the editorial office, he just walked out and was never seen or heard of again!

W. Howard Baker when editor of The Sexton Blake Library used to personally instruct his artists for his covers and thumbnail sketches inside. He would not in any case trust an artist with a manuscript - knowing how easy such things could get lost or misplaced!

I suppose over the years simply hundreds of errors in drawings and situations must have been spotted by eagle eyed C.D. readers - though it would be interesting to know if they had or would have spotted them as boys when originally reading the paper in question. Howard Baker remembers seeing situations that did not exactly match the tale, but was not much disturbed, as it was the main story that really mattered. Frankly I just cannot remember noticing anything wrong at the time - except the puzzling thing of illustrations at times many pages behind the page where the incident took place!

As adults I suppose we must notice errors, and more so if we study the art work closely. Only last Christmas whilst re-reading the Cavendale Abbey series I noticed a glaring error where Bunter threw a snowball at a gunman. This I'm afraid put me a little off the not-so-good as usual Frank Richards Xmas story. C. H. Chapman to give him his due used to examine covers I had shown him, and commented that he wished he could have gone over it again. He was so rushed to complete deadlines that his work at times left much to be desired, there was talk once in the Companion Papers Office of replacing him, but a solution was found by giving him help in the shape of Leonard Shields starting from the India Series in 1926.

I'm inclined to agree with Francis Hertzberg that artists never read scripts properly anyway, and just scanned them for incidents. In any case the editor of the paper in question was just as much to blame for the artist, for letting them pass without being rectified. Maybe he did not think readers would notice them anyway. No one in their wildest dreams at that stage would have contemplated that they would be so much discussed and reviewed some sixty years on!

AND EVEN MORE CHEERS...

by Tommy Keen

In the 1982 C.D. Annual, there appeared an article of mine, "Cheers for the Chilterns", in which I dwelt upon a period in the life of Frank Richards when he lived in a rented farm cottage in Buckinghamshire, during the years 1917-1919.

As I was born and reared in Bucks., it was absolutely fascinating to read, a few years ago, that Frank Richards had at one time resided in my home town. I read that he was very happy there, that the farmer from whom he rented the cottage had two little girls and a boy, to whom Frank Richards was most indulgent.

Although I have lived away from Buckinghamshire for very many years, the part of this lovely county from which I came, still holds a special place in my heart, and a few weeks ago I wondered if I might be able to trace any details of the Great Man's couple of years spent there. I made a random phone call to the district, and after listening to my ramblings over the phone, the person at the other end said that perhaps if I wrote to a man, who a few years ago had moved to the North of England, perhaps he might be of assistance. I was informed as to the address where to write.

I wrote a long, incoherent screed, which seemed appalling when I read it through, and felt quite certain that the recipient would think the letter the work of a madman (he might even be right!), so posted it immediately, lest I decided to tear it up.

Four evenings later, to my great astonishment, I received a phone call from the gentleman up North, saying that he was quite intrigued by my letter, and that he was the son of the farmer from whom Frank Richards had rented the cottage. He admitted that he had no idea as to whom I was writing about when I referred to Frank Richards, but when I mentioned the name Charles Hamilton in my letter, he remembered. He, and his two sisters, were the three children of many years ago.

I was enthralled. The typewriter in those far off days, was tapping away all the time, but... and what a but... he had no idea that it was the stories of Greyfriars and St. Jim's being pounded out. Well... well... well.

The gentleman in question is now seventy nine years old,

and his two sisters are still alive. "Do visit me" he said. Perhaps I will!

ROBEY AND THE BANDS

by Ernest Holman

The Editor's reference to George Robey's 1919 Revue and Danny's mention of the 1934 Royal Variety Show have interesting connections.

Nick La Rocca and his Original Dixieland Jazz Band came on a visit to Britain and opened at the London Hippodrome, on 7th April, 1919, with George Robey in 'Joy Bells'. The audience of the time included many American soldiers and the Band received a terrific ovation.

Robey, it would seem, was somewhat taken aback by this reception, apparently feeling his own position as Principal undermined. Albert de Courville, the Producer, was placed in an unfortunate situation when the Star delivered an ultimatum, to the effect that either he, Robey, or the Band, must go! Poor de Courville was really left with no alternative but to remove the O.D.J.B.

Fortunately for the visiting musicians, it was only a temporary setback. Later in 1919 they secured an engagement at the Hammersmith Palais de Danse, which lasted for nine months. When the Band left Britain, in the summer of 1920, they had achieved a great triumph.

That their influence remained was soon shown by the fact that other Bands began to form and follow in their footsteps. As a result, with gradual changes in arrangements and presentation, the coming Dance Band Era began to dawn.

So that when Danny listened to the 1934 Variety Show from the London Palladium, George Robey at that time was one of several acts. How the great Star of earlier years must have thought back to those days of 'Joy Bells', when the first half of the 1934 Show ended with Henry Hall's Band and the whole Show was brought to a close by the Band of Jack Hylton!

AN ANNUAL DELIGHT

by Graham McDermott

Tommy Keen was the cause of it all. We were discussing our favourite hobby one day, when Tommy asked me what I thought of the schoolgirl papers. I had to confess that I hadn't really given them a lot of thought; my main interests were the "Magnet", "Gem"... and, yes, "The Nelson Lee". Tommy left the room a moment and returned with a beautifully bound volume of "The Schoolgirls' Own", and it was through the pages of this delightful little paper that I met, and ultimately fell in love (if that's not too strong a word) with, the most agreeable set of schoolgirls one could wish to meet. I mean, of course, Betty Barton & Co., of Morcove School.

"The Schoolgirls' Own" was a weekly paper for girls. Slightly smaller than "The Magnet", it had a bold orange/blue cover. From its launch in 1921, until its demise in 1929 these covers were illustrated by Leonard Shields, also famous for his work in the "Magnet".

For some reason, the SGO isn't that easy to come by these days. Some say that the girls of that time didn't treasure their favourite paper in the same way as did their brothers with their "Gem" -- or whatever. Which is a real pity, as nowadays the "Schoolgirls' Own" (and "School Friend") are very difficult to find.

However, all is not lost, for it is still possible to obtain (if you keep your eyes peeled) copies of what I consider to be the finest series of annuals ever produced throughout the 20's and 30's.

The Schoolgirls' Own Annual was launched in 1922. It had a bright coloured cover, which featured a hockey field scene. Unlike the Greyfriars Holiday Annual, none of the stories featured were reprints, all work being quite original. Again unlike the GHA, the size of the annual did not alter, and it remained the same format, with its distinctive brown spine, until the last number to feature the Morcove tales in 1939.

It was an Annual that was truly full to brimming with good things: a Morcove story, and Play (some of the earlier numbers even featured a Cliff House tale), items about life at Morcove, the

girls' favourite pets - that sort of thing, and plenty of other adventure reading. For the more active girl there were plenty of articles about hiking, cycling, cooking and household hints. There were even hints about such things as: "How to Form Your Own Chummy Club".

But, to my mind, the most pleasurable aspect of these Annuals are the illustrations.

Apart from the cover, each featured up to four full colour plates, drawn by such artists as: A. E. Bestall, T. Laidler, Philip Hayward and E. V. Arnold. But my own favourite plate is by Ben Hutchinson, and appears in the 1929 SGO Annual. Quite simply it features a circus passing a girls' school. The girls on the school wall sit gazing at the circus girl, astride a pony, at the head of the parade. The circus girl is seen to be gazing at the schoolgirls. The caption reads: "Mutual Envy!". Lovely.

Attractive as these plates are, perhaps we should remember that without Morcove these annuals wouldn't be around for us to collect. So thank you Horace Philips, Leonard Shields... and Tommy Keen for making the introduction.

FOR SALE: £5 each or exchange for Magnet Baker volumes: Greyfriars Holiday Annuals 1976; 1981; 1982; 1983. URGENTLY WANTED: Sexton Blake Catalogue.

JARVIS, 204 Lewis Trust, Warner Rd., London, S.E. 5 9LY.

"COMIC CUTS" - Denis Gifford's Magazine for Comic and Story-paper collectors. Seventh year starting, subscription still £5! 80 Silverdale, Sydenham, S.E.26.

WANTED: S.B.L. 2nd series 3, 53, 57, 76, 101, 143, 151, 201, 214, 221, 266, 281, 433, 737, plus good replacements. Also - Dick Turpins, Claude Duvalls, Spring Heeled Jacks, etc. H. A. OWEN, 29 Narcissus Road, London, N.W.6.

AU REVOIR. We hope you have enjoyed the 450th issue of S.P.C.D.