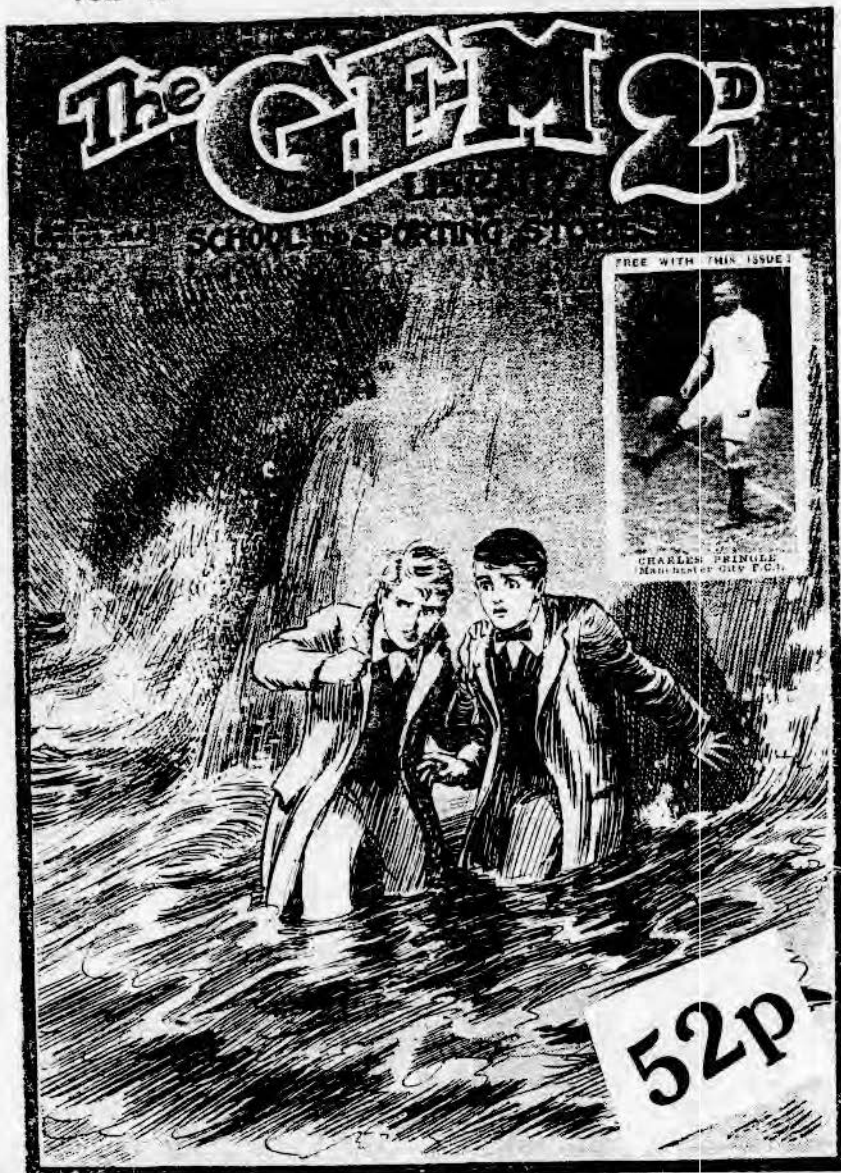


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COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Vol. 41

No. 486

JUNE 1987



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# STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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## THE EDITOR'S CHAT



### CARRY ON WRITING!

Like many another Editor, I am using my 'column' to thank you for all your interesting and extremely encouraging letters, which, alas, I cannot acknowledge individually. However, I love to receive them, and hope they will continue to pop vigorously through my letterbox. And, of course, your articles! Please don't feel discouraged if your contribution does not quickly appear in print, because even after several weeks it may still find its way into the C.D. Or - if it is on the longer side - it might have to wait in the wings until it can burst into the limelight in our next Annual!

Short items, incidentally, are much appreciated, because we like our little monthly magazine to offer a wide variety of articles about the old books and papers, and allied subjects.

FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD!

The grub-guzzling of Billy, Sammy and Bessie Bunter is notorious, but, even without the depredations of this larger than life family, comestibles played an important part in the story-papers. Our heroes and heroines would participate with relish in cosy study teas after the rigours of football or hockey on some frozen field; or they would idle away a hot and happy halfer by picnicking at the Old Priory, on Popper's Island or some other attractively shaded spot. The comics too of the 1930's and 40s often showed Weary Willie and Tired Tim, Laurel and Hardy, and other terrific twosomes tucking into mountainous and mouth-watering meals.

That such moments were enjoyed by readers is emphasized by letters from several of you who, vividly remembering Dolly Jobling's culinary efforts, were delighted that we recently printed her treacle-toffee recipe in one of Margery Woods' Cliff House articles. (No one, however, has written to say that he or she has tried and tested this - although at the Bloxham William convention in April, several people were brave enough to sample licorice-water, just like the brew imbibed by Richmal Crompton's juvenile desperado, which an enthusiast had produced!)

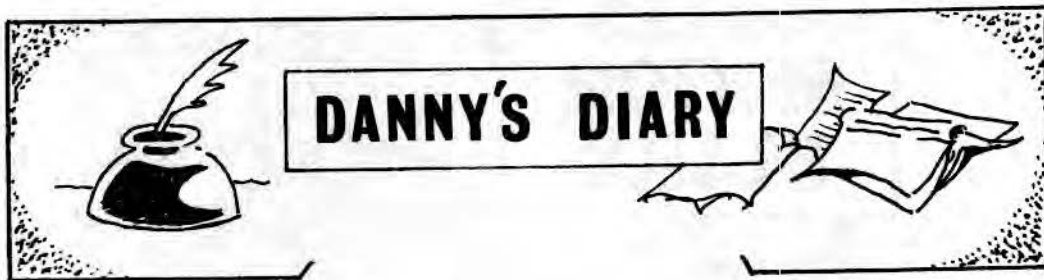
All very frivolous, of course - but a wonderful thing about re-reading youthful fiction is that, without any fear of getting fat, we can through its pages eat what we like, when we like and with whom we like. We can share cream-buns with Morcove's Naomer Nakara ("Oo - gorjus!"), or, in the company of Harry Wharton & Co., 'tea' at Uncle Clegg's, Mrs. Mimble's - or Chunkleys - which is where one of our contributors invites C.D. readers to go this month. Have a good feed!

MARY CADOGAN

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Many early Magnets, taped, 30p each. Buffalo Bill Library £1.00. Sunny stories £1.00. Schoolgirls' Own Library £1.00. Billy Bunter Paperbacks £1.00. Many C.D.s from 1955, 20p each. Taped Nelson Lees 50p each.

S.A.E. OLYMPUS, 1 CARTBRIDGE CLOSE, WALTON-ON-NAZE, ESSEX, CO14 8QJ.



June 1937.

It has been a Red-Letter month in the Fourpenny Libraries. In fifty years time, when I'm a very old fogey, I shall look back and say, with a sigh: "Ah! June 1937! What a Month to Remember in the Fourpenny Libraries."

And the kids, in those days - poor nitwits - will ogle and say "What on earth is a Fourpenny Library?" The poor lot won't know what they've missed.

First of all, the Sexton Blake Library. Raffles has been introduced into a story and it's a lovely one. Raffles is a gentleman cricketer who is also a skilful cracksman, and he has a pal named Bunny Manders. And they come into contest with Sexton Blake and Tinker.

Raffles was created a long time ago by a writer named Hornung. My brother Doug, who likes to sound pompous, says the new story is chronologically inaccurate. And when I told him I didn't speak Hindustani he explained that Raffles' place is at the turn of the century. He might have been opposing Sherlock Holmes, but he couldn't be versus Sexton Blake. I said "Nuts! It's a lovely story." And so it is, although I don't like it generally when one writer uses somebody else's creation.

The story is entitled "Raffles versus Sexton Blake" and it is by Barry Perowne. The editor says there will be more yarns introducing Raffles.

Mum says she remembers a lovely film a few years ago with Ronald Colman as Raffles, and Dad says he can remember a fine silent film with John Barrymore as Raffles.

Some marvellous tales in the Schoolboys' Own Library. "Bunter of Bunter Court" is terrific - a summer holiday tale in which Bunter, by trickery, gets hold of a mansion - Combermere Lodge - let



# RAFFLES v. SEXTON BLAKE

By  
**BARRY  
PEROWNE.**

A thrilling story of mystery and detective adventure, featuring for the first time the famous private investigator of Baker Street, London, W., with the most popular gentleman cracksmen, RAFFLES, in opposition.

*(With acknowledgments to the late E. W. HORNUNG.)*



furnished, with servants, for 3 months. Bunter changes its name to Bunter Court, and invites all his pals. The contrivance in this one is breathtaking.

And St. Jim's is at its best in "Raising the Wind". All stoney broke, the juniors open, the St. Jim's tea-shop, and all goes well till they get Wynn and Trimble as customers, eating as much as they like for a shilling. Then all goes bust. Finally, in some simply gorgeous chapters, we have Gussy trying to raise money by putting his gold ticker up the spout. He goes in the pawnbroker's shop and asks "Pway, where is the spout?"

Also in the S.O.L. a St. Frank's tale "The Schoolmaster Spy", with Mr. Health, the master of the Remove, being compelled to play the part of a spy in order to save himself from disgrace.

Another simply splendid Rio Kid set of tales in the Boys' Friend Library under the title "The Outlaw Rancher". The Kid, for a time, acquires a ranch and runs it.

And, also in the B.F.L., is "King of the Islands" a set of South Seas stories about famous Ken King up against Bully Samson, the notorious blackbirder, pirates and rogues.

A wonderful month in the Libraries.

In real life, the ex-King, now Duke of Windsor, has got married in France to Mrs. Wallis Simpson.

And "Mid-Day Sun" has won the Derby.

In Modern Boy the latest Len Lex series has ended.

In "The Man from Scotland Yard" followed by "Pie's Master-stroke" we complete the series about the Bank Robber who was actually Mr. Egerton Young, a master at Oakshott School. And that brought good-bye to the Schoolboy detective, for the time being.

Also in Modern Boy, a new Captain Justice series is going strong. The first tale of the new series is "The Wreck of Titanic Tower". An earthquake brings down the mile-high tower into the sea, taking Justice and Co. with it.

Then "900 Fathoms Down" in which Justice and Co. try to win back the secrets from the wreck of Titanic Tower. Next, "Trapped in the Depths" in which Justice & Co. face the prospect of never seeing daylight again.

Followed by "The Black Raider" which is a great black flying boat with a lot of men aboard who intend to try to scoop the wealth of the Titanic Tower. These Justice tales are very far-fetched, but they hold the interest.

In M.B., at the end of the month, a new Biggles serial started, "Biggles' Treasure Island". There is also a motor racing series by Kaye Campson, an air series by George E. Rochester about Scotty and his pals of the Secret Squadron, plus a railway series featuring the Wiper Crew.

The big Wimbledon Tennis fortnight has provided plenty of excitement for those who follow tennis. The Women's Singles champion is Dorothy Round who beat a Polish girl. The Men's Singles was won by J.D. Burge of U.S.A. who beat Von Cramm of Germany. So Wimbledon is over for another year.



All through the month a special series has been running in the Gem. Each story stars a representative of one of the countries of the British Isles.

In the first story of the month we had Kildare for Ireland, the yarn being entitled "He Wouldn't Sell His Side". It introduces Kildare's cousin, Micky Kildare, who is a Pilot-Officer in the R.A.F. He has got himself into a muddle with a bookmaker named Spooner - a bit of a rascal. Micky owes the man £50. He comes to the St. Jim's Captain for help, but Kildare can't raise the money on the spot. But Spooner has been taking bets on a cricket match between St. Jim's First Eleven and Lanchester. Spooner suggest that he will forget Micky's debt if Kildare will make sure that St. Jim's loses the match.

The next tale stars Fatty Wynn for Wales. Fatty is found to be breaking bounds, and he cuts the cricket. He is discovered to be singing at a low music hall, the Wayland Palace. Actually he has done it to help his father's chauffeur's son, a youngster named Evan Jones.

This story is entitled "The Way of a Welshman".

The third tale, perhaps the best of the four, is "A Son of Scotland" and stars Kerr. Figgins is accused of stealing a banknote belonging to Mr. Ratcliff. Kerr is something of a detective, and clears up the matter. The real thief was Craik of the Sixth a new name to me.

Finally Tom Merry represented England in "The Bulldog Breed". Out of bounds, Tom Merry goes to the aid of a Major Stringer, and then clears off without waiting to be thanked. Mellish claims to have been the hero.

There has been an interesting old Magnet tale serialised at the back of the Gem this month. It is "Bunter the Ventriloquist". It surprised me for I always thought that ventriloquism is a natural gift. But Bunter takes lessons in the art, is unsuccessful at first, but finally become a remarkably fine ventriloquist.

One day Mum and I went to Brixton to have a few hours with an old friend of Mum's in Brixton. It is a nice part of London with lots of big houses and the L.C.C. trams going up and down the main street. There is also a nice open air market, and some cinemas. There are two very nice live theatres. I would have liked to go to the Brixton Theatre where they had a thriller play entitled "Ladies in Retirement", but this was a once nightly theatre, which would be too late for us. so we went to the New Empress Theatre, which is twice nightly, and saw a lovely revue. It was Nat Mills and Bobbie in a revue entitled "We've Arrived."

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At the local cinemas we have seen "China Clipper" which starred Humphrey Bogart and Pat O'Brien.

One we very much liked was Gary Cooper and Jean Arthur in "The Plainsman", a lovely western about Wild Bill Hickok, Buffalo Bill, and Calamity Jane. Very amusing was Will Hay in "Good Morning, Boys". Then we had Gary Cooper again, this time with Madeleine Carroll in "The General Died at Dawn", a fairly good thriller set in China.

A great favourite of mine was "Tarzan Escapes" with Johnie Winklemuscle (I don't think I've spelt it right) and Maureen O'Sullivan.

One I quite enjoyed was "Cain and Mabel" starring Clark Gable and Marion Davies, about a prizefighter, and with, a bit out of place in this film, several songs.

One that bored me to tears was "Go West, Young Man", starring Mae West and Randolph Scott. I think Mae West wrote this one herself. She should stick to acting.

A little while ago a small girl named Mona Tinsley disappeared, and a man named Nodder was charged with her abduction and sent to prison. The judge told Nodder that one day the little girl's body would be found and then Nodder would face an even more serious charge. Now the body of the child has been found in the River Idle. I think that is somewhere in the Midlands.

And last but not least I come to the marvellous Magnet. The feud is going on between the Greyfriars boys and the Cliff House girls. I am not all that keen on tales which introduce the Cliff House girls, but this one is an exceptionally good series. First of the month is entitled "The Boy Who Wouldn't Split". He is Bob Cherry. The girls believe that Bob served them a dirty trick, and they're out to get their own back. Their action lands Bob in serious trouble with the Head of Greyfriars. But Bob would rather take what's coming to him than split on the girls.

Next comes "On the Track of the Trickster". The boys are sure that Ponsonby of highcliffe caused the friction between them and Cliff House, but the girls don't believe it. It is Mauleverer, the lazy lord who was born tired, who takes a hand to get the truth out of Ponsonby and end the feud.

To wind up the month, a couple of especially good tales starring Bunter. In "Bunter on the Spot" there was a £50 reward for a smash-and-grab man. And Bunter had the clue, and earned the reward. Then, in the sequel, "Billy Bunter's Windfall", several

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different fellows find "rich" Bunter a very attractive and handsome chap. But at the end he surprises us all by taking the money to his mother so that she can have a holiday in Bournemouth. A rare pair of tales.

\* \* \* \* \*

ERIC FAYNE comments on this month's "DANNY'S DIARY".

S.O.L. No. 301 "Bunter of Bunter Court" comprises the first section of the 8-story Bunter Court series which had formed the summer series in distant 1925. It is impossible to fathom why this series had been held over for so long before its reprinting in the S.O.L. The series could easily have formed 3 issues of the monthly, yet it was heavily pruned and squeezed into 2 issues. Why DID they DO these things?

By contrast S.O.L. No. 302 "Raising the Wind" comprises the 3-story "St. Jim's Tuck-shop" series of the summer of 1922, and fits beautifully into the medium. The brilliant little episode of Gussy in the pawnshop is a classic of its kind. The Rio Kid story in the B.F.L. "The Outlaw Rancher" came originally from the Popular, and had been reprinted in 1932 in the B.F.L.

The United Kingdom series which ran throughout June 1937 had originally appeared in the Spring of 1915. The editor introduced it as a kind of contest to see which of the four countries sold the highest number of extra copies for the week of its particular story. The result was announced some months later in 1915, and England, not unexpectedly, came first with an increase of about 20,000 copies.

For some reason, the Welsh and Scotch stories were reprinted in reverse order in 1937. The opening story of the series was "He Wouldn't Sell His Side" in 1937. It had been "Kildare for St. Jim's" in 1915. In 1915, the rather racketty cousin, Micky Kildare, had just joined "Kitchener's army" and might arrive at the school in khaki. In 1937 he was described as a Pilot Officer in the R.A.F., which was a bit far-fetched.

"The Way of a Welshman" of 1937 had been "A Hero of Wales" in 1915, with Fatty Wynn representing Wales. "A Son of Scotland" in 1937 had appeared under the same title in 1915, with Kerr starring for Scotland.

"The Bulldog Breed" of 1937 had been "Tom Merry for England" in 1915. Actually there is nothing outstanding or memorable about these stories, though they were competently written, like all Hamilton's stories. In fact, by 1915 the Gem had passed its heyday, though it was to have another glorious period (the Indian Summer of the Gem, as Roger Jenkins once so aptly described it) in the early twenties.

"Raffles" was made into a film at least four times - twice in silent days and twice with sound. We played the two talking versions in the Small Cinema; Ronald Colman in an excellent and popular version in the early thirties, and, some ten years later, with David Niven as "Raffles". The Niven film was less successful, and was not helped by being up-dated.



## A LATE CONVERT AND LAMENT

By Len Wormull

'Sorry to hear you have read only two of my Conquest novels. And what about Victor Gunn? There are between 30 and 40 of these books in the libraries. How come? ...Thanking you for your keen interest in my past work.'

So wrote E.S. Brooks to a St. Frank's hobbyist back in the 'fifties'. The mild rebuke was perhaps understandable. Having long thrown off the shackles of the Nelson Lee - a none too happy relationship by all accounts - Brooks was loth to look back on the old days. He said as much himself: 'I am far too busy writing books about Norman Conquest and Chief Detective Inspector Cromwell to spare any time for anything else (a reference to more St. Frank's). It is a change that does not appeal to you, but as far as I am concerned, it is for the better'.

As indeed it was. His success with the Victor Gunn and Berkeley Gray books is now history. They were once widely read by library users, among others, and if I remember anything about them it was that Gray was out-Gunned by his partner, so to speak. Maybe Ulverscroft printed more of one than the other. If I use the past tense it's because a sad development has taken place in my neck of the woods. G. & G. have completely vanished from the shelves, along with their famous detectives. Long years of handling has seemingly taken its toll. Enquiries showed that Berkeley Gray is no longer in print, while only six Victor Gunn titles are still published.

Contrary to what might appear, I am no expert on these authors; in fact, I could well be the odd man out. It seems to have been the "done thing" among Lee-ites to embrace the duo, and I salute

their loyalty. (I believe our own Jack Murtagh had a book dedicated to him.) My allegiance to Brooks never strayed beyond the Nelson Lee and St. Frank's. Foolishly, perhaps, I stuck with my boyhood memories. Only now have I caught the bug, and it came by way of a secondhand bookshop. There on a shelf, nestling together, were two Victor Gunn paperbacks; "Death at Traitor's Gate", and "Murder at the Motel". On another, a slim hardback by Berkeley Gray: "Duel Murder". At 10p each how could I forsake my boyhood idol? My estimation of Brooks rose at a bound. Polished, racy, intriguing, adult - what a true professional he was. Something you have known all along, of course. A desire for more took me to the libraries...and disappointment.

True, in the highly competitive world of crime fiction there's plenty more fish in the sea. To say nothing of the old dependables: Christie, Chandler, Charteris, Innes, Ellery Queen, Sayers, Wallace. Even the odd Rex Stout, a Brooks' favourite. But I did rather like old Ironsides Cromwell of the Yard, and that Gay Desperado chap, Norman Conquest. Oh well, no doubt we'll meet again sometime.

#### ABOUT ST. FRANK'S

By Jim Cook

A very dear friend who loved to read the stories of St. Frank's, and who is no longer with us has always puzzled me with her hatred of the Moor View School for Young Ladies' characters in the NELSON LEE LIBRARY.

Sexton Blake had a more generous attitude toward the lady characters, in his observation to Tinker ... "When you reach my age, Tinker, you'll have ceased to be surprised at anything a woman does, be she beautiful or otherwise." (S.B.L. No. 319 "Moroccan Bazaar".) Certainly Blake didn't hate the opposite sex. But I have always maintained the arrival of the girls in the St. Frank's tales injected a fresh interest and verve into them.

I will also maintain the Charles Hamilton schoolgirls remained in the Victorian and Edwardian eras, while Brooks, creating the Moor View School many years later, was able to depict young ladies of that period when girls were shedding the image of Drawing Room etiquette.

The year 1923, when the Moor View girls were introduced to the Nelson Lee readers, was a period already showing the last grey areas of a world war and a new zest for living. And Edwy S. Brooks faithfully described his new girl characters concomitant to the time. No doubt had Brooks still been writing those stories today he would have featured the girls in the pop musical world, just to be topical ...although I am glad this didn't happen! But I cannot understand my friend hating the girl characters. I don't think I could even hate the school cads at St. Frank's...they were a necessary adjunct to the best characters there.

The St. Frank's junior Vivian Travers was really afraid of the Moor View girls. Normally an adventurous youth, Travers, always seemed to freeze at the approach of these girls and became bereft of speech; a not uncommon phenomenon among young men. It wasn't long after the coming of the Moor View girls that



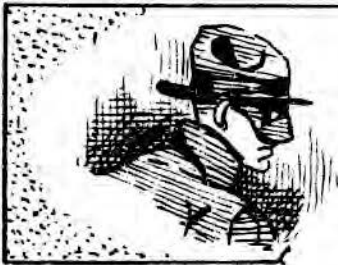
friendships sprang up with the juniors, although the St. Frank's seniors took no part in these friendships, for the girls had a definite age link to the juniors only.

Brooks shaped his girl characters brilliantly. In this he had the guidance of his wife, who would describe female attire and girlish attitudes. It may be surprising that these likeable young girls accompanied the juniors to faraway places where danger was forever present...but they were the undaunted, fearless type.

We never got to know much about their school life except at intervals. There were 35 girls mentioned all together and the School was previously a rather rambling building and possessed only two floors. Being an old fashioned place the rooms were not high. When the school became marooned during the flood the girls were rescued by the St. Frank's juniors from the school roof. (NLL March 1927). Unlike St. Frank's which was a massive structure the Moor View School was just an ordinary house. Luckily Irene Manners, the leading light of the school, had remembered her knowledge of Morse and the boys were made aware of their plight. This is a very exciting and thrilling Flood series and is recommended. After reading, you may feel surprised it isn't raining when you venture out.

In these turbulent times it is very pleasant to read about young people who live clean lives and who are always fresh with vigour. In a further contribution I will detail more adventures of the Moor View School For Young Ladies.

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**BLAKIANA**



Multi - media Blake.

By Norman Wright

PART ONE

The popularity of a fictional character can often be judged by the variety of media in which his or her exploits appear. Such notorious heroes as Robin Hood, Hereward the Wake and Dick Turpin appealed to the masses largely in days when mass communications were limited. Yet even then their adventures were told as exciting tales, sung as ballads and acted out on stage.

When mass education precipitated an explosion of cheap fiction, new heroes supplemented, though never vanquished those lusty, semi mythical rogues. Like their predecessors only the robust survived.



A myriad of detectives and doers of daring deeds fell by the wayside, often after only a minuscule of printers ink had been spent on chronicling their adventures. Such characters seldom had the time to persuade the world that they were good enough for anything other than the printed page.

Dickens knew the value of lifting his characters from the printed page. He generated fresh interest and inspired a new following when he toured the country giving dramatised readings from his novels.

No character has had greater success across all the media of communications than Sherlock Holmes. Plays, films by the dozen, radio adaptations by the hundred, comic strip adaptations, T.V. shows, not to mention the pastiches and send ups.

Which brings us to our own detective: - Sexton Blake. Within fourteen years of his first exploit appearing in the 'Halfpenny Marvel' he appeared on stage, impersonated by one C. Douglas Carlisle. Later other plays were written, the most notable probably being that written by Donald Stewart in 1930 entitled simply 'Sexton Blake'. Stewart was to be responsible for transferring Blake to other media, but more of that later.

The first Blake film, 'The Clue of the Wax Vester' was made in 1914. Readers of the 'Boys Friend Library' were told that it was a thrilling film concerning Sexton Blake and Yvonne. It was undoubtably popular, for within a year a second film, 'The Mystery of the Diamond Belt' had been made. The story appeared in B.F.L. number 302. Readers were told that the thrilling tale of Blake versus Plummer appeared by arrangement with the Kinematograph Trading Company. It seems to me rather odd that the film was not based on an existing story, there being such a wealth of material to choose from.

I doubt whether prints of those very early Blake films survive. If they do it would be interesting to see them screened at the National Film Theatre as part of a season of early British detective films.

In the late 1920's another batch of Sexton Blake films were made and at least two of them were, until about ten years ago, available to collectors on 8mm. The titles in question were 'Silken Threads', starring Langhorn Bunton as Sexton Blake, (1928) and 'The Clue of the Second Goblet' (1929). I remember my excitement at seeing the former advertised in a film dealer's catalogue and my bitter disappointment at the ghastly quality of both print and acting. 'The Clue of the Second Goblet' was a little better - just a little.

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Whatever the quality, the late 1920's spawned six one reel Blake films. Perhaps a little of their popularity was attributable to the Sexton Blake busts that some of the cinemas showing the films gave away. The famous and elusive plaster busts were designed by Eric Parker, his first venture into such modelling. He must have been pleased with the result, for his daughter still retains one that her father kept in his study.

The silent screen was not the ideal medium for the detective story. While such films as 'The Mark of Zorro', 'Intolerance' and 'Tumbleweeds' can still be watched and enjoyed as masterpieces of the silent filmmakers' craft, the detective story, relying on subtlety rather than action, required dialogue, and few silent thrillers really succeeded. But sound was just around the corner and Sexton Blake was due to embrace it in all its forms.

\* \* \* \* \*

SEXTON BLAKE AND TINKER IN DRUGS DRAMA!

By Ray Hopkins

Tinker watched Sexton Blake with alarm and consternation as the Guvnor accepted a £2,000 cheque as hush money from a crooked solicitor. Tinker is unaware that Sexton Blake has tasted and swallowed a minute portion of a new Chinese drug that is threatening to enslave England. Later when Blake orders Tinker to bring him the drug, Tinker destroys it.

The Department of Overseas Trade asked for Blake's help to locate a stolen consignment of several hundred tons they had confiscated off the China coast and was believed to be headed for England. Sexton Blake realizes that the drug can numb one's moral sense and destroy the judgement that keeps an honest person from becoming a law breaker. It had succeeded in doing this in his own case.

Reports from every police force in England warn Sexton Blake that, especially in the Northwest, there was an alarming rise in petty crime involving first offenders, especially prevalent in an "area towards Liverpool in the west, beyond Manchester eastward, south in to Cheshire, and north beyond Preston and Blackburn". Sexton Blake and Tinker travel north and meet a village policeman who tells them his wife has shop-lifted half a pound of sugar and their next-door neighbour has stolen a tea towel and half a dozen pegs from their clothes line. Both women take headache powders for relief.

The village policeman is one of the title characters in SBL 120 (3rd Ser.), Walter Tyrer's THE MYSTERY OF THREE DEMOBBED MEN. The second they meet is a bargee who becomes involved in transporting unknowingly the missing drug which has turned up in open waters near Liverpool aboard a small, unobtrusive cargo steamer. The bargee delivers it by canal to the works where a popular brand of headache powder is manufactured. The third demobbed man is the research chemist who has taken over the works when sales fell. The addition of the drug to the headache remedy resulted in vastly increased sales as well as a huge rise in petty crime in the northwest of England. The three men had all fought in.

the China Sea, were known to each other and had been demobbed the same day in Liverpool. The first two were entirely innocent.

The research chemist knew two Chinese brothers, one in Hong Kong, the supplier of the drug, and one in Liverpool, the receiver and distributor. All three demobbed men come together in the finale.

Tinker enlists the aid of the bargee who leads Sexton Blake's assistant to the works where the drug was delivered. The village policeman is roped in for heavy support. Meanwhile, Blake has analysed the contents of the headache powder after penetrating the deserted works at night. He is confronted by the research chemist, armed and determined to kill. But the village policeman also has a gun!

Later, Sexton Blake refers to this as an "unsatisfactory case because we never proved anything and never brought anyone to trial". But the Police are able to clear up a black spot in the district with the arrest of the Chinaman in Liverpool.

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My Favourite Blonde

By Esmond Kadish

I confess it! Somewhat shamefacedly, it is true, but, nonetheless, firmly, I admit that, in my youth, I had a very soft spot for "golden-haired" Mabel Lynn.

I suppose that this predilection for blonde young ladies started when I was about four, and discovered Miss Kitty Brown in the beach hut next door on Bournemouth sands. Kitty was very pretty, and the grown-ups said that she was a "mannequin". I didn't quite know what that was, but if it meant that she would make a fuss of me, and sit me on her knee, when I toddled into the Browns' hut then I was all in favour. She had impeccable taste in small children. I thought! Later, when I encountered the silver screen, I experienced a weakness for fair-haired minor actresses like Mary Carlisle. (Mary WHO?) Bing Crosby and I seem to have been the only two people who noticed Mary in the thirties. She appeared with him as his leading lady in at least three films - with me, never! Miss Carlisle apart, I can also claim to be the only youth in the British Isles who went to see "Three Smart Girls Grow Up" because of Nan Grey - another blonde! - rather than Deanna Durbin.

So it's hardly surprising that I should fall for the fair "Mabs". True she never possessed the charisma of the other Cliff House characters who graced the pages of the SCHOOLGIRL - the sturdy Clara, the imperturbable Jermima, the flamboyant Diana. In fact, she was usually described as Babs' second in command, or her loyal lieutenant. She never appeared to mind this faint praise herself, but there were times when I half wished that she didn't always do what her chum suggested. Just once, I hoped, that she might turn round to her astonished chum, and say, "Look here, Babs, old thing, don't you think it's time that I organised things for a bit, and you followed, instead?" But she never did! Her name, too, seemed a bit old-fashioned:- "Mabel Elsie Lynn". Why I wondered, didn't "Hilda Richards" write a series disclosing that she was a long-lost heiress, and give her a new, trendily - thirties name like "Carole" or "Jeanette". Too much to ask, I suppose!

Mabs was a dab hand, of course, at anything to do with acting or impersonation and could make up as the spirit of Isis, a Japanese girl, or an elderly lady,

with equal facility. Such occasions provided the only opportunities for being in the limelight. Generally, though, she's there to back up Babs - like Frank Nugent is to Harry Wharton. Like Nugent too, she tends to show unexpected character when there's "a rift in the lute". In "The Girl Who Came Between", she quarrels with Babs, and walks out of the play she is producing:- "so fierce was her attitude, so frightening, somehow, the passion which flamed in her face, that the stupefied audience gave way to her".

It doesn't sound like the normally loyal, untemperamental "Mabs", but it does make her seem more human.

Anyway, occasional temper tantrum or not, I still like you, Mabs!

## CLIFF HOUSE CELEBRITIES

**M**ABEL ELSIE LYNN is her full name, but to all her friends she is known as "Mabs."

Big blue eyes, most marvellous silky, golden hair, and a rose-pink complexion make Mabs one of the prettiest girls in the Junior School.

She is Babs' greatest and staunchest friend, her faithful follower and her whole-hearted admirer. As Babs' second in command in the Junior School she has proved her sterling worth on many occasions. Rather quieter than her clam in temperament, it is Mabs who puts into effect Babs' bright ideas; Mabs whose opinions are always formed upon what Babs think; who organises while Babs advises.

An earnest and willing worker and a very clever girl in many directions is our Mabs. Where she shines, however (and in this she does eclipse Babs), is in amateur theatricals.

Mabs, like her amous father, Major Arnold Lynn, writes plays. She is an amateur actress of great ability, though it should be stated that she is fonder of organising and producing than she is of taking parts herself.

Most of the new Junior School plays come from Mabs' able pen, and she has already achieved some fame with her "Little Lady of Luxor," which has been made into a film.

At games she is good, if not brilliant. She enters wholeheartedly and with keen zest into all the activities of the Form.

Her hobby, as you have probably guessed, is amateur theatricals, and all her ambitions are connected with the stage. She has quite a good voice and can sing prettily.

Mabs has a younger sister, Ivy, aged seven, who is longing for the day when she will be old enough to join her big sister at Cliff House. Her brother Eric, aged nineteen, is already an assistant film editor in one of the big studios at Epsom.

She has also a very famous cousin, Austin Lynn, a private detective, whose life story reads like a Sexton Blake Thriller. Another cousin of Mabs, who played an important part in these stories some time ago, is May



Mabel Lynn

Lynn, Mabs' exact double in every outward particular.

Mabs' favourite mistress is Miss Charmant; her favourite prefect Lady Patricia Northanson, though it may surprise you to learn that she also has a great admiration for sour-faced Sarah Harrigan. This admiration, however, is in connection with Sarah's acting ability only. Mabs thinks that Sarah will one day be a second Flora Robson, who is Mabs' favourite actress on the stage.

Mabs' theatrical and film favourites are many, but perhaps her two best-liked ones at the moment are Deanna Durbin, the heroine of "Three Smart Girls," and Robert Donat.

Her favourite flower is the delphinium; her favourite colour, primrose-yellow. She is 4 feet 10 inches high and takes a size three in shoes. Her position in class at the end of last term was seven.

Mabs' home is at Lynn's Folly, a beautiful rambling old house on the Essex coast.

# OUR BOOKSHELVES



REVIEWS BY

MARY CADOGAN

CONAN DOYLE (Unwin, £6.95) by Hesketh Pearson is a compelling biography of the creator of Sherlock Holmes. It originally appeared in 1943. This paperback reprint contains several pages of photographs and colourfully conveys the fact that Doyle's own life 'could rival his fiction'. It was varied enough to take in whaling in the Arctic, a medical practice in England, and, of course, adventures into the occult. As well as describing how some of Doyle's characters came into (fictional) existence, this biography gives insights into the impact of several public events. It is a witty and moving portrait of the man who wrote:

I have wrought my simple plan  
If I give one hour of joy  
To the boy who's half a man,  
Or the man who's half a boy.

COMPTON MACKENZIE: A LIFE (Chatto, £16) by Andro Linklater is another gripping biography to feature a very popular novelist for whom fact was just as vivid as any work of fiction. As well as being a best-selling author, Compton Mackenzie was a master-spy with British Intelligence during the First World War, a successful radio and television personality and the champion of a mixed clutch of causes, including Siamese cats and Scottish Nationalism! For good measure, he was a child prodigy, and the brother of actress Fay Compton. His dramatic and romantic lifestyle comes forcefully across in this absorbing study.



THE OXFORD BOOK OF LITERARY ANECDOTES (Oxford, £4.95) edited by James Sutherland, is a bumper paperback containing some five hundred anecdotes about writings and writers from the Venerable Bede to Lord Northcliffe, Edgar Wallace and P.G. Wodehouse. It is a lively sloop into 'over a thousand years of memoirs, reminiscences and letters' - an ideal bedside book.

THE EVERYMAN BOOK OF THEATRICAL ANECDOTES (Dent, £14.95) rather naturally covers a shorter period of time, but is also wonderfully varied and amusing. The selection has been made by the popular actor Donald Sinden, who seems well qualified to pick out for us the plums from four hundred years of theatrical mishaps, marvels and magic. Many of us will find our favourite actors and actresses featured.

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### THE ERIC FAYNE COLUMN

Recently I drew attention to the odd fact that the body in Agatha Christie's novel "The Body in the Library" was given the actual name of a real-life murder victim of a few years earlier.

I have come upon an equally strange Christie curiosity.

Two young thugs, Bentley and Craig, were concerned together in a robbery, in real life, which resulted in the murder of a police officer. Bentley, who was actually under arrest when the policeman was shot, was hanged for the murder. Craig, who actually pulled the trigger of the murder weapon, got off with imprisonment because he was only 17 years of age and too young for the death penalty to be passed on him.

The case became a "cause celebre", being used in arguments by abolitionists.

I recently read the Christie novel "Mrs. McGinty's Dead". The young man, sentenced to death for murder in the story, is named Bentley. There is frequent mention of an earlier murderer named Craig. The names of Craig and Bentley feature frequently throughout the entire novel.

In the case of "Body in the Library" I mentioned that the use of the name Ruby Keene was not a coincidence. But the use of the names Craig and Bentley in "Mrs. McGinty's Dead" was a very definite and remarkable coincidence. The book was published in 1952. But the real life Craig and Bentley murder did not occur till the closing weeks of 1952, months after the book was published.

In passing, "Mrs. McGinty's Dead" was made into a very poor film under the title "Murder Most Foul", with the story changed almost beyond recognition, and with Poirot replaced by Miss Marple, played by a much miscast Margaret Rutherford.

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Brave Beyond Belief

By Tommy Keen

Centuries ago, when I was a very young schoolboy, I read a story of the boys of St. Jim's. Nothing very remarkable in that, as at that time I had been an avid reader of the GEM and the MAGNET for at least a year or so, but I then obtained some back numbers. The story in one of these old GEMS affected me strangely, and although in later life when schooldays were far behind, and these lovely periodicals of my youth were no more, the title of this one special story was always etched in my memory. The story was called "The Pluck of Edgar Lawrence"

As each decade passed, Tom Merry & Co. and Harry Wharton & Co., became more part of history, until, with a jolt, in the mid 1970s I became aware that people (at least certain people) were still interested in the good old GEM and MAGNET. Immediately I became hooked again, and, discovering that many of these old papers were still in existence, I began to crave for the pleasure of reading the Edgar Lawrence story once more. It took quite a time to find that special GEM, but find it I did, and now it is a real treasure, being the only original GEM I possess. Reading it again so many years later, I was still deeply moved by the theme of the story, even though smiling wryly at the absolute nobility and heroism of Edgar Lawrence.

Lawrence was a member of the New House at St. Jim's, his close friends being Dick Redfern and Leslie Owen. Redfern, the acknowledged leader of the three, and a really splendid fellow, shows up, however, in a very bad light in the story in question, turning completely against his chum Lawrence, through one of those awful misunderstandings which were forever cropping up (misunderstandings which helped to make the GEM and MAGNET so popular). Redfern is invited by his uncle in Cornwall to bring several of his friends to visit him for a week-end, but insisting that he brings Owen and Lawrence. Seventeen boys go in all (there must have been plenty of accommodation for such a crowd), but the atmosphere at times was far from happy, owing to Redfern's feud with Lawrence.

On a storm-tossed night, Redfern and Owen are in peril by the cliffs, with the sea lashing against their legs, and the tide becoming ominously nearer, but luckily their cries for help are heard by Tom Merry & Co. who have decided to search for the missing boys.

Owen is miraculously hauled up the cliffs by a rope to safety, but then the rope breaks, with Dick Redfern still below. Now for sheer heroism. Edgar Lawrence rushes off into the darkness, borrows a boat from a conveniently found fisherman, and takes off into the raging sea. He manages to reach Redfern, who clammers into the boat, but then disaster...the boat collapses, and the two boys are now at the mercy of the waves. Redfern, normally a champion swimmer, is helpless, but Lawrence, not such a strong swimmer, manages (with death staring them in the face) to get them to the shore, and of course, Tom Merry & Co. are there, just at the right spot, to drag them to safety. In such turbulent waters, boots must have been an encumbrance, but, according to the illustrations on the cover of the GEM, Redfern is wearing an overcoat. By the time he is struggling in the surging waters, however, the coat seems to have vanished.

Back at the house, with Redfern fully recovered from his ordeal, Lawrence is rushed to bed, and death appears imminent, but (and probably at the Editor's

insistence, still having the death of Valance of Greyfriars in his mind), Lawrence is not allowed to slip away. Nurse Marie Rivers from St. Jim's is sent for, and, with the help of her careful nursing, he recovers.

Sentimental yes, maybe even slightly morbid, as Lawrence has made an emotional farewell 'speech' to Redfern, but once again it was proved how brave and noble our schoolboy heroes were. Actually, round about this period in the MAGNET, there had been quite a run of deaths, Clifford Stott (No. 788), Cuthbert Willesby (No. 805), and Bobby Seven (No. 813). So it was very wise to retain Edgar Lawrence, although he never starred again.

Oddly enough, it is not Martin Clifford I must thank for this story which meant so much to me, but I will be forever grateful to the gifted, substitute writer, George R. Samways, for penning the superb "Pluck of Edgar Lawrence".



Lawrence was not a strong swimmer, but in the present crisis he had more stamina than his chum, and he made a last desperate effort to reach Redfern. Gripping him under the arms, he held him up until a powerful billow carried them towards the shore, where willing hands were waiting to assist them.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITRESS!

R. HIBBERT (Ross on Wye) With regard to Mr. Bennett's query about the 'futuristic aircraft' in the film THINGS TO COME, in and around 1936 I belonged to a model aeroplane club. Our planes were made of balsa wood, covered with Japanese tissue and powered by elastic. Most of them were non-scale models and flew quite long distances. Every month we, the members, read THE AEROMODELLER a 6d monthly (still in existence, I think) which contained plans of the latest model plane designs.

Sometime in 1936 or '37 THE AEROMODELLER contained a plan of the very futuristic aircraft in which Raymond Massey arrives over War Lord Ralph Richardson's territory, stops a war which has dragged on for forty years, and announces that a new era of 'law and sanity' is about to begin... Whether or not the magazine still exists there is an Aeromodeller Plans Service which, so far as I know, deals in plans for solid scale models. Still, if Mr. Bennett writes to them they might be able to dig out something on THINGS TO COME planes. Their address is Argus Specialist Publications Ltd., 9 Hall Road, Maylands Wood Estate, Hemel Hempstead, Herts, HP2 7BH.

DAVE HOBBS (Seattle, U.S.A.) I prefer to read, and re-read, the Digest by degrees, over several days, to prolong the enjoyment. I do like the insertion of illustrations from the old papers at the heading of articles... Delighted that you were able to obtain the Wakefield drawing. Years ago I always liked any Rookwood story illustrated by his father...

LaVonne and I were pleased to discover the recipe for treacle-toffee... We cannot buy treacle in the U.S. - at least we've never found any... Anyway the Cliff House recipe is just the way I remember my mother and sisters making toffee, around 'The Fifth of November'... Can you actually buy old-style/taste black treacle in England?

BARRIE STARK (Plumpton Green) Might I suggest that the Magnet Editorials and Question and Answer features could form a basis for an article - and maybe several articles... Similarly the sports features could be used - and maybe at least one article on the advertisements. Nobody seems to own up to writing to an advertiser nor

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that they were pleased to see their name in the Editorials.

(Editor's note: We have received one very interesting article on the editorials, which we hope to publish very soon.)

ESMOND KADISH (Hendon) I share Father Francis's liking for Jeanette MacDonald! She had a self-mocking quality which was very appealing, and modern critics make too many cheap, underserved jibes at her films. Lovely, enlarged Easter 'Digest', full of good things!

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## CHUNKLEYS.

By E. Baldock

Ten whirring wheels, five pairs of driving legs, a summer's day with the resultant cloud of dust raised by the progress of such a cavalcade. Five fellows, five very famous fellows - the 'Famous Five', no less, careering along Friardale Lane towards the Courtfield en route for Chunkleys Emporium; and such a tea as only that establishment can provide in the whole of the quiet market town. It is Wednesday and a 'halfer' with, surprisingly enough, no cricket fixture, not even 'Nets'. Thus our legendary five are taking time off to sample the 'flesh-pots' of the town.

Chunkleys it has been said - indeed it is their proud boast, are able to produce for you anything from an Oxo cube to a complete suite of furniture together with beds and curtains too, or a Christmas pudding in July, upon a moment's notice. Of especial fame and wide repute are their 'Tea-rooms'; the fare here must be sampled to be fully appreciated. William George Bunter, a long-time authority in this particular field, not infrequently bores his school-fellows with accolades upon the superiority of Chunkleys fare. These praises are usually accompanied by the request for a small loan - "Five shillings will do old chap, just until my Postal Order arrives you know" (the Post Office being, as ever, exceedingly dilatory in matters of this kind). And Chunkleys, although large, is yet small enough to insist upon instant payment for comestibles consumed, and has been known upon occasion - as the fat Owl can avow from experience - to be quite uncivil to a gentleman, a Public School 'man' to boot, concerning petty sums outstanding.

The Famous Five are, however, a very different 'cup of tea'. At Chunkleys they are recognised and always welcome. They even have a favourite waitress who appears to take pleasure in affording them preferential treatment, i.e. a special table in the corner partially concealed from the vulgar gaze by the fronds of a palm tree - the real thing in a large tub - much to the chagrin, when their paths cross, of Horace Coker and Co. (although Potter and Green always appear less than eager to become involved in a fracas than does their noble leader).

Many and varied are the japes which have been planned and brought to the point of perfection in the shadow of this palm over the years. Nothing ever changes at Chunkleys. Many high teas have been consumed here during which the strategies of countless football and cricket matches have been determined. While



'our' nice waitress is in constant attention, with fresh pots of tea in winter, or cooling drinks in summer. And should Billy Bunter, for whom Chunkleys represents a demi-paradise, have succeeded (as he usually does) in 'latching on' to the party, she brings a constant supply of fresh cakes, tarts, doughnuts, and fruit.

This splendid and faithful service may, or may not, be connected with the shilling coin traditionally left concealed beneath Harry Wharton's plate on leaving. Billy Bunter has frequently and loudly deplored this custom of 'tipping' "It should be enough, that she is being of service to gentlemen you fellows..." is the tenor of his views on the subject - for which incidentally, he has been repeatedly kicked in the past. Not in the public eye at Chunkleys of course, but later, in certain retired surroundings far from the public gaze; sad to relate such lickings have had no appreciable effect!

Chunkleys has always been a focal point for the Greyfriars' fellows when in Courtfield. Upon rare occasions Mr. Quelch relaxes there from a shopping expedition. (From masters do from time to time engage in such mundane activities). His features are unusually relaxed as he surveys the animated scene. A few small parcels (the results of his expedition) and his Homburg hat are placed on the chair beside him, while his walking stick stands in the corner. Here is Mr. Quelch in his unofficial capacity - a private gentleman. The notorious 'gimlet eye' is a little softened, the acidity of his features a degree less obvious. In fact he is postively gallant to 'our' waitress, exuding quite an old world charm as she enquires "Will there be anything else sir?". At such times he has been known to bestow upon her one of his very rare and frosty smiles - a privilege indeed. It would be an intriguing and revealing exercise to analyse the young lady's reactions following the receipt of such a compliment. A smile, be it ever so frosty, from the Remove master is a phenomenon of no small rarity. No, there is nothing more - but an exceedingly liberal 'tip', left upon the table for her when he departs, is a sure token of his esteem.

On the whole Greyfriars 'stock' is high at Chunkleys emporium if one excepts certain incidents involving Billy Bunter, and disturbances (unfortunately there have been several in the past) by Horace Coker which, happily, have been smoothed over to the satisfaction of the management. Now good relations are the general rule when Greyfriars' caps are in the offing. If one may quote 'our' waitress on the subject - "They are nice boys - all of them." What more would you have?

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## Your Editor says—

It helps the C.D. if readers advertise their WANTS and FOR SALE book and story-paper items, etc. in it. The rates are 4p per word; a boxed, displayed ad. costs £20.00 for a whole page, £10 for a half page or £5 for a quarter page.



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No. 245.

DOUBLE, DOUBLE, TOIL & TROUBLE:

By Eric Fayne

We all know that Charles Hamilton repeated a great many of his themes, often transferring a certain plot from one of his fictional schools to another. With a man who wrote so much, repetition was inevitable. Normally, however, there was a gap of some years before a subject was re-hashed. In that time a new generation of readers had come on the scene, and it was to only a handful of the "ever faithful" that the theme was familiar.

But in 3 weeks of May 1937 an identical basic theme was being given an airing at the same time in two Hamilton schools in two separate papers - the Gem and the Modern Boy. So we have one of those anomalies which are so fascinating and, often, inexplicable for the student of the work of Hamilton and for the researcher into the vagaries of our much loved old papers.

"Martin Clifford" in the Gem told the story, in a 3-story series, of Mr. Brandreth, a millionaire, an old friend of Tom Merry's father, who made Tom Merry his heir, providing the heir proved worthy. Should Tom Merry be disgraced, the heir would be a distant relative named Goring. Goring came across a boy named Clavering who was Tom Merry's double in appearance.

The real Tom Merry is kidnapped; the false Tom Merry slips into St. Jim's in his place, and sets about disgracing himself so that as Tom Merry, he may be expelled. Once he is expelled, the false Tom Merry will disappear, and the real Tom Merry will eventually be set free to tell his incredible story which nobody will believe.

"Charles Hamilton" in Modern Boy told the story of Tunstall, a Fifth-former, who is his grandfather's heir, providing he is a worthy heir. Should he prove unworthy, the heir will become a distant cousin named Varney.

Tunstall has to leave a Yorkshire school owing to the plotting of Varney who is at the same school. Tunstall is wangled into Oakshott School in the south. But Tunstall is kidnapped, and Varney, who is "like Tunstall in appearance", turns up at Oakshott in the name of Tunstall, and sets about trying hard to get himself expelled. Unluckily for him, another Fifth-former at Oakshott is Len Lex, the boy detective.

In May 1937, readers of both the Gem and Modern Boy must have been astounded to find the same plot being served up at exactly the same time in both papers.

Clearly there must have been a lapse of some sort on the management side of these papers - and especially with Modern Boy. Who was to blame? Was it the editor, or was it the author? I tend to the view that Hamilton himself was the most culpable. He knew - he must have known - that he had used the plot before in the Gem. He knew that his early Gem stories were being reprinted in the Gem.

The Tom Merry's Double series had originally appeared in the Gem in April 1914. An additional oddity is that, in the reprints, the series was published long out of sequence. It was held over for the best part of a year; then it turned up in the Gem in May 1937 at the same time as the theme was re-hashed in the Len Lex series in Modern Boy.

Was there some purpose behind this remarkable piece of editorial thinking? Or did it all happen by chance? If it was intentional, the reason is obscure.

Which was the better of these two series?

The Oakshott series was by far the more credible. Tunstall was unknown at Oakshott. His cousin, Varney, was like him in appearance. The false Tunstall arrived at the beginning of term, and joined schoolfellows and staff who did not know him.

The Tom Merry's Double series was quite incredible. It was beyond belief that some boy, unrelated to Tom Merry, would be an identical twin in appearance. It was beyond relief that Clavering, posing as Tom Merry, could join the school in the middle of term, taking part in class work, being an intimate member of the Terrible Three, and acting as junior captain of sports as he had always done, without the imposture being discovered within an hour.

But, in actual fact, the Gem series was by far the better of the two. Boy readers - and plenty of adult readers as well - do not bother much about the credibility of a plot, if a story is well-

written. And the Tom Merry series is finely written, well balanced, and the suspense work up to a great climax. Another factor was the affection that readers had for Tom Merry, while nobody cared a lot what happened to the unfortunate Tunstall in Modern Boy.

A minor detail is that the Modern Boy series had an anti-climax in a comedy chapter with Pie of Oakshott, a chapter which seems to have been tacked on as padding.

The Tom Merry series was one of my big favourites of the blue Gem. Oddly enough it was a sadly neglected series. It never appeared in the S.O.L., even though, on a number of occasions, they had to fall back on sub series for that monthly. I cannot trace that it ever appeared in the Penny Popular or in the later Popular. This was remarkable, really, for some tales were re-printed more than once in the Penny Pop and its successor.

The only reprinting of this Doubles series, so far as I can trace, was in this 1973 reprinting in the Gem, at a time when the stories then selected were being marred by excessive pruning. Even so, it still retains much of its suspense and overall charm in 1937.

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### CLIFF HOUSE CORNER

By Margery Woods

Keen readers of the storypapers soon begin to recognise the familiar situations turning up yet again in new guise, and while each story seems different at first glance a judicious paring away of top dressing reveals the same common denominator of the basic emotions that motivate human action and form the essential substance of fiction with a grip. While the favourite situations could be related to a small group of basic themes, e.g. A shadow from the past, The imposter/ure, Rivalry, Banishment, and so on, all of which apply to any fictional genre, they lent themselves with great success to the world of the school. One in particular was the siege syndrome, or barricade, isolation, or beleagerment, which used to pop up every so often.

In NEW RULE AT CLIFF HOUSE this theme was turned in on itself by removing most of the teaching staff and leaving the girls, the Fourth in particular, at the mercy of one of Hilda Richards' most unpleasant individuals. Miss Primrose and staff had managed to get themselves quarantined at a neighbouring school during an outbreak of scarlet fever. Sir Willis Gregory, the pompous, peppery head of the board of governors, who has long held firm views of his own regarding the education of schoolgirls, seizes this opportunity to move into the school and put a few of his theories into practice. (There's a lovely summing-up line about Sir Willis... "Sir Willis's views about girls as a whole were founded upon a vast inexperience of women in general" ...which tells us all we need to know about the unlikely outcome of his administration.)



Only two mistresses remain at the school, Miss Charmant, the Fourth's popular young mistress, and a junior teacher, Miss Belling. Sir Willis borrows two masters from Friardale School and appoints one of them, Shaw Dennis, as co-head with Valerie Charmant, she to be responsible for discipline, he for curriculum.

At first Cliff House was delighted. All was new, different. But not for long. Babs and Co. soon noticed that their beloved form mistress was anything but happy; they also began to realise that the cool, good-looking Mr. Dennis was not quite so knowledgeable a teacher as he would be. Very soon there is open enmity, and the second theme--the shadow of the past--is interwoven.

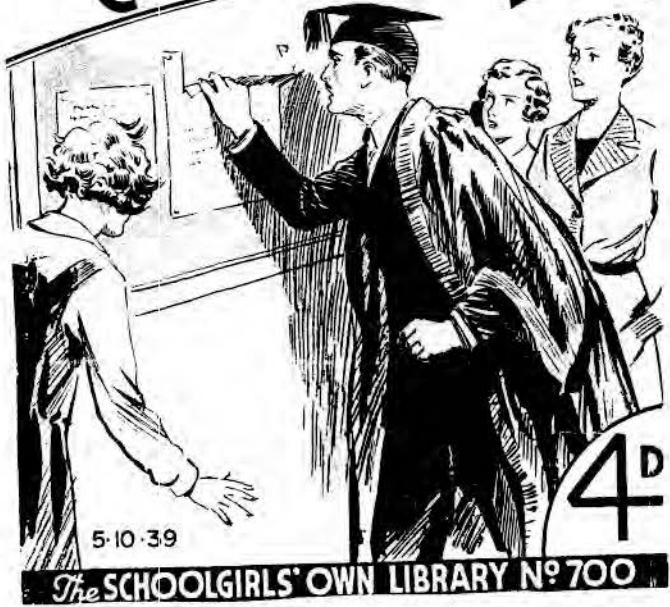
Valerie Charmant was an adopted child, much loved by her foster parents but hated and envied by her older

cousin Shaw, the nephew of her foster parents. After being expelled from his school and stealing from his uncle he was banished from the Charmant home to make his own way in the world. Now he was back, to seek revenge on the girl he believed had displaced him in his uncle's and aunt's affection. All the seeds of conflict are sown and the entire form forgets its more trivial inner differences as it unites in defence of Miss Charmant. Barrages of rapid-fire questions from the girls in class, and craftily wrong answers from them make a hilarious scene which fully substantiates the girls' suspicions; Shaw Dennis knows little about teaching.

Rosa Rodworth plays an important role in this great series, and for once no-one in their heart really worries when Rosa's conscience becomes a little more deaf than usual after she finds Shaw Dennis's passport and discovers she indeed has a weapon with which to wage her own spot of moral blackmail. Bessie posts the wrong letter, Jemima adds her own special intelligence to the plot, and the net begins to close in on the Cliff House tyrant when Marcelle Biquet's brother Alphonse comes to England in search of a thief. But before the tangle

# NEW RULE AT CLIFF HOUSE

A  
BRILLIANT TALE  
of the early  
ADVENTURES  
of BARBARA  
REDFERN  
and Co.  
by Hilda  
Richards





is worked out a great deal of heartbreak befalls Valerie Charmant.

A study of this series would be well worth while to any researcher into the craft of fiction. For this story pivots on one of the cleverest ploys for engaging the reader's sympathy, a ploy with which a skilful author can maintain suspense throughout. Try to borrow a copy, and see how Babs and Co. are caught in the author's craft. They long to rid Cliff House of Shaw Dennis to help their form mistress, but time and again they have to subdue their rebellion because they will simply bring more harm to her. Shaw Dennis is a dangerously manipulative character, exploiting the girls' rebellious instincts, the pompous self-importance of Sir Willis, and the vulnerability of the woman he hates so much. There is cruelty in this character, even a trace of sadism not often found in the storypapers, not the kind in the storybook adventure sense, as in the stock type incident where the chums and Marcelle's brother are left deliberately trapped underground by Dennis, but in the sheer mental persecution which runs through this series.

This series has all the strength of John Wheway's earlier writing, when he was bringing Cliff House back to greater popularity than ever before, but I hesitate to attribute it to him without being absolutely certain of the writer's identity. Certainly, for me, it was one of the best Cliff House series every written.

(Editor's note: Perhaps Bill Lofts and Derek Adley, or other Cliff House fans can tell us if Wheway was indeed the writer of this excellent series - and when it first appeared in the weeklies?)

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### MIDLAND O.B.B.C.

Only seven members were present at the April meeting, which is discouraging for those few who invariably turn up and do most of the Club's work. Acting Chairman Ivan Webster read out the sad news that Brian Fahey had died of a heart attack, and great sympathy was expressed.

After the formal reading and approval of the minutes, Ivan Webster read a chapter from *COKER THE REBEL*, a Howard Baker volume, about a feud between Coker and Walker.

The eatables were provided by Betty Hopton. Ivan forgot his electric plug so some of us had cold milk instead of tea or coffee. Then followed a quiz, mainly on Rookwood, with the prize of the Museum Press's Rookwood volume won

by Ivan Webster, and consolation prizes of past C.D.s to other members. Then another reading about Coker and Walker was given.

We meet again on 19th May, in order to avoid holidays.

JACK BELLFIELD

### LONDON O.B.B.C.

Including the Harper family of five, a total of twenty-five members and friends enjoyed a happy time at the club's May meeting at the Loughton rendezvous. Norman Wright in the Chair welcomed new member Alan Knight, a keen Hamiltonian. Copies were available of the Ealing Gazette mentioning the Hamilton exhibition at Ealing College, arranged by Stephen Goddard and Bill Bradford. In a talk on Charles Hamilton, Roger Jenkins elucidated facts which never appeared in the famous author's Autobiography.

Christ Harper's Choice of three Desert Island books comprised George E. Rochester's The Black Squadron, Captain Charles Gilson's The Mystery of Ah Jim, and The Adventures of Jack-A-Lantern by S. Walkey. His talk was followed by Duncan Harper's reading from Murder Comes Calling, in the last series of S.B.L. Don Webster conducted a quiz based on characters from Magnet, Gem and Nelson Lee. Alan Stewart won, Mary Cadogan came second, with Roger Jenkins in third place.

Because of Betty Lawrence's indisposition, the June 14th meeting will be held at the Walthamstow venue. Betty's thanks to all those who had written to her at the hospital were read out. Votes of thanks were accorded to the hospitable Harper family.

BEN WHITER

### NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

We had thirteen members at our meeting on 9th May, and were delighted to welcome Catherine Humphry, a local librarian, as an Associate Member. David Bradley reported on developments concerning the W.E. JOHNS MEETING planned for October in Nottingham. 'Biggles, the film, is now available on videocassette. Darrell Swift reported on the success of the April WILLIAM MEETING at Banbury. Of the 39 people present, 5 were from the Northern, and two from the Midland O.B.B.C.s. Paul Galvin, who had now obtained the Club library from Mollie Allison, explained that this was much larger than envisaged, and he was now in the process of cataloguing it.

Arthur Fortune played part of the 1981 radio broadcast 'Portrait of Greyfriars'. After refreshments, Margaret Atkinson presented a beautifully prepared quiz on hobby related and some general knowledge items. David Bradley was the winner. Keith Atkinson then presented a most ingenious item. Reading the chapter 'On Habits' from the book WINDFALLS, he explained that we all have habits of some kind. He then related these to the Magnet story concerning Harry Wharton's habit of fumbling with his jacket button. Excerpts from the book, and the Magnet, brought to us a novel and original theme. Keith was given a hearty round of applause for his presentation - and in addition that very day was his birthday!

Our Club Dinner is at 8.00 p.m. on Saturday, 27th June. Details of this and the Club Programme for the rest of this year may be obtained from our Secretary, Revd. Geoffrey Good, Thornes Vicarage, Wakefield, West Yorkshire.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR.

#### CAMBRIDGE CLUB

Our May 1987 meeting took place at the Northampton home of Howard Corn; with the hospitality of both lunch and tea being provided by Howard and Sandra Corn, and Paul Wilkins. Following on from his talk to the Club in November 1986 on another BBC-serial AND Eagle character, 'PC 49', Howard delivered a comprehensive audio-visual treatise on Charles Chilton's 'Riders of the Range', showing that this was a most skilful blend of Western fact and fiction. Jeff Arnold and his 676 Ranch cowboy colleagues chalked up an audience of listeners and readers for well over a dozen years.

Bill Lofts then delivered a talk on 'Titles', which amply demonstrated their choice, their real meaning, and how they are designed to sell comics and magazines.

Paul Wilkins then gave a very subtle quiz on the TV shows of the 50's and 60's. The meeting concluded with a sincere vote of thanks to our hosts. (N.B. Both of Howard's Eagle character and story analyses are in print in the Eagle-enthusiasts fanzines, 'Eagler' and its recent successor "Eagle Days".)

ADRIAN PERKINS

#### SOUTH WEST CLUB

On Sunday, 26th April, members met at the home of Tim Salisbury for the first of two meetings in 1987.

We listened with interest to Bill Loft's talk on Dick Turpin and this was illustrated by Mac who passed round copies of the stories from his collection. After a delicious tea and general chat we settled down to resume the meeting, with Bill giving another very enjoyable talk on 'Greyfriars on holiday', after which we were asked our preferences of favourite series. The three that came out top were the Egyptian, China and India series.

To end the meeting Terry Jones described how his reading of the Magnet and Gem had influenced him over the years. We now look forward to our Autumn meeting.

TIM SALISBURY

### REVIEW BY ERIC FAYNE

"THE GREYFRIARS SUFFRAGETTE"

Frank Richards.

(Howard Baker Special Club Volume £18.00)

This is a gorgeous volume. It is also a volume of some poignancy, containing as it does the last few Greyfriars stories written before the start of the Great War, after which nothing would ever be the same again.

The volume comprises five consecutive Red Magnets, one of which is the Summer Double Number (with a typical Double Number cover from the artist Philip Hayward), from the whole of August 1914. The war had, of course, started by the time that most of the issues were in the shops. In fact, the final issue of the book announces that next week will be the Special War Issue of the Magnet. Not yet was there anything but glory in War.

The opening story "The Match with St. Jim's" is one of the best in the book. The Remove has a fixture on the cricket field due with St. Jim's. Temple & Co. of the Fourth steal the fixture by getting the real team shanghaied by a bogus driver in a motor coach. And with Harry Wharton & Co. out of the way, Temple & Co. step into the vacancy and set off to steal the match with St. Jim's. This is the famous story where the Bounder digs a penknife into the neck of the coach-driver to compel him to stop. A highlight of later Red Magnet days.

The next story "Self-Condemed" is high melodrama with a capital "M". Lyceum at its best. Dicky Nugent gets into trouble with Ponsonby of Highcliffe - and it's the type of trouble which arouses fury rather than sympathy in brother Frank's bosom. Dicky gets a severe thrashing from Frank - and Frank finds himself condemned, not only by the Head of Greyfriars, but also by his own chums. Excellent drama. Wun Lung, complete with pigtail and flowing robes, plays a substantial part in sorting things out.

Then comes the Summer Double Number. In a way, more like an early edition of "Pluck" or "Marvel", with two other long complete adventure tales and a serial appearing with the Greyfriars story. "Harry Wharton & Co's Holiday" is a curious inconsequential affair. Not really a story at all. More like a series of reports on various cricket matches which the Greyfriars chums played during their summer vacation. Yet oddly captivating and pleasant all the way through. There would never be a "story" quite like it again in the Magnet.

"Wild Women at Greyfriars" comes next - a real period piece. A bevy of suffragettes descends on Greyfriars, and the result is hilarious. Charles Hamilton never saw the suffragettes as anything but figures of fun. Ladies with an aim in view, and an iron determination, perhaps a little like the Greenham Common ladies of modern times, except that the clothes are different. But the suffragettes at Greyfriars develop into a frantic affair.

Last of all comes "Coker's Conquest", an above standard Coker story. Coker as a ladies' man, even being reformed sufficiently to wear a topper on occasion. The young lady of his choice is guarded by a severe aunt, so Coker has to seek the aid of, of all people, Billy Bunter. And the result is a disaster for Coker.

All lovely stuff. A gorgeous volume, as we said earlier. And bound to match the quality of those who really care.

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