

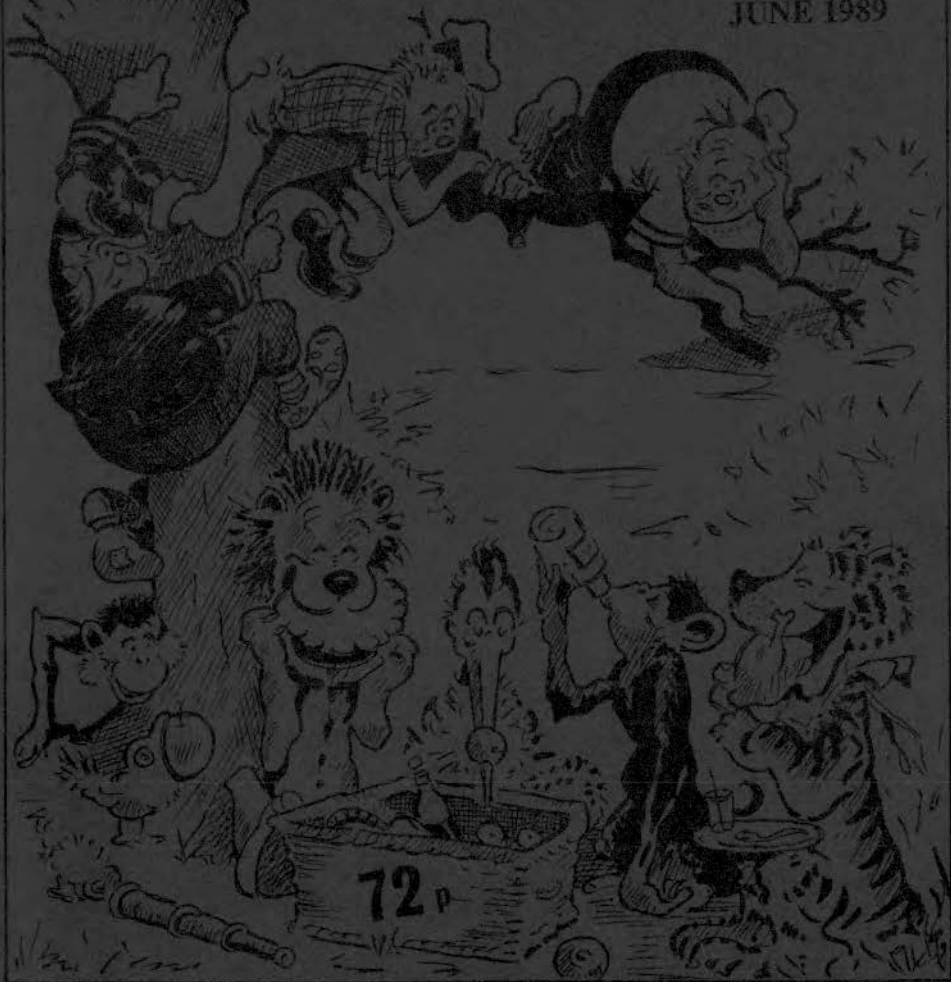
STORY
PAPER

COLLECTORS DIGEST

VOLUME 43

Number 510

JUNE 1989



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Whispers from the Den



WILLIAM - AGAIN

Richmal Crompton's 'Just William' celebrates the 70th anniversary of his creation this year. He was launched in February 1919 in Newnes's popular Home Mag. and, as all C.D. readers know, then went from strength to strength. The seventh annual William Day in April again drew enthusiasts from all over the country and was a very happy occasion. To mark

William's 70th birthday (although somewhat belatedly) we are publishing in this issue a story about our favourite juvenile desperado. This is by Thomas Penn, who was joint first prize winner in a competition organized recently by Macmillan's Outlaws Club.

DENISE, THE MYSTERIOUS DIARIST

Several readers have written to enquire about the identity of Denise, who is chronicling for us details of the last days of the Schoolgirls' Own Library. It is not myself - or Margery Woods - or Tommy Keen, as some of you thought; Denise is, in fact, Dennis L. Bird, a writer whose interests

include ice-skating, flying, the old papers and, in particular, stories featuring those intriguing detectives Noel Raymond and Valerie Drew.

CALIFORNIA THE GOLDEN

I have just been on another wonderful trip to California where, amongst the boulders and dry valleys, I could imagine that Charles Hamilton's Rio Kid and other cowboy heroes from my childhood might at any moment appear. I also yearned to ride the range with Gene Autry and some of the other singing cowboys whose cinematic exploits used to thrill me so much. And wouldn't it have been marvellous to have come across my brother's and my all-time favourite film-star, Gary Cooper, in full western garb! Nevertheless California was still expansive, exciting and - above all - gloriously sun-soaked.

My next trip is to the English lakes; I hope that many of you are planning or are already enjoying equally happy holidays.

MARY CADOGAN



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE FU CHANG TONG?

by William Lister

In the beginning! That, if possible, is the best way to start, whether it be a book, a play, a film or a story. The world's greatest books starts "In the beginning". One can understand an issue a lot better if one is in it from the beginning. Even if a film begins with events from later in the tale, flashbacks have to be used so that we see how it all began.

That goes for many things, including the saga of St. Frank's, its teachers and schoolboys. Unfortunately, many of us were too young perhaps to remember an important beginning; that is when the mighty edifice of St. Frank's was erected, which was later to house many who became household names. These of course include Nelson Lee, Nipper, Handforth & Co., Ezra Quirk and a number of bad lads, Fulwood and his

two cronies, Gulliver and Bell. Such characters provided the foundation of the school stories.

Of course, not all of them appeared at the same time. Some came along in ones and twos, later. Fortunately, thanks to the interest of folks who collected or bought and sold these old papers, we can even now go back to the beginning. Also, as time went on, some of the old stories were reprinted. Take the one I now have before me, No. 2/3rd New Series/March 4, 1933, entitled KIDNAPPED by E.S.B., originally came out as No. 114 Old Series, wherein a glimpse of early days flashes through the story, as an encounter with a Chinese villain brings back a memory of the day they arrived at St. Frank's. KIDNAPPED, the story of the kidnapping and rescue of Farman, son of an American millionaire, closes in a snatch rescue of the boy in a hand to hand fight, when Nelson Lee, Nipper and a handful of St. Frank's boys stormed the enemy, one of these being a Chinese man. Nipper later pens the incident, as follows:

"The second man was a Chinaman! Instantly there flashed into my mind the remembrance of the dreaded FU CHANG TONG - the fearful, murderous Chinese secret society which had sworn to kill Nelson Lee and me. Was that Chinaman a member of the FU CHANG TONG? and had we been discovered in the obscurity of St. Frank's?

Days passed, but Lee and I were still a bit uneasy. Had the FU CHANGS discovered us? Only time would tell."

We never hear about the various Tonges now, but in our younger days the thought of a Chinese Tong struck terror into our hearts, no doubt due to the influence of Sax Rohmer and his Dr. Fu Manchu. When we were young, the sight of a Chinaman made us dive for shelter (having read about, or seen Dr. Fu Manchu on the silent pictures) and so, dear Nipper, I understand your fear.

So that's how Nelson Lee and Nipper arrived at St. Frank's. Later when news crept out that Lee was a detective, and the boys shared in some of his cases, it was rumoured at St. Frank's that "He seems to be a Sexton Blake and Sherlock Holmes all rolled into one, by gad!"

So Nelson Lee and Nipper took refuge at St. Frank's almost at the beginning, and stayed until Edwy Searles Brooks penned his last words on the subject of St. Frank's, which leads one to ask... whatever happened to the FU CHANG TONG?

Its members had made a blood promise to "get" Nelson Lee and Nipper. They swore it. Scared the life out of our detective duo everytime they saw a Chinaman.

However, time rolls on, as time is apt to do, and Nelson Lee and Nipper are still with us.

Whatever happened to the FU CHANG TONG?

Excuse me laughing!



DID THEY WRITE OF SEXTON BLAKE? - Part One by W.O.G. Lofts

Unfortunately, Sexton Blake rarely gets a mention these days in newspapers, magazines or the world of T.V. and radio. This is mainly due, of course, to the near disappearance of the great detective from fresh stories, the last being in about 1970. Even his publishers have shirked from putting him in picture form, and changed what was to have been a Blake adventure to some name more modern for its readers.

"Old Hat" was the remark of a Producer I met recently on Thames T.V. when I suggested that Sexton Blake ought to make a return to the small screen. It is refreshing to know that at least through the medium of the C.D. that we keep the memory alive.

When Sexton Blake was a household name in the old days, the media had a favourite phrase in mentioning some of his most famous writers. "Edgar Wallace, Leslie Charteris, and Sax Rohmer all cut their eye teeth on the famous Baker Street detective" was the blurb copied from some distant unknown reviewer in the past. None of them of course penned a Blake story, though the son of Edgar Wallace, Brian, did so in *The Detective Weekly* in 1939.

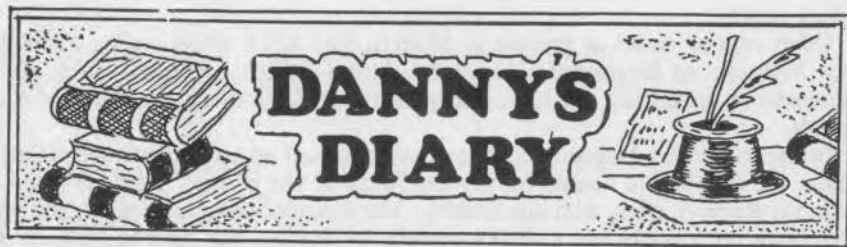
Leslie Charteris, for instance, told me personally that he could see no point in writing about a character that was not his creation. He had every admiration for Sexton Blake, but liked *The Saint* far better. His ambition was to build Simon Templar up to a household word, and how successful and rewarding it was eventually!

Sax Rohmer created his own detectives in stories, as well as the famous (or infamous) Dr. Fu Manchu, the devil Doctor, whose ambition was to rule the world. I would presume that Rohmer's reasons were similar to those of Leslie Charteris.

Perhaps I should explain now that, before the early sixties, official records were not known, consequently many tales of Sexton Blake in the S.B.L. and Union Jack could not be credited to an author. True, some were known by say, a set character, such as Zenith the Albino (Skene), but of many others one could only guess about the authorship. I can well remember the greatly loved Josie Packman, who conducted Blakania for

so many years, assuming that two anonymous stories in the Union Jack were the work of Gwyn Evans. Unfortunately she was wrong, as Mr. Twyman's official list under his editorship proved them to have been penned by a new writer, Tom Stenner, a newspaper writer connected with speedway, and later on in an interview Tom Stenner confirmed that he had penned some Blake stories in the old Union Jack.

Consequently, I wrote to Horace Phillips, better known as 'Marjorie Stanton' the brilliant creator of Morcove girls' school. He was then living in retirement on a farm near Lyme Regis in Dorset. I asked if he had produced any Sexton Blake yarns in his early days of writing, and he replied that he had. These were a few for William H. Back, and were in the Sexton Blake Library when it was priced 3d. He could not identify them after such a long period of time, and unfortunately, when official records were perused much later, none of them were found. One can only conclude that they were not used, or else he was getting confused with The Boys' Friend Library.



JUNE 1939

Conscription is in. On June 3rd all young men of 20 had to register for military service. It kind of sends a slight chill up the spine, but it seems to be necessary. Maybe it will cause old Hitler and Musso to drop any idea they might have had of coming centigramming over here. As for me, I'm going on working hard at school, perhaps, and enjoying myself with my weekly and monthly mags, certainly.

Lovely month in the good old 4d monthlies. The Greyfriars S.O.L. is "The Fighting Form-Master". Mr. Lascelles is the maths master at Greyfriars, but originally he was a prizefighter in the ring. (Shades of Bombardier Billy Wells and Jack Johnson.) But Mr. Lascelles' old pals in the boxing game want him back in the ring, so they set about persuading him to go back. Lovely tale, out of the ordinary. The 2nd S.O.L. "The Boy They Couldn't Trust" is a glorious tale, with lots of cricket. Cardew is a star bat and bowler, and a win against Rookwood seems in the bag with Cardew in the eleven. Then he lets them down. The plotting of that villain, Racke, plays a bad innings in this super tale. The 3rd S.O.L. is "The Fiends of Fu Chow" and it continues the exciting tale about Yung Ching, the Chinese boy at

St. Frank's. The fiends are determined to "get" the Chinese schoolboy, even if it means blowing up the school. Very thrilling.

I had two Boys' Friend Libraries this month. One was a King of the Islands tale called "Rivals of Treasure Island". Very good adventure tale. I read it before in Modern Boy, but it is nice to have it in book form. The other B.F.L. is "Buffalo Bill's Boyhood" by E.S. Brooks, which I enjoyed a lot.

In the Sexton Blake Library I had "The 13th Code" by Warwick Jardine. It introduces Big Ted Flanagan, who is a rolling stone.

With the last issue of the month, Captain Justice is back in Modern Boy to start a new series. The first tale of the series is "Justice the Peacemaker". A group of unscrupulous financiers have banded together to cause a world war - a master mind behind them striking at the British Empire. That's what Captain Justice and his friends are up against in this new series.

Other regular series at present in Modern Boy are a motor-racing series by Barry Joynson; an Engineering series by Alfred Edgar; a school series about Lowminster by John Mackworth; an African series by Dick Shaw. And lots of odds and ends.

In the wonderful Magnet the series has continued all the month about Bertie Vernon, the cousin and double of Vernon-Smith of Greyfriars. Bertie Vernon is now in the Remove along with our Smithy. The Bounder hates his cousin, and will do anything he possibly can to make trouble for Bertie. The opening tale of the month is "The Perfect Alibi". This is followed by "The Kidnapped Cricketer". Both boys are splendid cricketers, but they hate the sight of each other. So things are difficult for the cricket skipper. Next came "Rough on his Rival". It continues with the bitter feud between these two members of the Vernon-Smith family. The plot is carried still further in "The Rebel of the Remove". Vernon-Smith goes to see Bertie's uncle, and complains fiercely that Bertie has been sent to his, the Bounder's, school. And the uncle tells Herbert to mind his own business.

It is a great and enthralling series, the only fly in the lovely ointment being that Vernon-Smith, our Bounder, is such a detestable character all the time that one does not have much sympathy for him. It is turning out to be a very long series, and I expect it will be going on for quite a while yet.

At the local cinemas there has been one terrific film, and the rest have been, well, pretty good. It often seems that we don't get the best films in the summer months. We started the month, Mum and me, with "You Can't Take it With You" which Mum enjoyed muchly. About the daughter in a family who fell in love with the son of a rich business man. Jean Arthur, James Stewart and Lionel Barrymore were in this one. Then came one which I enjoyed a lot. This was "The Young in Heart" about a family of rogues who moved in on an old lady, and she brought out the best in them. Janet Gaynor and Douglas Fairbanks Junr. were in this one, along with Billie Burke.

CAPTAIN JUSTICE

tackles the mischief-makers who are out to stop Britain's re-armament.

Don't miss this first grand yarn in the new series of Captain Justice stories starting this week in MODERN BOY!



MODERN BOY

SIX GREAT STORIES EVERY WEEK!

Shirley Temple was a bit coy and so sweet in "Just Around the Corner". Then came that really stunning one which I mentioned just now. It was "Angels With Dirty Faces". A gangster is a great hero with a lot of slum boys, and, to try to undo some of the harm he has done, he pretends to be a coward when he goes to the electric chair. A terrific cast of James Cagney, Pat O'Brien, Humphrey Bogart, Ann Sheridan plus the Dead End Kids. Lovely film.

Our own Gracie Fields was in a pleasant little picture named "Keep Smiling" and we ended the month with "The Ware Case", a British film starring Clive Brook in which a nobleman is suspected of murdering his wife's rich brother. I always enjoy courtroom scenes in films.

And so the the Gem, which carries on blithely with its very strong programme of new stories of St. Jim's plus stories of Cedar Creek and the Benbow. The opening St. Jim's tale brings us to the end of the series about the Flying Schoolboys. The story "The Man in the Mask" is set in Naples, and Coker and Co. are now in the party. The Man in the Mask of the title is one of several people who are after Gussy's mysterious little black box. And at the end of the tale he is exposed, under his mask, as being Pawson, Lord Eastwood's man, who is in charge of the party. After his exposure, Pawson clears out, and the schoolboys head for home and a new term at school. But we have still to find out the secret of that box.

Next tale is "The Nizam's Diamond". Back at school, first of all Pawson comes on the scene again. And then the American who first entrusted the box to Gussy's care in Wayland Wood. In the end it turns out that the box contains a marvellous diamond, one that had been stolen earlier from Lord Eastwood.

Then a new series about House rivalry starts with "The Secret Passage". Fatty Wynn discovers a secret way into the School House by means of a hidden passage into the Fourth Form corridor. So Figgins & Co are able to carry out all sort of raids on the School House. Next week this theme is continued with "The Night Raiders". It is lovely to have an old-style tale after so much adventure in recent months. I love this new series.



Jack Drake, in the long field, was watching the ball like a hawk as it whizzed towards him. He backed, his eyes upward, his arm outstretched. Upon the catch depended the result of the match!

FOOLING THE FIFTH!

By Owen Conquest.

The month's first Cedar Creek tale is "Four Kings Trumped". The old scoundrel, Four Kings, tries to blackmail Frank Richards, because he believes that Frank is robbing the miners' claims.

Next comes "The Claim Robber", and it turns out that Gunten is the culprit. So Cedar Creek breaks up for the holidays, and the story

is "The North-West Trail" with Frank Richards & Co off to the Wild North West, and Yen Chin wanting to join the party - but all the "want" is on his side. The theme continues with "Yellow Cunning" and it is great fun as the party tries to shake off the chinee. Tip-top!

The Benbow's innings opened with "Taking Tuckey for a Ride". With the school ship in the West Indies, Tuckey takes up horse-riding, and has many a spill. Next, the boys are preparing to get some cricket in the West Indies. In "The New Captain", Daubeny resigns from the junior captaincy. Next "Rival Cricketers" in which the Fifth Form wants to take over the junior game against the West Indies, and it looks as though they will succeed.

Finally "Fooling the Fifth" in which the juniors, now captained by Drake, defeat the fifth - and also manage to beat Cazalet and his West Indian cricketers. Pleasant little cricket interlude, this one.

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

S.O.L. No. 373 "The Fighting Form-Master", comprised a couple of connected Magnet stories concerning Larry Lascelles from the early summer of 1933 plus, as make weight, a single story "The Worst Boy in the School" (he was Ponsonby) which immediately followed the Lascelles pair. S.O.L. No. 374 contained four Cardew stories (a couple of pairs of connected stories from the Gem of the summer of 1924).

The Cedar Creek stories in Danny's June 1939 Gem were four consecutive stories which had appeared in the Boy's Friend from the start of August in 1918. "Four Kings Trumped" of 1939 had been "In a Borrowed Name" in 1918. "The Claim Robber" carried the same title on both occasions. "The North-West Trail" (the start of the holiday series) had been "Frank Richards & Co.'s Holiday" in 1918. And the Gem's "Yellow Cunning" had been "Yen Chin's Ruse" originally.

The Benbow series of the Gem of June 1939 comprised four stories which had appeared consecutively in the Greyfriars Herald from the start of September 1920. "Taking Tuckey for a Ride" of 1939 had been "The Tribulations of Toodles" in 1920. "The New Captain" had been "Who shall be Captain?". "Rival Cricketers" had been "The Benbow Cricketers" and "Fooling the Fifth" had originally been "The Winning Catch". (It was the new junior captain, Jack Drake, who took the brilliant catch which won the match for the Benbow against the West Indies players.)

Just for a moment, let us drift back to the Boy's Friend, from which the Gem's Cedar Creek tales were reprinted. What a truly lovely paper the Friend was at that time, with a guanine and brilliant new story of Rookwood every week plus a superb Cedar Creek tale. And the B.F. had other worth-while attractions as well.

I never cease to drool over my bound volumes of mint copies of this lovely old paper. In those far-off days, the Friend and the Magnet used to appear every Monday, and I collected my copies from the newsagent on my way home from school. Excuse me while I shed an unmanly tear.

New boys came (and usually left) at an alarming rate, throughout the many decades of the MAGNET'S and GEM'S history. Generally it was more satisfactory if they left after their brief spell of glory, or dishonour, depending on their characters. However, quite a few remained, who, in time, became known as 'dead wood', for after their initial entry into the stories, they seldom featured to any extent again.

One such character to arrive at St. Jim's was Richard Roylance, way, way back in the far off days of World War I. It was in January 1918 that Roylance first made his appearance, a new boy arriving from New Zealand. As the MAGNET already had a boy from New Zealand at Greyfriars, Tom Brown, presumably it was considered time for St. Jim's to be likewise honoured. According to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had gleaned much information of Roylance's forthcoming visit, the new boy's Father had joined the Army, and 'was going to the Front'.

It was one of those wintry days, when the entire countryside was covered in snow, which was to be the cause of all the trouble. Reggie Manners, of the Third, had fallen out with his chums, Wally D'Arcy and Frank Levison, and had sulkily gone off alone. Manners of the Shell, also, was alone that afternoon, for some reason not having gone out with Tom Merry and Monty Lowther. But more of that later.

Reggie, wandering along the road to Rylcombe, spies a boy in the distance, and decides to snowball the fellow as he nears, and then to escape. With snowballs at the ready, and with the boy approaching, Reggie lets fly, but then trouble begins. The boy is, of course, Richard Roylance, and laughingly, in quite a good mood, retaliates. He is described in the typical Martin Clifford manner, as sturdy, handsome, and sunburnt. Reggie, after receiving several snowballs, becomes spiteful,



RICHARD ROYLANCE (The New Zealand Jester of the Fourth Term.)

and viciously kicks Roylance on the shins. This is too much for the new boy, who gives the wretched Reggie a good shaking. At that moment along comes Manners of the Shell - "Let him alone you cad" he shouts - and, within minutes, a fight is in progress. Manners is beaten, and Roylance, contemptuous of Reggie, walks away, leaving the Third former to sneer at his major for being beaten.

Roylance arrives at St. Jim's, and immediately is taken care of by Gussy and his chums. Manners arrives back at St. Jim's in a fearful temper, and seeing the new boy there, refers to him as a hooligan. From then on, Manners behaves in a most unfavourable light, quarrels with Merry and Lowther, and insists that he fights Roylance again. Roylance is now sharing a study with Smith Minor, and Giacomo Contarini (more 'dead wood'), but it is Gussy who keeps a benevolent eye on the new boy.

Knowing that it was through the snowballing episode, and that another fight is in the offing, Gussy tackles Reggies, who merely thinks his brother an idiot, but admits that he had hacked Roylance. Gussy then takes the wayward fag to the Terrible Three's study, and Reggie has to relate the whole story to his major. Harry Manners feels most humiliated (something Reggie could not understand) and, with Tom Merry, Lowther, and Gussy, goes to the Common-room. Here, Roylance is chatting with other boys, and to his astonishment, Manners says "I've come here to apologise", and Roylance is delighted. The story in question was called "Manners' Vendetta".

Manners, however, still remains testy over Roylance, and will not make a trip to Abbotsford with his chums, thinking that Roylance is going. Reggie, now on friendly terms again with Wally & Co., is out on a Third form paper chase, and insists on crossing a field where one of those famous bulls decided to be. The bull, of course, charges towards the now terrified Reggie, but riding by on their cycles, at that very moment, were Roylance and Gussy. Roylance crashes through the hedge, dragging his waterproof cape with him (*very* lucky the cape was handy) and by now Reggie is in a dead faint. Roylance hurls the cape at the 'thundering bull's lowered head', leaps aside, picks up the insensible fag, and rushes back to Gussy. Reggie is saved, and taken to a nearby cottage by Roylance, whilst Gussy goes to Rylcombe for the doctor, after promising Roylance he will not say anything about the saving of Reggie. Later, back at the school, Racke of the Shell, causes trouble between Roylance and Manners, and another fight ensues. Manners is again beaten.

Wally & Co. visit the cottage to which Reggie had been taken, to thank the people there for their kindness, Mr. Bunce, the tenant, remarked that he had seen the rescue from his window, and afterwards found the torn cape. This he shows to Wally; it is clearly marked with the initials R.R. Wally takes it back to St. Jim's, shows it to Gussy, and Gussy explains why he could not say that Roylance had rescued Reggie from the bull. Knowing now that Roylance saved his brother, Harry Manners is crest-fallen. 'There was a conflict in Manners' breast... but Manners was

sound of heart, and he would not refuse to face what he knew to be the truth'. With red cheeks, he apologises to Richard Roylance, much to that young man's astonishment, and eagerly grasps the outstretched hand of the fellow to whom he had shown so much enmity. At last, all is well.

For a while Manners and Roylance remained on friendly terms, but then Roylance was seldom heard of again. He faded into the background, thereby perhaps disappointing many New Zealand readers. Pity... he was a pleasant character.

THE SCHOOL FOR SMILES

by Ernest Holman

Short stories of (at most) 10,000 words appearing weekly for about 11 years, may seem quite an output. Measured against the 'Magnet', though, it would probably amount to not much more than a couple of years' issues of that paper.

Which means, of course, we are referring to Charles Hamilton's third school, Rookwood. Compared with Greyfriars and St. Jim's, Rookwood had a short life - or did it? Not really - for after dropping out of the weekly 'Boys' Friend' (not surprisingly, the paper itself did not exist much longer) Jimmy Silver & Co. were to rise again. Albeit, it would mostly be in repeats - and so they appeared in the weekly 'Popular' (which must have used up pretty well most of the saga) and in the Schoolboys' Own Library. As with St. Frank's, probably many readers of S.O.L. were unaware of the original source. There were also stories in the 'Gem', many of them 'sub' efforts but a few originals from the real Owen Conquest. Even after the end of the Second World War, Rookwood was still about. The short stories (mostly featuring Lovell, which could become tedious) that appeared in the Annuals from the late 1940s were, at best, 'carbon copies'. There was, however, one full-length yearn of about 60,000 words, published in hard-back ('Rivals of Rookwood School') which was well up to the real Conquest standard. It was one of Hamilton's best, in the post-war era.

Being of a short nature, whether as singles or series, the 'Boys' Friend' appearances moved along rapidly - no need for 'padding' or unnecessary lengthening. They were mostly of the 'jolly' type of adventures and incidents - living up to "Uncle James" Silver's exhortation to "Keep smiling!". In fact, these light-reading and/or humorous contents made the Rookwood stories quite a record of a school of smiling occupants! Probably, Jimmy Silver apart (and, maybe, Valetine Mornington) there were not too many boys that came into the category of 'characterisation'; most of the cast (a small one, at that) managed to get a look-in at times, however.

They were, above all, readable stories - none more so nowadays than the fifty-odd S.O.Ls., nearly all by the real writer; anyone possessing

these Rookwood 'pocket-books' has a repeat read for life. Cinderella School, yes - but Jimmy and his smilers had quite a Ball!

'LAUGHTER AND THRILLS' number 7: Introducing Annuals
by Norman Wright

Packaging has always been an important consideration when marketing any product. The Opie Collection of Packaging, now housed in Gloucester, is a testimony to the ingenuity of manufacturers who over the years exploited almost every aspect of design and colour in an attempt to make their product look more appealing to the would be consumer.

D.C. Thomson certainly knew how to make their annuals look attractive. While these were not perhaps as durable as the cloth spined volumes that issued from the Amalgamated Press offices, they had colourfully illustrated spines that made them look very appealing on the book-shelf. Such spines, paper covered card with fragile joints, do not stand the test of time very well. Sometimes careless fingers, pulling a favourite volume from a tightly packed shelf, separated spine from annual and all too often we collectors, having found a much sought after annual to add to our collection, shake our heads regretfully and lament as we discover our prize is minus that colourful spine strip.

THE BEANO BOOK



The Beano Book 1942
Copyright D.C. Thomson

As far as I can remember, every Thomson annual I have seen that was published before 1943 had a wide pictorial spine. The Amalgamated

Press, on the other hand were still issuing most of their annuals with cloth spines until at least 1962. Cloth being a fairly durable material does last well, but there is nothing more frustrating than being confronted by a block of cloth spined annuals in a newly discovered second hand bookshop only to discover, after carefully pulling out each annual, that there is nothing more exciting than a "Girls Crystal", and that most of them are the most boring dross imagined. It is in fact quite amazing just how many copies of "Stirling Annual" there are, cunningly placed on bookshop shelves to annoy the searching collector. Why so many copies of such a boring annual were ever bought is one of those mysteries like the "Marie Celeste", to which we will never know the answer! (No doubt the editor will receive shoals of letters from readers at my condemnation of their favourite annual.) Interestingly enough the Amalgamated Press did issue some of their cheaper annuals with pictorial spines.



Few products faced fiercer competition than Christmas annuals. In their limited counter life of a few months from September to December, they had to appeal almost instantly to the consumer or stay unsold, to be sold off ignominiously at half price in the January sales. Established annuals had an easier time of it. The "Holiday Annual" probably owed its long term success to the fact that its catchment of purchasers was made up

from the readers of more than one publication - "Gem", "Magnet", "Boys Friend", "Popular" and "Schoolboys Own Library". If each paper had produced its own bumper year book the market share for each annual would have been drastically reduced. It is difficult to understand why so many of the Amalgamated Press annuals had the almost identical format of black lettering on a yellow background. If each title had adopted its own background colour it would have been far easier to explain a particular Christmas requirement to a doting aunt who may well have muddled a "Holiday Annual" with a "Playbox", a mistake made all the more likely by the obscuring overprinted tissue wrappers that most of the Amalgamated Press annuals wore to protect them in transit. Such a mistake would have caused the recipient some anguish on Christmas morning on discovering "Little Doggy's Friend" instead of Billy Bunter!

Size was important; if a book looked good value for money it stood a better chance of being bought by the casual purchaser. Some of the early Thomson annuals were fairly small but very thick. The "Holiday Annual" went in for the same trick from the 1929 issue when it changed from a many paged book printed on fairly good paper to a thick book with less pages printed on paper that resembled fluffy cardboard.

Later Thomson annuals were issued in large formats with fewer pages, and at least some of them had coloured dustwrappers. But, whatever the size, shape or colour there is no doubt that one's favourite annual on Christmas morning was always a source of laughter and thrills.

FOR SALE: Holiday Annuals 1931/33/34/36, Gems 1929 (3) 1930 (12) 1931 (30) 1932 (46) 1933 (44) 1934 (11) 1935 (28) 1936 (19) 1937 (36) 1938 (22) 1939 (2), Magnets 1939/40 (9), Nelson Lees 1919/1933 (58), Practical Mechanics 1934/1943 (25), Practical Wireless 1934/38 (55). Detailed lists available (SAE). No selected copies. Also Hardbacks Trouble for Tom Merry, William the Pirate/Detective/Gangster. OFFERS TO PETER BARLEYCORN, 120 Buckswood Drive, Crawley, RH11 8JG.

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OUR BOOKSHELVES

REVIEWS BY ERIC FAYNE
and MARY CADOGAN

(Picture by Terry Wakefield)

BUNTER THE MASHER

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker Book
Special: £18.00)

This luxury volume comprises 5 of the early white cover Magnets. Apart from the Christmas Number of 1915, which is omitted, the copies run consecutively from mid-November 1915 to the end of the year, a happy collection of stories, with some fascinating reading for the Magnet historian. "The Conjuror's Capture" is the opening tale in the volume. It gives a welcome little turn in the limelight to Kipps, and it also re-introduces the German, Falke, who some months earlier had played an unworthy part in a thriller concerning an attempt to kidnap Johnny Bull. This time the slimy Snoop becomes the assistant to the German rogue, who is eventually beaten by Kipps and the Bounder.

The Editor's Chat in this issue provides engrossing material for the fan. It was the week that the Greyfriars Herald started off as a separate entity at a halfpenny. So there was no hint of a paper shortage yet. There is plenty of plugging for that No. One. (I have all those unusual little Heralds bound in a volume in my bookcase. Needless to say, I value it highly.)

Also in the Editor's Chat this week of the Magnet there is a bit of roguery worthy of Bunter himself. The editor, Mr. Hinton, comments on a forthcoming B.F.L. entitled "School & Sport". "You will remember", says Hinton, "what a great hit was made in the Magnet by the story "Sportsmen All" which was a Samways sub tale of a few months earlier. Hinton then prints a letter which he says he has received from Frank Richards. In short, Frank says that, while he was supposed to be on holiday in Cornwall he has been writing a sequel to his earlier success "Boy Without a Name" and this new story, which he was now sending to Mr. Hinton (you will be surprised at the big batch of manuscript) is entitled 'School & Sport'. And this bogus letter is signed "Frank Richards".

It is most improbable that the writer of the genuine "Boy Without a Name" would write to Hinton concerning "School & Sport" written by a sub. It is a typical Hintonism, or, to be less polite, a downright lie. One wonders idly whether there was any motive behind it, beyond plugging a new story. Is it just possible that they

feared Hamilton might be called into the war, and they were grooming the young Samways to take his place? We shall never know.

Next, "The Jape of the Season", with Hamilton at his most humorous. An advertisement in the local paper reads: "Lonely schoolmaster desires to meet a kindred sould. Good salary. Pleasing personal appearance; affectionate disposition. Acquaintance with a view to marriage. Personal interviews essential. Call at Greyfriars School any Wednesday or Saturday afternoon. H. Quelch, School House, Greyfriars". Enough said. One of the most deliciously funny tales of the period. The next tale, "The Rebels of the Remove", is also amusing and unusual, even if very unlikely. Rake of the Remove is fed up with football being so much in the hands of the "old gang" of the Remove. Rake does well for a time. Then, all disguised as girls, the "old gang" play Rake's lot, and put them in their place.

Next, "Bunter the Masher" has many original moments. It shows Bunter in his very worst light, pretending that Marjorie Hazeldene is writing to him and meeting him because she is smitten with him. The solution is novel and entertaining.

And Bob Cherry is heart-broken till the truth comes out.

The final tale in the volume - and the final tale for the year 1915 - is "The Bounder's Relapse", a substitute story, another one from Samways, who was almost certainly the best of the sub writers. In this yarn, the Bounder seems to have gone back to his old bad ways, though there is a reason for it all which brings him admiration in the last chapter.

As always in the Magnets of this period, the adverts and the Editor's Chats are nostalgically - and sometimes staggeringly-special.

So! Another lovely book to give beauty and glamour to your highly-polished book-cases - and to give you many hours of tantalising reading. Happy days.

E.F.

THE HISTORIC GARDENS OF OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE by Mavis Batey (with photographs by Hugh Palmer) Macmillan £16.95

This large and beautifully illustrated book deals with celebrated environments some way from Greyfriars and, just like that popular seat of learning in Kent, of course, Oxford and Cambridge never lose their charm. This history of the college gardens is traced from mediaeval times to today. Cloisters, quadrangles, walks and courts, and sympathetically placed flowers, lawns and trees are atmospherically described and illustrated (in photographs, paintings and engravings). Many of the pictures are in full colour and one feels one can almost walk into the idyllic scenes which have inspired artists, writers, philosophers and scientists throughout the years. Amongst the several secret gardens espied through ancient gateways, I most liked reading about the Deanery garden at Christ church in Oxford which was immortalized by Lewis Carroll in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

M.C.

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"Well, wot I think is this", said William, mounting one of his favourite hobby-horses. "School's all wrong. Think of it, us slavin' and slavin' away in schools on aftmoons when we could be gettin' a little exercise. Seems to me", he grumbled bitterly, "folks'd sooner see us dead in school than living in the woods or suchlike. I think that ..."

"Yes, that's all very well", said Ginger hastily, trying to get a word in edgeways before William got totally carried away, "You've said this often, but when 've you ever done anything about it? 'S all very well sittin' an' moanin' isn't it. 'f we don't get anythin' done now, we'll have left school, and what use will any changes be to us then? Tell me that".

The Outlaws were unusually edgy and bad-tempered. Of late, William had been kept in after school so many times, and given so many impositions, that he had fallen back to harping on his grievances, a thing which he did not often do on any sunny day, let alone a half-holiday. Ginger, Douglas and Henry considered this a waste of time, and wished to get out into the sunshine.

"f you weren't so silly", Henry retorted to William, "You wouldn't have got all those lines an' suchlike. Ole Stinks is as blind as a bat and you have to get caught throwin' darts. Clumsy!"

It says much for William's frame of mind that he did not even reply to this, let alone fly at Henry as he could have done in normal circumstances. In fact, he brightened considerably, and a faint glimmer appeared in his eyes. Those who knew him knew that he had had an idea.

"Sno good trying to change school rules jus' now", he said slowly. "We've tried that. An' remember when we tried to walk to parliament about penshuns. We wunt get halfway 'f we tried that again. But why don't we have a school. We cud be the masters - me headmaster and you the others. It'd pay ole Markie out an' Warbeck an' Stinks. We needn't teach gography an' Latin. We can teach how to make whistles an' how to play Red Indians prop'ly an' stuff like that. I bet that's much more useful than knowing when the Battle of Waterloo was."

As William paused for breath, the church clock struck 4, and the meeting was adjourned. "We'll get pencils an' uniforms an' stuff an' meet here after tea", summed up William, as the Outlaws traced their separate ways home.



At tea, 'Robert was in with a friend, and he resented William's friendly overtures and his appearance. "Look at your hands, they're filthy", seemed to be his only remark to William all the way through tea, and when William tried to engage the friend in conversation, Robert looked at William in a murderous fashion and told him to "shut your mouth, and get out." Robert was twice as big as William. William seized several pieces of cake, shut his mouth and got out.

On entering the kitchen, William found his mother conversing with a visitor. Indistinctly, through a mouthful of cake, William asked how much his school fees cost. "Quite a few pounds, I believe, dear", his mother replied. William just refrained from spraying the area with cake in a spate of indignation. "Pounds?" he spat out. Think what you could buy with pounds.

He went upstairs to look for his headmaster's uniform, shaking his head at the thought. He always knew grown-ups were mad. Pounds! When he was grown-up, he wouldn't spend pounds on school. He ... suddenly he stopped. Why shouldn't the students who were to attend his school pay money. A halfpenny a day! Why, with 1 person that'd be (here, he drew his face into a scowl as he exerted extreme mental strain) 15 shillings tuppence halfpenny a year! He and the Outlaws could buy that cricket set in Brook's window and that expensive motor boat. They'd be millionaires within five years. They'd open schools all over the country. They'd buy houses for themselves. They'd break as many windows as they wanted without having to worry about the money... He brought himself out of his daydream and went upstairs to fetch a uniform and some pencils and paper.

The Outlaws met in the old barn. William had brought his most official-looking uniform - a postman's outfit with toy sets of stamps and official-looking cards. Ginger had his red Indian's outfit, Henry had "borrowed" his father's top hat and his little sister's toy desk. Douglas had a long flowing cape and a pair of pince-nez. William stood on a packing case and summoned his outlaws to attention. "What we've got to do is make notices now an' I've thought that we can charge money for lessons, after all, our parents have to pay sev'ral pounds fr our lessons. Its only right that, 's we're wearin' ourselves out teachin' that we get somethin'. We'll be millionaires within years. We'll change schools. We'll put Markie an' Stinks out 'f business - stop 'em prac'lly stealin' money from our parents. "Tisn't as 'f school does us any good anyway. We ..."

Ginger, Henry and Douglas, carried away by William's eloquence, cheered loudly. "We've gotter start tomorrow", went on William, "so let's get started on these notices now."

The next morning, when the local young students made their way towards school, they saw a sign reposing against a hedge, which said:

This way to
Brown's school
for the gentry

William had copied the sign which hung outside his school: "Markson's school for the sons of gentry", but decided to go one better and have it for the gentry itself,

not knowing what the sign was referring to. However, the sons of the gentry, glad of any diversion, wended their way in the direction of the sign, which pointed to the old barn. Outside the old barn itself, a sign hung suspended by a pin and read:

Brown 's scue for the
jentry. Feez 1d a day
or 6d a week

William stood outside the old barn, majestic in his postman's outfit. The Outlaws had decided that, as they were starting their rival school, they wouldn't attend school any more. William started forward. "Pennies, please", he said aggressively. "I'm the headmaster, and I don't want to be kept waiting." He had decided to adopt his headmaster's attitude of what he considered downright tyranny, because, as he thought to himself, if that's what people pay money for, they must get it. He had learnt from past experience that trying to be different was not always better, as the customers usually bashed up anything in sight.

He sighed as he saw Arabella Simpkin at the head of the children. Arabella was the one who generally caused most of the trouble at the Outlaws' events. She had wrecked their nightclub no so long ago and was, in William's opinion, overbearing, conceited, aggravating and expected too much for the price. She was a damsel of Amazonian spirit, with a shock of red hair and a ferocious temper. Now, she glanced contemptuously at the sign and handed William a halfpenny.

"I'll see what it's like first", she said. "If it's alright, I'll give you the other ha'penny at the end". Having set this example, her followers took it that they should pay a ha'penny and, having done so, jostled into the barn and looked around.

"Not much here", mentioned Arabella scathingly. "What're we supposed to sit on for a start?"

William, having memories of the nightclub, had set out some packing-cases. Slightly disappointed at not being able to fuss, Arabella sat down. So did the others. William took his place at the toy desk and spoke: "this is a school which we've set up to teach you useful things, not like geography and maths and suchlike. We're goin' to teach you things which you can use, 'stead of french verbs. Hours are from 9 to 12, not afternoon school 'cause of exercise, an', an', an' ... we hope you'll be very happy here an' industrious", (having memories of Mr. Markson's platform manner).

"First lesson is taken by Professor Ginger an' is on how to make whistles out of reeds. Professor Ginger will now demonstrate how to make a whistle out of a reed". Ginger took a reed and began to shape it. Suddenly, Arabella Simpkin stood up. "I can make those. If this is just about makin' reeds, I'm goin' 'ome. Anybody can make reeds. This is daylight robbery, that's wot it is."

"Jus' a moment", interrupted William hastily. "We c'n teach you lots more things than that, how to make a bird's nest, how to make a dog beg an' lots of things. Honest."

"Go on then, show us", retorted Arabella. Suddenly a voice shrilled from the back: "Want my Sat'day penny. Don't want the narsy boy to 'ave my Sat'day penny." The shrill cries rent the air. Subterranean rumblings came from the rest of

the group. "A'right", said William, "She c'n have her rotten 'ole penny. Give it her, Douglas."

Having solved this problem, they settled down. At this moment, however, shouts could be heard from across the field. William looked out. "Oh crumbs!" he murmured. A group of teachers and parents, headed by Mr. Brown, were heading for the old barn. Their faces all wore the same expression - grim and full of foreboding. William turned white. So did the rest of the Outlaws.

That evening, William and the other outlaws were walking slowly down the road. William limped, Ginger had a sore head, so did Henry and Douglas. Almost tearfully, William spoke:

"'S jealousy, 's wot it is. Don't like it when others do well. We mus've been popular 'f they said we'd taken over half the school. My Father made such a fuss, you'd think I'd murdered someone. He almost murdered me. Shun't be s'prised 'f he gets hung someday. Cares more about his b'loved reputation than he does 'bout me. That's wot he said to me anyway. I'd rather 'f gone to school for a hundred years than 've been home today. Well, I'm finished with tryin' to teach other people things" - here he brought out his terrible threat - "I w'unt teach 'em useful things 'f they came beggin' to me to."

Then Ginger spoke, "Did they take the money back?"

"Gosh, no. I'd forgotten." William took a handful of pennies from his pocket. The outlaws counted it breathlessly.

"Two an' six!" shouted William with glee "'s not bad. 's enough for the motor boat anyway. Come on." Giving a joyful limp forward, William set off for Brook's shop.

(Richmal Crompton's characters are used with permission from her niece and literary executor, Richmal Ashbee, and the publishers of the William books, Macmillan.)

COLLECTOR wishes to start collection of Jennings first editions in V.G. Dustwrappers; Bunter first editions in V.G. Dustwrappers; William reprints in V.G. Dustwrappers. Have you any spares, or a collection for sale?

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Cliff House Corner

by Margery Woods

WHEN TYRANTS RULED AT CLIFF HOUSE

No story is complete without an element of conflict to spice its plot, and of the many themes of conflict found in the history of Cliff House School that of tyranny was a favourite ploy of the Hilda Richards authors.

A tyrant could set friend against friend, form against form, mistress against pupil, and threaten to destroy the very fabric of the school itself.

Some were ever present in the school, needing only a spark of some personal desire or grudge to fire the greed for power and revenge. Others were wished upon the school by circumstances sometimes beyond the control of administration, even Miss Primrose herself, there to wreak damage and interrupt the well-planned organisation of the great educational centre. To this second group belonged several characters who gave rise to dramatic and memorable series, including Shaw Desmond, whose personal vendetta with Valerie Charmant has already been featured in this column, a certain Miss Potter, a Miss Harper, neither of whom would the Cliff House girls be likely to forget in a hurry, and the dreadful Miss Talma Tylor.

Actually, within the space of a year, 33/34, Cliff House twice suffered the imposition of a new, tyrannical head mistress whose rule saw the immediate resurgence of the school's own petty tyrants within the ranks of girls and staff.

The reign of Miss Talma Tylor was entirely the fault of the Fourth's own Firebrand, Diana Royston-Clarke, then still very much a newcomer. Already she was under sentence of expulsion, only to be saved by her doting father buying an interest in the school and becoming Governor, after Sir Willis Gregory found himself in financial difficulties. Diana's father immediately ordered Miss Primrose to rescind the sentence, Miss Primrose refused --- one just doesn't order Miss Primrose to do anything! --- and tendered her resignation.

But Mr. Royston-Clarke was not quite as clever as he thought, and the arrival of Miss Tylor to take up the post of headmistress, plus the antics of his naughty daughter, soon bring the school to a rebellious standstill. When Miss Tylor introduces caning --- unheard of under Miss Primrose's rule --- the girls decide something must be done.

They form a secret society, called the Society of Justice, in order to investigate the sinister Miss Tylor and the suspicious activities of Diana. Meanwhile, Miss Primrose, now relegated to form mistress, has her own suspicions of Talma Tylor, whom she had met several years previously and who at that time was not given to the grammatical blunders which now tend to fall from her mean lips.

Eventually the chums discover that Diana and her father have acquired an old chart which purports to show the location of the Cliff House treasure, a treasure estimated by the covetous Mr. Royston-Clarke to be worth at least half a million. But the chart is stolen from Diana.

And so schemer foils schemer and the Society of Justice stalks both, until justice wins and Miss Tylor is revealed as imposter and crook, and banished. Sir Willis recoups his finance and is able to buy back his interest in the school, Miss Primrose is reinstated, the treasure is saved, and Diana is expelled --- although not for very long.

Sir Willis Gregory did not come out of things as well the following year when his niece Gail Gregory is sent from Australia to England and Sir Willis, again in slight financial thrall to his brother, is requested to look after Gail. That Gail should require looking after is about the only joke in the entire series. In next to no time Gail has managed to ret rid of Miss Bullivant and the Charmer, install herself as virtual boss of the school and scare the wits out of her uncle, until, with the entire school on strike,



"ARE you going to expel Barbara Redfern?" Gail demanded. "Certainly not!" replied Miss Bullivant. "Then," threatened Gail, "I shall go to my uncle. And you know what that will mean—for you!"

he is forced to send for the seriously ill Miss Primrose. Really, every time that poor woman was ill or called away she left that school running on oiled wheels and returned to what was more like a madhouse. The five stories are written at a spanking pace, doubtless to keep the reader galloping over the pages before there is time to consider how one teenage girl, no matter how wilful, could achieve so much power in so short a time. No tyrant headmistress here --- Gail would have been more than her match!

The reign of Miss Potter took place during the early days of SCHOOLFRIEND in 1919. The chums go to see Miss Primrose off at the station and moments later have a decidedly inauspicious meeting with the unpleasant Miss Potter. They are no sooner back at the school when they discover there is no supper; suppers are to be discontinued: Miss Potter does not believe in suppers for young girls. To add insult to supperless bedtime she leaves instructions that rising bell is to be an hour earlier each morning in order than an additional hour of work may be put into the class. She withholds their letters, censors their letters home, forbids tea in studies and puts Friardale Village out of bounds. This is just for starters! Soon there are no games, no walks, class instead of halfers, extra drill, and the cane wielded sadistically at the slightest hint of defiance. However, like many more unpleasant individuals who enter Cliff House down the years to come, Miss Potter underestimates the spirit, courage and ingenuity of the girls.

They organise the Great Barring Out, which seemed to go down tremendously well with the readers, judging by the appreciative letters that were quoted after this series appeared. The shenanigans are very much of the old water, flour, soot, and pepper variety, not forgetting the pushing over of ladders on which the unfortunate

Piper is being urged to break into the chums' stronghold. At last Miss Bellew, the Fourth's mistress at that time, secretly dispatches a telegram to Miss Primrose and that long-suffering lady returns once more to salvage what she can from the wreckage of her school.

Although Miss Bullivant shamefully aided and abetted the awful Miss Potter she does not really belong to the category of tyrant. She could be harsh, lacked understanding and was lavish in the handing out of lines. But she had no motive of selfish gain, nor the over-riding ambition for power of the true tyrant. She wanted mainly to instil knowledge and always endeavoured to fulfil her job as conscientiously as possible. Over the years John Wheway mellowed her a little, so that perhaps she realised her own failings, of not really understanding youngsters and not making sufficient allowance for the inexperience of youth. On occasions she softened, and at least once was grateful to accept the help and kindness of Barbara Redfern. Life had not been kind to Miss Bullivant; she endeavoured in her way to be fair; perhaps it would be asking too much to expect her to be kind.

Of the terrible trio of hags that afflicted Cliff House, Miss Harper remains. Space is running out, so more of her and her unholy alliance with the school's most tyrannical prefect, Connie Jackson at a later date.

"DENISE'S DIARY"

JUNE 1939

"Danny's" entertaining Diary is a delightful mixture of information on the schoolboy papers of the time, and his impressions of what was happening in the world at large. I only wish I too had such total recall, but as I did not start keeping a diary until 1941 I have only hazy and uncertain memories. June 1939 does not strike any particular chord in my memory, but it must have been around this time that I saw the film of "The Adventures of Robin Hood". It is still, to my mind, the finest dramatic version of the old story, with Errol Flynn ideally cast as the athletic, light-hearted outlaw, Claude Rains a sardonic Prince John, and the smoothly sinister Basil Rathbone perfect as Guy of Gisborne. In 1939 Rathbone scored a second success as Sherlock Holmes in "The Hound of the Baskervilles", but I did not see that until after the war had begun.

War was not far off in that warm summer, and to an 8 year old boy the name of "Herr Hitler" seemed ever-present on the radio and in the newspapers. I also recall seeing chalked on the walls of Shoreham in Sussex, where I lived, the lightning-flash symbol of Sir Oswald Mosley's Fascists. Fortunately there were also signs of Britain's intention to combat these evils: I think it must have been in May or June 1939, at an Empire Air Display at Shoreham Airport, that I first saw a Hawker Hurricane fighter. The elegant Spitfire was then only just in service; Hurricanes were far more numerous, and it was to that sturdy aeroplane that I gave my allegiance, then and now.

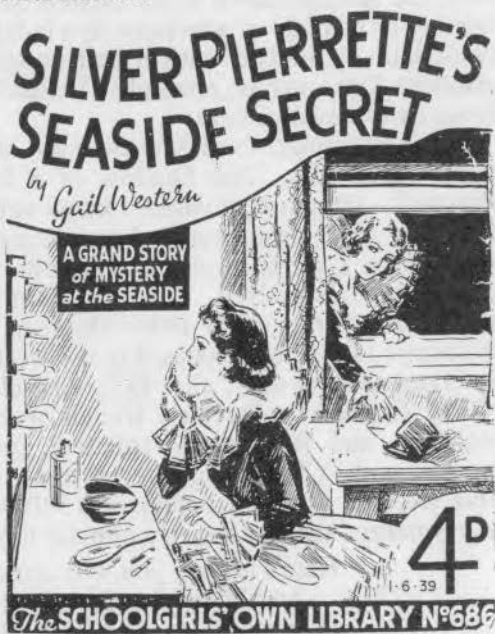
Coming to the juvenile literature of that time, my sister and I were just getting used to all the new characters in the "Girls' Crystal" which in May had swallowed up our "Schoolgirls' Weekly". This meant the much-lamented loss of Valerie Drew the detective and her Alsatian dog Flash, but introduced us to her exciting and debonair male counterpart Noel Raymond. As usual, there were four Schoolgirls' Own Library "yellow books", published on 1st June. The Cliff House story was "Mabel Lynn's Mystery Idol", No. 684, which I have never seen; but I still have the other three, and fine stories they were.

No. 685, "When Pam Made Morcove Wonder", featured my favourite of all the Morcove characters - and incidentally the one best liked by their creator "Marjorie Stanton" (Horace Phillips). This was the cool, somewhat reserved, but deeply loyal Pam Willoughby. She seemed to me quite different from all the other schoolgirls at Morcove (or Cliff House too, for that matter) - she never seemed interested in cheap popularity, but always took her own line in doing what she thought right. We shall find a supreme example of that in a few months' time when we meet her at home in "The Legend of Swanlake"; meanwhile, here she is at school in a situation which cuts her off from her friends.

The story revolves around Tom and Edna Morgan, a young brother and sister in their twenties who are out of work - a familiar plight in the 1930s as it is in the 1980s. They gain the sympathy of Betty Barton and Co., who resolve to help them. The wealthy Pam is asked to join their efforts, but to general surprise she is at her most coldly discouraging. What she knows and they don't is that the Morgans are a couple of no-goods who had been employed by her father. A complicating factor is that they have a younger sister, Leila, who is a thoroughly deserving girl who arouses all Pam's compassion.

Horace Phillips rose to the demands of his plot. This passage sympathetically summarises the core of the matter:

"I have waited to see if they are out to make good", Pam was saying to herself at last. 'And now I know for certain! It mustn't go on. Only I must see poor Leila before I do anything about it all.'



"Painful interview that it was going to be! Pam could guess how much anguish that younger Morgan girl was going to suffer. There would be a flood of tragic tears when she was told. No likelihood of her brother and sister making good. Vain the wistful hope that perhaps - perhaps, after all, they had changed for the better!"

To readers today, that may seem to have an almost Victorian sentimentality about it. But it has a genuine depth of feeling which I find attractive even now. The ramifications of the tale need not concern us here - how the Morgans tried to blacken Pam's name before they received their just deserts. But the book gives a portrait in depth of this endearing character, Pam, and her family. (She inherits many of her qualities from her mother.)

The happy outcome was that, after all the misunderstandings, Pam was vindicated and "On the Honours Board at Morcove School went up the name of PAMELA WILLOUGHBY, Fourth Form".

SOL No. 686 was "Silver Pierrette's Seaside Secret", by "Gail Western" (C. Eaton Fearn, editor of the "Girls' Crystal"). I mentioned last month that a number of SOL books only came my way about a year later, when the Amalgamated Press cleared out their warehouse, and my chief memory of this tale of adventure in a holiday resort is of reading it early in 1940, laid up in bed with a bad cough and cold and sucking Valda pastilles! Does anyone remember Valdas? - little sugar-coated pyramids of throat-easing medicament.

Coincidentally, the last June issue also concerned a seaside concert party. This was "The Shadow of a Stranger", No. 687, by "Sylvia Marston" - an author of whom I know nothing. It featured Denise Laxton, a dancer, and I dimly remember reading it first in the old "Schoolgirls' Weekly" as a serial, probably in 1938. Denise was a most lovable girl (she re-appears in SOL 719), and lived with her invalid and widowed mother and her younger sister Maureen. Denise was one of four main characters (a formula repeated in the weekly Cruising Merrymaker stories by "Daphne Grayson", alias G.C. Graveley which had just started in the "Girls' Crystal"). Denise's friends were "Paula Westley, the talented violinist, and Raymond Faulkner, good-looking young comedian", together with "Clive Langham, possessor of a magnificent baritone voice". This too was a book I bought in 1940, and I used to sing their Masked Merrymakers' theme song to a popular tune of the times:

Here's hoping you will come again,

And bring your friends to see

How gaily goes our merry show

Each night beside the sea.

Good-night, goodnight - and pleasant dreams,

May fortune come your way.

We hope we've helped to make you glad

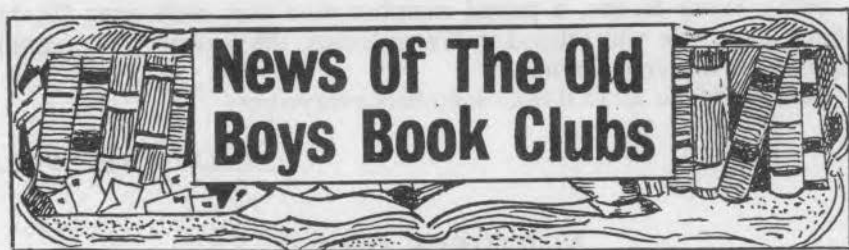
You came to Lynsand Bay.

That - give or take a note or two - fits very well to the tune of "There'll always be an England", with which we fortified ourselves in that Battle of Britain summer.

The stranger who casts a shadow is one Andrew Lenfield, or Stanbury, who is secretly blackmailing Mrs. Laxton regarding some trumped-up charge of dishonesty against her late husband. Apart from one singularly incredible episode where Denise is kidnapped and has to escape from a seagoing steamship, this is a realistic and rather touching story of a girl's fight to clear the honour of her father's memory. Needless to say, all ends well, with the villain charged by the police with "obtaining money by false pretences". On the last page, unusually for the SOL books, the heroine becomes engaged to be married.

It was unusual for an SOL book to feature adult love. In this case the path did not run smoothly; SOL 719 describes the vicissitudes of "Her Mystery Foe in Screenland", when Denise's film contract leads to unhappiness between her and Ray. But that must wait until next February.

DENNIS L. BIRD



CAMBRIDGE CLUB

Our May meeting, held at the home of Adrian Perkins, was rather hastily rearranged in an open air venue to take advantage of the fine spring weather.

After a short business meeting, Adrian talked about an Oxbridge (now national) magazine very much of our times, and the various brands of humour it has probably inspired in the media. We discussed this magazine's continuing links with people associated with 1960s/1970s radio and TV programmes such as 'That Was the Week That Was', 'Sorry, I'll read that again', 'Monty Python's Flying Circus' and 'Fawlty Towers'. Displayed examples of the magazine, associated books and strip cartoon anthologies, and discs provided an atmosphere of some levity, most appropriate for the garden venue.

Later Paul Wilkins confounded and entertained us with a profusely illustrated quiz concerning unidentified personalities in rarely seen undated publicity stills.

ADRIAN PERKINS

MIDLAND O.B.B.C.

The inevitable happened, after recent falling attendances, when only 3 of us attended the April meeting; if I had known the state of affairs I should have cancelled the meeting. Geoff Lardner travelled over 80 miles to get there and back, and Ivan Webster and I, 24 miles. There were some apologies but those who did not send an apology were at fault. At our May 23rd A.G.M. we shall be forced to reorganize the club. We have a large postal membership.

Of course the May meeting could not be a formally structured one, but as fortunately all those present were fluent speakers on many topics, we were able to proceed. Ivan Webster produced coffee and cakes. Geoff Lardner is full of ideas for discussion at the May A.G.M.

Sadly Harry Evans, a postal member who was well over 80, has recently died. He was related to Gwyn Evans, the Sexton Blake author, and proud of this connection.

Best wishes to all O.B.B.C. members everywhere.

JACK BELLFIELD

NORTHERN O.B.B.C

Chairman David Bradley welcomed the 21 present at our May meeting. We were pleased to hear that Michael Bentley was progressing well after his operation.

Darrell Swift reported that the William meeting at Norwich had gone well. The 1990 meeting would probably be in the Bromley, Kent area, which has strong associations with Richmal Crompton; the date was still to be finalized. Paul Galvin reported that things were taking shape for the W.E. Johns meeting to be held in October at Nottingham.

Barry Hill, our special guest for the evening, runs O.R.C.A., the radio show collectors' association, of which a number of C.D. readers are members. He commenced by stating that he considered radio, in common with books, as the theatre of the mind, requiring the use of our imaginations (unlike television). He probably has the largest collection in the world of recorded radio programmes, from Britain, the U.S.A., Australia, New Zealand and other countries. Barry played excerpts from some vintage programmes, beginning with ITMA. He demonstrated how

fashions changed by playing comedy from the fifties, sixties and seventies (programmes still very enjoyable now). After refreshments, by popular demand Barry continued for a further 15 minutes and it is almost certain that he acquired new members for O.R.C.A. by his very entertaining presentation.

To conclude, Geoffrey Good read superbly a Magnet extract in which Gosling and the Headmaster discuss (with some misunderstandings) the matter of some gold sovereigns 'nicked' from Gosling's lodge. A very amusing reading to round off a splendid evening.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

Editor's Note: The report of the London O.B.B.C. May meeting will appear in the July issue of the C.D.

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