

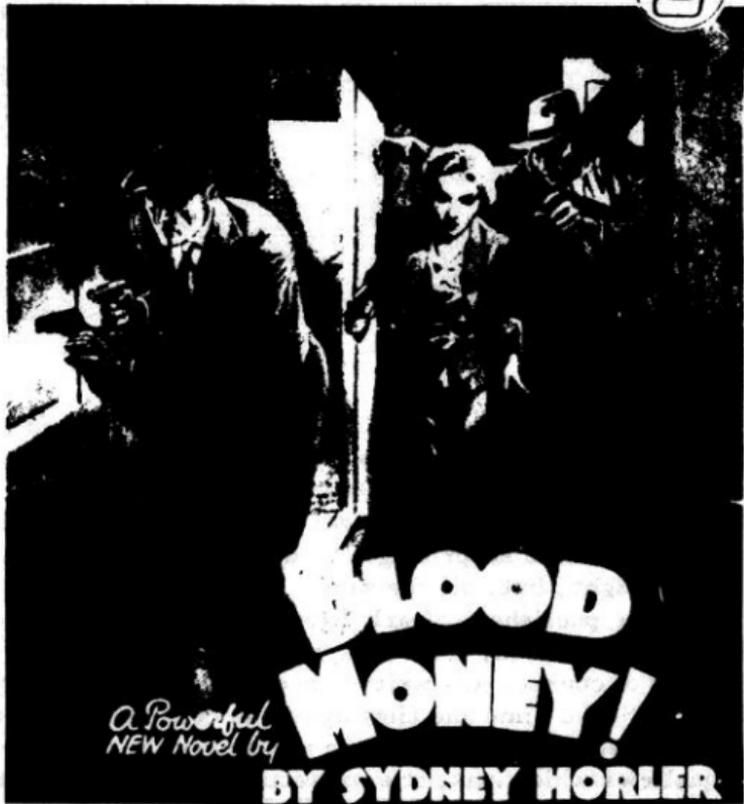
STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

SYDNEY HORLER'S LATEST NOVEL—COMPLETE WITHIN!

THE THRILLER

THE PAPER WITH A THOUSAND THRILLS

2p



Vol
25

No
29's

12½p

J
U
L
Y
1
9
7
1

12½p

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by
W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 25

No. 295

JULY 1971

Price 12½p

The EDITORS CHAT

H.W.

MID-SUMMER MUSINGS

ride of place in the window of my favourite bookshop is given, at present, to new editions - well-bound, well-printed - of Dean Farrar's "Eric" and Talbot Baines Reed's "The Fifth Form at St. Dominic's." I found it a pleasant sight, but also, in view of the times in which we live, rather surprising. No doubt both these yarns are long out of copyright, but, all the same, the cost of issuing them must be immense. The publishers clearly have faith in those yarns which entertained us as children, and our fathers and grandfathers before us.

"Eric," of course, was written over a hundred years ago. It has been re-published time and time again, in countless editions. Mocked and derided for as long as I can remember, it must nevertheless have qualities which make it everlasting. In spite of its refusal

to die and lie down, it has never been regarded as a school classic in the same class as "Tom Brown's Schooldays." Yet, for youngsters, it is more readable, lacking the stodginess which occurs in parts of "Tom Brown." How strange that Farrar never wrote a second story to equal in appeal the sentimental "Eric." His other tales, "St. Winifred's" and "Julian Home" never won comparable popularity, though, for years, "St. Winifred's" limped along on the strength of "Eric."

I daresay a reasonable claim could be made that "Fifth Form at St. Dominic's" is the finest school story ever written. It was filmed at least twice, and was also made, rather too economically, into a T.V. serial. But my own favourite Reed I find in his less well-known story "My Friend Smith." Coincidence runs riot in most of Reed's novels, and we would not have had it otherwise.

In a charming letter, Mr. J. K. Morgan of Liverpool tells me that the new home of C.D. brings back happy memories to him. About forty years ago he was in his first camp, under canvas not far from Crookham. "The Hampshire countryside," writes Mr. Morgan, "always reminded me of caravan and holiday series in the old papers."

And that, of course, reminds us in our turn, that Tom Merry and Co. went camping in Hampshire exactly fifty years ago, and the Greyfriars chums went caravanning in a series which had its moments, even though it was something of a shadow of the caravanning done by Tom Merry and Jimmy Silver, respectively, in earlier series. The Hampshire country is still very beautiful, although the dead hand of commercialism is gradually ravaging that beauty by slashing down the woods and rhododendrons, and building, building, building. One wonders rather fearfully what Hampshire will be like another fifty years on.

I assumed last month that we have a great number of animal lovers in our happy band of readers. I was right. So many people have written me the most charming letters expressing their regret at our loss of Mr. Chips, and telling me of their own pets. I am deeply grateful to all who wrote. I said last month that one day we might have another C.D. mascot - another tabby. But not yet, I added - and really meant it.

But we had a call from the Animal Welfare Centre at Wokingham. They had a large number of tabby kittens, hoping for homes. So we

DANNY'S DIARY

JULY 1921

What a shock for Boys' Friend readers! The Cedar Creek tales have come to a full-stop. I am very sad about it, for I have always loved Cedar Creek.

Just 3 tales to wind up the series. In "Frank Richards' Trust," Lord St. Austell left a large sum of money in Frank's charge. The earl wanted to test Frank's honesty.

In "Back to Cedar Creek," Lord St. Austell persuaded Frank to go back to the ranch, and in a lovely little tale it was proved that Yen Chin had been guilty of the theft of which Frank had been accused. The final tale was "Frank Richards' Choice." Frank saved Lord St. Austell from a ruffian named Four Kings. In recognition of his services, Lord St. Austell wanted to take Frank back to England, send him to a university, and give him the opportunity to realise his ambition of becoming a great author. The choice was left to Frank. He chose to stay on at Cedar Creek, so maybe we will have some more Cedar Creek tales soon. I hope so.

The Rookwood space has been taken up all the month with the continuation and conclusion of the Montmorency series. In "Living a Lie" Lurchey, who had been prepared to betray the ex-servant of Goby Hall, was bought off by Montmorency's uncle.

Lattrey gets his father, a seedy private detective, to find out the truth about Montmorency, in "Danger Ahead," but the wealthy uncle bought off Mr. Lattrey. But in "Chumming With Monty," Tubby Muffin overheard Montmorency talking to his uncle on the telephone. Muffin proceeded to blackmail Montmorency, until the upstart managed to make certain that Muffin would keep the secret.

In "Shewn Up," Sir George Goby's son came as a new boy to Rookwood (what a coincidence!). Montmorency met Goby at the station, and asked him not to give the game away and let the fellows know that Monty had once been a pantry-boy at Goby Hall. Goby promises - but, in "Exit Gentleman George," Peele & Co. tortured Goby till he spilt the beans and betrayed Montmorency. So Montmorency left Rookwood, and went to High Coombe. And, a few months later, Jones Minor's

cousin, who went to High Coombe, wrote to Jones Minor that Mr. Montmorency senior was in the hands of the police owing to hanky-panky in his bankruptcy. And in the holidays, Jimmy Silver was dining at an hotel and was served by a very haughty waiter. The waiter was Montmorency.

The great Musical Show "Chu Chin Chow," which seems to have been running for ever, has had its final performance this month at His Majesty's Theatre. It ended after 2238 performances.

England continues to do badly in Test Cricket. The Australians won at Leeds and the game at Manchester was a draw. Send for W. G. Grace.

The Boys' Herald (once the Greyfriars Herald) has been enlarged and gone up to 2d. It has a new serial entitled "Don't Go To London, Lad!" And it has cricket stories about Stringer, the Demon Bowler.

Jack Dempsey has knocked out Georges Carpentier in America, at Jersey City.

The Magnet has been just chronic this month. It gets wuss and wuss. The tales are so silly.

In "Bunter, the Bandit," Bunter decided to model himself on Slim Sylvester, his hero of fiction, and follow a life of crime, with Sammy Bunter as his assistant. Bunter goes to rob the Head's safe, and finds that a real burglar has already opened it. Bunter scares off the burglar, and then robs the safe. H. W. & Co. find Billy and Sammy preparing for another robbery, and counting out the proceeds from the Head's safe. An utterly silly tale.

In "Coker's Conquest," Archie Howell's father made a lot of money on the Stock Exchange. He sends Archie a fiver. Villains kidnap Phyllis Howell, who has Bessie Bunter with her, and hold her to ransom. Coker rescues them.

"Billy Bunter's Luck" was somebody else's piffle. Bunter helped a man who was in difficulties near the shore in a boat. Bunter said he had saved the man's life, and deserved a reward. So the man said he would come back and bring Bunter £500. Bunter spent the £500 and then found out it was counterfeit, so his father had to pay the bills. A waste of time reading it.

In "The Skipper's Bat," the bat-making firm put numbers on

their bats, and certain numbers won prizes. Wingate's had a number which Skinner found out was worth £25. Finally, "The Society for Reforming Billy Bunter" was formed by Bob Cherry, and it was all very silly.

In the cinemas, we have had "The Kid" back for a return showing. Other very good pictures have been William Farnum in "The Scuttlers;" Charles Ray in "Two Minutes to Go;" Sessue Hayakawa in "The First Born;" Norma Talmadge in an excellent film "De Luxe Annie;" and Betty Balfour in "Nothing Else Matters." Betty Balfour is great fun, and plays cockney girl parts.

The marvellous holiday series has continued and ended in the Gem. Unfortunately, it only ran to four stories, but all were great. The second story in the series (it started last month) was "Seven Schoolboys - and Solomon." The chums find trouble with Farmer Gregg, but they manage to save his farm from being burgled.

"Cardew and the Campers" was great stuff. The chums camp near the home of Cardew's Uncle Lilburn, and Cardew treats them very badly. But they get their own back by kidnapping Cardew, and making him rough it by going camping with them.

The last and best of the series was "Camp, Caravan, and Cricket." The chums run foul of a horrid character named De Jones, a purse-proud oaf who tries to shoot Towser. They meet up with the Greyfriars chums and Billy Bunter, who are caravanning. Wharton has agreed to play cricket against De Jones's team, and the St. Jim's fellows agree to make up the eleven for Wharton. But when De Jones is losing the game, he refused to play, on the grounds that the campers are hooligans. I don't think there has ever been a better holiday series in the Gem. I am only sorry it was so short.

This was followed by a special Levison number of the Gem, with a picture of Levison on the back page, and an article on how Levison came to St. Jim's. But the story, "Levison's Great Secret," was grim. Levison's people were hard hit, and it looked as though he might leave St. Jim's and become a county cricketer. And there was a misunderstanding with Manners over the minors, and a trip to Brighton. All rather feeble.

Final of the month, "Tom Merry and Timothy," was what my

form-master would call absurd. Miss Priscilla sent to St. Jim's a boy named Timothy Duffe, who seemed mental. In fact, to stop him becoming a marquis, some plotters had put him in a lunatic asylum, and Miss Priscilla had got him out. Too silly to bother about. And so ended July.

And speaking of July, it has been the driest and hottest month since records were kept. On several days the temperature in London was 93 degrees in the shade. We are having a lovely summer. And Bank Rate is down to 5½% which pleases plenty of people.

WANTED: Good loose copies or volumes containing one or more of the following: GEMS 801, 817, 826, 828, 832. Also POPULARS 401, 403, 407, 413, 415, 422, 441.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, 113 CROOKHAM ROAD, CROOKHAM, Nr. ALDERSHOT.

XX

WANTED: Greyfriars Holiday Annuals, all years. Schoolboys Own Libs., Greyfriars, Rookwood, St. Jim's.

JAMES GALL, 49 ANDERSON AVENUE, ABERDEEN.

Telephone ABERDEEN 0224-491716.

XX

TOP PRICES paid for complete Collections or surplus items.

VERY GOOD stocks available at present of most old boys papers, hardbacks and annuals. This includes Hamiltonia, Lees all series, Blakiana, etc., and mags. previously listed. Try me!

Details sent of your specific requirements, sorry, no lists.

Your "wants" lists please.

Write or phone (evenings)

NORMAN SHAW

84 BELVEDERE ROAD

LONDON, S.E. 19.

01 771 9857

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN
27, Archdale Road, London, S.E. 22

I would like to say thank you once again to all those kind people who have sent me such welcome articles for Blakiana. I even have a long one on a Christmas theme for the C.D. Annual! So come on all those who have not yet started on their material.

The Sexton Blake Catalogues and Supplements are still available. There are already a few more items to be inserted, something always turns up as soon as lists are prepared and printed. However, I will wait a little longer before publishing them in this column just in case I obtain any further information.

I must not harp too much on the Eric Parker theme, but I still feel that the later drawings are much cruder especially those in the Detective Weekly. But there, that was a crude publication!

All for now,

JOSIE PACKMAN

* * *

THE WORK OF ERIC PARKER

by J.E.M.

As "Anon" suggests in the June C.D., adverse criticism of Eric Parker must be rare indeed. Opinions will, of course, differ on what was E.P.'s "Golden Age" but it is interesting that Josie Packman sees the 1920's, and 1926 in particular, as the high point of Mr. Parker's work.

In this period the Union Jack conducted an artists' popularity poll among its readers and a reference to this in U.J. No. 1169 recapitulates the results as follows:- Eric Parker, 878 votes; Val Reading, 656; J. H. Valda, 421; A. Jones, 242; H. M. Lewis, 151. Not much doubt at this time about E.P.'s artistic pre-eminence.

Many will also agree with Mrs. Packman's opinion that Mr. Parker's work "improved with the years." But Mrs. Packman goes on to qualify this by saying that after the early 1930's she feels his

illustrations "were mere outline drawings." Is our Blakian editor referring to work in the U.J. or to the Detective Weekly which replaced it in 1933?

Parker's drawings for the last year or so of the U.J's life were surely not only well up to standard but among his very finest. The Onion Men series, the Tram series and the Criminal Confederation series were all marvellously illustrated as were, for example, the last Wu Ling stories. I have only recently had access to "Sexton Blake in Manchuria" (U.J. 1494) and the drawings for this are incredibly evocative and atmospheric. And what about the U.J. covers for the last Zenith stories "The Rainmaker" (1505) and "The Gold Maker" (1510). (The inside drawings were by other artists.) By any criteria these were surely first-rate. The U.J's last Christmas number (1521) is also a vintage issue, as much because of Parker's lively and above all atmospheric illustrations as because of Gwyn Evans clever story.

Perhaps our editor dates the "decline" of E.P's work from the date of the U.J's replacement by the D.W.? Certainly the larger illustrations made possible by the D.W's format often made Parker's work look cruder, no doubt because there was less reduction in size from the original drawings to the finished blocks. It is a fact that a substantial reduction in size of an artist's drawings for the purposes of photo-mechanical reproduction almost always "tightens up" and improves the work.

There is no doubt that some of Parker's illustrations in the later Detective Weekly were not of the highest quality, but perhaps E.P. was by this time as unhappy with the whole set-up as many of the readers....

My point about the larger drawings in Detective Weekly does not, it seems, apply to all issues. I have just been comparing D.W. 304 ("The Clue of The Painted Smile," Donald Stuart) with U.J. 1523 ("The Crimson Smile," also Donald Stuart). Not only are the stories identical, but so are most of the illustrations. Naturally, the blocks being lifted from U.J. are smaller than those used in early issues of D.W., where presumably new and original stories were being matched by original illustrations.

When, in its declining years, D.W. went in for a policy of

reprints and rehashes of old U.J. stories, it may well be that the Parker blocks for U.J. were reproduced in the D.W. on more than one occasion. I have a feeling that, for example, the drawings for D.W. 306 ("Dr. Satira Takes All") and 338 ("The Fort of Lost Men") were old ones. Certainly the stories themselves were U.J. rehashes, and some of the illustrations, especially of motor cars, etc., in the D.W. versions look at least ten years out of date. It looks as if there is a wide field here for the enthusiastic researcher.

* * *

PRINCE MENES

The Man from Everywhere. A Tale of the Occult.

During those far off days of the year 1917 when all the world was in turmoil, including the very tempestuous country of Egypt, a set of four stories appeared in the Union Jack of so unusual a type that they set the pattern for all time of intrigue, vengeance and Occultism, in the Sexton Blake Saga. In my opinion, no stories of the Supernatural have ever reached the heights of these of which I now write. The author and creator of Prince Menes was that most famous one - George Hamilton Teed.

It would seem at that time Mr. Teed intended to write a long series on Prince Menes but in the event only four tales appeared in 1917 and they were the last stories he wrote for the Union Jack for nearly five years. He himself was caught up in the maelstrom of war and its aftermath.

The first story was in U.J. No. 722 entitled "A Case of Re-incarnation" or the Vengeance of Ra, in which a long explanation was given of the ancient Egyptian religion "The Order of Ra" and why the modern Prince Menes was supposedly a re-incarnation of the Prince Menes who lived 10,000 years ago. When at that time Egypt ruled all the known world Prince Menes had been betrayed and killed by ten traitors, priests and priestesses, at the instigation of his own twin brother. Egypt sank into a deserted barren country, a tomb for all her ancient power and glory. Never would she rise again until Vengeance had been exacted upon those traitorous priests. But ten thousand

years were to pass before all these ancient people, including the Prince were again living at one and the same time.

At this point a description of the Prince and his upbringing and education would seem to be necessary and here it is in the author's own words: "In appearance he was a little over medium height, his features while dark, were handsome in a way which had no suggestion of the sinister about them, whilst his brow had a sweep which was almost noble. At first glance one felt there was something peculiar in his face, and only after a closer look did one discover that in keeping with his olive skin, his black hair and small upturned moustache his eyes should have been brown. Instead, however, they were of a deep luminous blue, which when his lids were raised gave him a distinguished and arresting expression. And what a strange birth was his. His father, a Russian Grand Duke, had been in China many years before. While there he had seen and fallen in love with a Chinese Princess. She had fled with him to his summer home on the Crimean Peninsular and there had Prince Menes been born. For over thirty years this Prince had been educated in all the arts and cults necessary for him to become the Supreme Master of the Order of Ra. Throughout the world among races and peoples of every clime had the tentacles of the Order spread. Men of position and power, whom their fellow-men little suspected of Occult leanings belonged to the Order and firmly believed and waited for the reappearance of Prince Menes."

In the Temple of Ra, built near the lost Oasis of Zagwa, the Prince learned through the Priestess Zanona, who had been trained for what we now call a "Medium," that the first of the persons upon whom he was to wreak vengeance was living in London, so to London he came with his retinue of priests and servants, his old Master, Akbad and Zanona the Medium. He himself was a Clairvoyant of mighty powers, so with his own knowledge of the Occult and Zanona as his medium he was able to learn the whereabouts of his first victim.

This so-called victim was no less than a Peer of the Realm, one Lord Roncote, head of the great Yellow Funnel shipping line. But he was no less a traitor than the Priest of Ra, of whose re-incarnation the Prince believed Lord Roncote to be. He had obtained his title and wealth as a "War Profiteer" and was at this time planning to bring

almost to ruin another shipping line so that he could, in modern parlance "make a take-over bid" for it at a low price, having used questionable means on the Stock market to bring about the drop in share prices, and in so doing had involved many thousands of people in the same ruin. This did not worry the Prince, indeed he helped the traitor to become more deeply involved to the tune of some £150,000, of more value in those days than it is now. However, the noble Lord eventually realises that someone is forcing him to the verge of ruin and calls in Sexton Blake to solve the mystery. During his investigations Blake learns about the mysterious "Count Gardici," as Prince Menes now calls himself, who has apparently been meddling in Lord Roncote's affairs, and sets Tinker to work to trace the whereabouts of this unknown Count. Tinker tracks him to the large house in St. John's Wood which the Count had had specially built, containing many secrets and hidden rooms wherein the Priestess Zanona resided. In the meantime Sexton Blake had discovered that the Count, still pursuing his vengeance, had tempted Lord Roncote to forge a bond belonging to his own company, for half a million pounds, for which he would let Lord Roncote have gold in exchange. (In 1917 golden sovereigns were still in use as currency although becoming very scarce.) But he released the bond to one of the more reputable City firms in the sure knowledge that Roncote would then be exposed as a swindler. Although Blake had no real desire to help such a man he decided to do so only to help the share-holder from complete ruin also. He obtained the false bond and caused it to be burned thus leaving no evidence of such a document, and then he procured a loan from his own bank to settle Lord Roncote's debts. In return he demanded that his client should stop all his bids for the other shipping company and retire permanently from the City and Stock Exchange. Blake called at the house in St. John's Wood to return the gold to Count Gardici only to find him and all his household departed for an unknown destination. Thus ended Prince Menes first bid for Vengeance. Although he had not actually ruined his victim he had caused him heavy losses and also to make him retire and therefore unable to recoup any of those losses.

"But the day was rapidly approaching when Sexton Blake was to probe a little deeper into the personality of the Man from Everywhere -

DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 90 — "The Rivals of Rookwood"

The late 1940's and early 1950's witnessed a flood of Hamiltoniana, in annuals, hard-backs, and paperbacks, but most of it naturally enough concerned Greyfriars and St. Jim's. Charles Hamilton declared that only one or two letters in a hundred even mentioned Rookwood, but I persisted in extolling its merits, and eventually in 1951 I reaped my reward when Mandevilles published "The Rivals of Rookwood."

This must have been the longest single Rookwood story ever written, though it was not the only post-war tale by Owen Conquest, as several Rookwood stories appeared in the Christmas annuals. It revolved around Lovell, as might be expected, and related how he fell foul of Mr. Manders and sought revenge, getting into even deeper trouble as he proceeded until luckily, by sheer chance, he won the good graces of the Modern housemaster.

Lovell was, like Bunter and D'Arcy, the obvious character upon whom a light-hearted story could be centred, and as Rookwood had always enjoyed plenty of stories of this kind, it is perhaps true to say that Rookwood survived the war better than did Greyfriars or St. Jim's. At all events, there was no strong character drama: Lovell's head was jammed in the coal-locker, but there were no hard feelings about any of it.

Perhaps the most interesting side of the story was its glittering display of the Rookwood masters. Dalton, Greely, Mooney, Bohun, Monceau - all emerged from the shadows to play their last big parts on the Rookwood scene, but Mr. Manders had the star role. There was a subtle change in the way Charles Hamilton portrayed him, and he seemed to have mellowed since the war: sharp and acid he remained, but he had acquired a sense of fairness and consideration that came as something of a surprise to those who remembered him in his heyday. If Manders had changed, however, Dr. Chisholm remained triumphantly the same: austere, cold, majestic, and domineering, the very appearance of this old autocrat carried the reader straight back to the nineteen-twenties. "The Rivals of Rookwood" remains, a solitary story,

to entertain us and at the same time to tantalise us with an echo from another world.

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 160. FAREWELL TO THE PRAIRIES.

So Danny, in his famous Diary, has now come to the final story in the Cedar Creek saga. Anyone who has all the Diary extracts over the past four years or so has now a complete summary of the entire Cedar Creek series with a juvenile appraisal of each tale as it appeared. The final tale of the Cedar Creek collection featured in the Boys' Friend exactly fifty years ago, and it was the only one of Hamilton's main series to which he never added in later years.

We have taken a critical look at Cedar Creek before in Let's Be Controversial, and nothing could be gained by giving it more than a passing glance this month. We know that Hamilton wrote every story with one exception, and it is indeed a puzzle as to why just one substitute Cedar Creek tale came to be written and published.

The standard of the series was high. Most successful, probably, were those which related western adventure as opposed to Canadian school life; least successful were those concerning the very unlikely Hillcrest School conducted by Mr. Peckover.

There had been nothing to indicate that the series was in its closing stages in the early summer of 1921, and the end must have been a great disappointment to Cedar Creek enthusiasts. We shall never know for certain just why Cedar Creek ended when it did.

Was the closing down of the backwoods series a decision made by the author or by the editor? Such evidence as there is seems to indicate that it was an editorial decision.

For some months there had been indications that the Boys' Friend was returning more to the type of periodical it had been in the time of Hamilton Edwards. And this process increased to a marked degree after Cedar Creek ended. Once again the Friend became the paper for serials, supported by short-running series. It is clear, looking back over the paper, that the day of the everlasting series was over. True, Rookwood continued for a few years more, but now the

Rookwood tales were painfully short, averaging about four chapters. The most space devoted to any particular item was now two of the large Boys' Friend pages, with reading matter further curtailed by headings, illustrations, and advertisements.

The final story, "Frank Richards' Resolve," was intriguing for Cedar Creek fans. Frank had been of service to Lord St. Austell, who was Beauclerc's uncle. The earl wanted to take Frank back to England, send him to university, and set him on the road to realising his ambition of becoming a great author.

Here was a natural ending for the series. Had Frank accepted, it would have been a splendid wind-up to Frank Richards' school career in Canada.

But Frank turned down the offer. The call of the prairies was too great, according to the author. And so the door, which should have been slammed, was left open so that the series could be continued at a later date. Of course it never was continued. But that ending inclines me to the view that the decision to end the series was not made by the author.

Cedar Creek was undoubtedly sorely missed by Boys' Friend readers for years after. The very fact that the stories were reprinted so continuously is ample proof of their great popularity.

Looking back on it now, it is impossible for anyone to doubt that the sudden departure of Cedar Creek was the very best thing that could have happened. It is pretty obvious that the publishers saw it that way, too. They wanted Hamilton back where he belonged, in the Gem and the Magnet. Only a month or two earlier the sub-standard Greyfriars series in the Boys' Herald had been stamped upon. Now Cedar Creek had gone.

It was, without any doubt, quite an absurdity that the A.P.'s star author should, for so long, have been using his time and talent to provide Greyfriars stories for the Boys' Herald plus a portion of the Boys' Friend fare in a paper which already had a strong line-up of stories, while the Gem and Magnet, whose lives depended on their school stories, were fading under the weight of a long series of substitute tales.

How it ever came about we do not know, and, probably, never will know for certain. In all likelihood there were faults on both sides.

But it was ending now, and I have little doubt that the powers-that-be determined that Hamilton should return to the two main papers. And they did this by ending Greyfriars in the Herald and Cedar Creek in the Friend.

The departure of Hamilton from the Herald had been followed by his return to the Gem. After Cedar Creek ended, he was back, in August, in the Magnet with a caravanning series.

From now on, for the next two years, all the cream of his work was to provide an Indian Summer for the Gem. Though he was to give less attention to the Magnet for a year or two, the main fact was that he was back at last, after a long, long absence.

So we can remember Cedar Creek with happy gratitude. We can also be very, very thankful that it ended when it did.

FOR EXCHANGE: 5 Adventure (1941), 1 Boys Magazine (1932), 1 Wizard (1940), 1 Wizard (No. 17), 6 Rovers (1943), 1 Pluck (No. 244), 1 Bound Vol. Adventure (1943-1944).

McMAHON, 54 HOZIER CRESCENT, TANNOCHSIDE.

XX
SALE: 4 H. Baker Magnet Books, £1.50 each plus postage.

MAGOVENY, 65 BENTHAM ST., BELFAST, 12.

XX
WANTED: Gems any period in fair or better condition. Will pay 27½p each.

W. SETFORD, 155 BURTON ROAD, DERBY.

XX
FOR SALE and WANTED: Most Old Boys, and Old Girls' Papers, Annuals, Books. Also many types Old Periodicals, Newspapers (loose or bound). 50,000 items in stock. Send for Free Catalogue.

ED JONES, 43 DUNDONALD ROAD, COLWYN BAY, DENBS., U.K.

XX
FOR SALE: Many pre/post-war comic annuals, film books, magazines, Holiday Annuals, etc. Please send wants lists with s.a.e. to

JACK PARKHOUSE, 74 THE OVAL, BATH, BA2 2HE
or phone BATH 3242.

XX
GRANGE BINDERS for quick service. All bindings undertaken, specialists in Antiquarian work.

r/o 260 HIGH STREET, NORTH MANOR PARK, E.12.
01 552 9866 (DAY) :: Romford 68370 (evening)

NELSON LEE COLUMN

ACTION — DIALOGUE AND THE MISSING LINK!

by William Lister

The passing of time has brought at least one change in my reading. I now can take a great interest in descriptive passages. At times I can almost imagine I am on the spot; climbing the mountain, flying the plane, discovering underwater wonders, or roaming round the Lake District; and all with the aid of the printed page.

It was not ever thus; time was when a descriptive passage left me cold; I was but a youth. The story was the thing, describing of the scenery was apt to slow things up.

Perhaps, for this reason as I re-read copies of the "Nelson Lee's" of yesteryear (or for that matter some of the other old boys' papers) I notice the absence of passages that fill in the background.

Most of the St. Frank's tales are all action and dialogue. One finds a little break in the sky now and again. The other day I took the opportunity to trace a few such, using the "Monster Library" No. 15, "The Boy Who Vanished" by Edwy Searles Brooks. The "Monster" (as most of my readers will know) was usually made up of one hundred and twenty-eight pages of about three hundred and fifty words to a page; a reprint of several copies of the "Nelson Lee Library."

I intend only to point out a few cases; however descriptive passages are so rare that you will not find many more. About page eight we find:

"I lay in bed listening to the last chimes of the old clock. When they had died away everything was still, except for a slight breeze blowing against the window pane. There was a moon somewhere, hidden by clouds, but it sent out a dim, diffused light."

Read it again, you will be in that bed, you will hear those chimes, you will feel the slight breeze on your forehead. In other words you will be "with-it."

Now I am not saying that I would have even noticed such a passage on first reading so many years ago, but now it is these passages that make the story come alive.

One has to turn a few more pages before this happens again - here it comes: "It was growing dusk. In the lane, where the trees met thickly overhead, the gloom was quite deep, and it was only possible to see for a hundred yards or so in either direction.

"The foliage of the trees formed a complete canopy overhead, although this canopy was not nearly so dense as it had been a month earlier."

Do you remember the oil-lit bicycle lamp?

"Goodwin took the bicycle, and lit the lamp for it was quite dark already. Dark dull masses of cloud filled the sky and there was a considerable wind."

On page 64 we get a good view of Bramley Gap.

"The surface was atrocious, being smothered with huge stones, deep holes and formidable ruts. On either side frowned the rugged cliffs, and downwards, the shingle of the beach, with the waves of the English Channel beating unceasingly. The wind was cold and now and again the air would be filled with soft spray." Or the same spot (4 pages later): "Rain was now descending fiercely and the wind was simply tremendous. It came along over the sea in great billowing gusts, and the waves rose higher and the spray came splashing over in constant cascades."

Bramley Gap sounds like a real wild spot. By the time you get through reading that, you feel like a real old salt.

I have collected enough material here to illustrate how descriptive passages can fill out, supplement, or high-light a story.

Trouble is, that such passages are rare in our St. Frank's tales. But one must remember that Edwy Searles Brooks was writing for schoolboys and teenagers and as such we had little interest other than dialogue and action.

Today I am not so happy about it. I still enjoy my "Nelson Lee's" and "Monsters." I trust I always shall, but I must confess in this matter there now seems to be a lack; with one exception - Christmas!

In the Christmas stories Edwy Searles Brooks goes to town. There it is we get caught up in terrific snowstorms, violent blizzards, pea-soup fogs, glittering spectacles of ice covered country, frozen

lakes at a thickness to hold a whole party of schoolboys and schoolgirls.

Even the buildings came in for description (just to get the atmosphere). They were usually grim - dark - hung with cobwebs - mysterious - gaunt - haunted, surrounded by whistling winds, covered in snow, moon-lit, chilly with age, with a well described ghost for make-weight.

Now my reader will find that though I have only quoted a few of the descriptive passages from the Monster Library "The Boy Who Vanished" he would be hard-pressed to find many more. Considering the wordage of the story this illustrates my use of the word - rare!

I would not claim this as true of every St. Frank's tale, there are exceptions, and of course I am not decrying the works of Edwy Searles Brooks. It comes about (in my opinion) because the author had to consider the type of paper he was writing for, and its readers.

There is no doubt if E.S.B. had wanted he could have described many scenes, many a change in the weather, many details of "St. Frank's" itself.

But he knew, and the editor knew, and you and I know that at that stage of our lives it would not have been appreciated.



KEEPING UP-TO-DATE

by W. O. G. Lofts

The big mystery regarding Nelson Lee Library history, is what happened to Harold May its editor during its most successful years until 1926? According to the late Edwy Searles Brooks, when May retired in that year, the N.L.L. simply went downhill. Mr. Brooks did not enjoy the co-operation and friendly atmosphere from later editors that he did when Harold May was in office. He lost interest and enthusiasm, and his writing suffered. Readers were lost, and so eventually was the Nelson Lee Library. Mr. May, if still alive and traced, could obviously reveal a tremendous amount of fresh data about the Library during his reign, for the interest of all St. Frank's readers in the C.D. The last time anyone saw of him was around 1940 at Hammersmith, London, when he was known to be living in the Richmond area.

Since I last wrote on this subject, some new facts have been

Come back with us in this school story classic of over 60 years ago.

THE ONLY WAY

Valence was almost too fatigued to climb the wall, but he managed to clamber over it, and crossed the Close, and climbed in at the window he had left open. He stole away on tiptoe to the Sixth-Form passage. Suddenly he stopped.

Across the corridor, from under one of the doors, came a gleam of light. One of the rooms was lighted yet.

Valence stood with his heart beating like a hammer. Even the most studious of the Sixth could never have sat up burning the midnight oil until three in the morning. And - as he realised with a thrill of terror - it was from under his own door that the light was shining.

He had left the room in darkness - he knew that - but there was a light there now. What had happened in his absence?

A thousand possibilities flashed through his uneasy and terrified mind.

Perhaps a master had been specially detailed to watch for any breaking of bounds that night, and all was known.

Someone was waiting in the study for him, that was clear. He crept stealthily up to the door and listened. He could hear breathing inside the room, and faint sounds that told of the impatient movements of someone who was weary from a long vigil.

Who was it?

The Head, or Mr. Quelch, or Mr. Prout? If it was a master, the game was up. And whom else could it be?

Valence stood in the passage trembling. After his narrow escape in the woods it had come to this - to be discovered and caught in his own study. Again he cursed the mad folly that had led him on that night. He screwed up his courage at last, and opened the door of the study.

The watcher within started to his feet.

"So you've come back!"

Valence, blinking in the sudden light, stared at him blankly.

"Courtney!" he exclaimed.

Courtney looked at him hard. The dew-drenched clothes, the blackened face, the air of fatigue and haunting fear - he noted

them all at once.

"Come in and shut the door," he said.

"Courtney!"

"Quiet! Do you want to wake the whole Form?"

Valence was recovering his nerve. It was only Courtney, after all. Courtney he could depend upon not to betray him. At all events, he could wheedle him round - he could get his sister to intervene for him if necessary. There were few shifts and dodges that Valence would not have descended on to save himself from the just punishment of his own folly and rascality.

Valence closed the door. He turned to the washstand and sponged his face. Courtney looked at him sourly.

"Have you been disguising yourself?"

Valence chuckled breathlessly.

"It's an old dodge, and it saved my bacon. They didn't recognize me, and they can't identify me."

"Then you've been seen."

"I've been caught."

"Caught!" exclaimed the other, with a quick breath.

"Oh, I got away, or I shouldn't be here," said Valence. "What are you waiting up in my room for?"

"For you."

"Well, I've come back."

"Wingate found that you were gone out, Valence, and he was going to wait up for you. I persuaded him to let me wait instead. I've told him that you will promise, on your word of honour, to drop this game. You'll make me that promise, Valence, and you'll keep it."

Valence bit his lip.

"And what if I don't?"

"If you don't, I leave the matter in Wingate's hands."

"And what will he do?"

"Report your conduct to the Head first thing in the morning."

"And then I shall be expelled?"

"Yes, and serve you right!" said Courtney, frowning.

"Thank you," said Valence, with a

sneer. "But as it happens I had already made up my mind to drop this game for good. It's too risky. No more poaching for me. I'm quite willing to make that promise, if only I get clear of this."

Courtney nodded.

"Word of honour?"

"Yes."

"Good, then! Good-night!"

Valence did not reply, and Courtney left the study without speaking again. Valence went to bed, but, weary as he was, it was long before he slept.

* * * * *

Bob Cherry came out into the sunny Close with a cheery whistle. The rising-bell had not ceased to clang, but Bob was an early riser, and he was frequently down before the bell rang at all. His whistle rang out unmusically as he strolled into the Close.

He was first down of the Lower School that morning, and he had the Close to himself. He strolled round the house, but, as he passed the side-window of the Form-room passage, he halted suddenly, and his whistle died away in a quaver of amazement.

On the ground below the window lay a dead bird.

Bob Cherry picked it up. He knew a partridge when he saw it, and he knew that the bird must have been dropped by someone who had climbed in at the window overnight. Bob stared at the bird in his hand, and whistled softly.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he murmured. "So that rotter did go out after all last night, and he's been poaching again."

A gleam darted into his eyes. He turned round, and returned to the School House door. He entered the house, and made his way to the Sixth Form passage. Harry Wharton met him as he went, and stared at the dead partridge.

"What on earth have you got there, Bob?" he exclaimed.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"I found this."

"Where?"

"Under the passage window. That rotter, Valence, must have dropped it getting in last night."

"Keep it dark," said Wharton hastily. "The fellow's a rank rotter, but we can't round on him, you know."

"I know! I'm going to take it to him! Come on!"

The two juniors reached Valence's study. Bob Cherry kicked at the door, and opened it. Valence was in bed, and the sun was streaming in at the window. The Sixth-Former was asleep, and his white, worn face showed only too plainly signs of what he had been through the previous night. His boots, clogged with mud, lay beside his bed, and his collar, blackened with the charcoal he had put on his face, lay on the table in full view.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" shouted Bob.

Valence started up from slumber.

He sat up in bed, looking wildly at the two juniors. He had been deep in a dream in which he was again in the hands of the two keepers.

"We've come to call you," said Bob Cherry. "You look as if you've been having a wild night, old son."

"Get out of my room!" exclaimed Valence.

"Did you lose anything while you were out last night?" queried Bob Cherry.

"What do you mean? I was not out."

"Not out?"

"Of course not, you young fool. If you begin spreading any yarns of that sort in the school I'll lick you within an inch of your life," said Valence savagely.

"Must have made your boots in that state walking round your room, I suppose, meditating on your studies?"

Valence glanced at his boots, and flushed.

"Mind your own business," he snapped. "Get out!"

"I only wanted to know whether you'd lost anything."

"What do you mean?"

Valence glanced hastily round the study.

"This your property?" asked Bob Cherry, as he held up the partridge.

Valence gasped for breath.

"Where did you find that, Cherry?"

"In the Close, under a window."

"You ought to be more careful,

Eric Fayne muses on the theatres and cinemas when we were kids.

THE GRAND, GRAVESEND

One of the most popular articles in last year's Annual was one by Mary Cadogan on Cliff House and the School Friend. For this year's Annual, Mrs. Cadogan has written another striking article, this time on the schoolgirl character Jemima Carstairs. This article, for a reason which I will explain in a moment, reminded me of the Grand Theatre at Gravesend in Kent.

Even when I was a child and visited it, the Grand was a very old theatre. It had been built, not originally as a theatre, I believe, in mid-Victorian times. As I knew it, it was a pleasant theatre, with boxes, stalls, pit stalls, circle, and gallery, but its small seating capacity - it only seated about 700 - prevented it from staging anything but the least expensive touring productions. Nevertheless, scores of famous names figure in its booking lists. People like Gracie Fields, George Formby, and Tommy Trinder trod its boards before they were famous, and others like Harry Champion, Tom Costello, Victoria Monks, and "Pimple" starred there when the passing years had made them ready to accept engagements at lower fees than they had once enjoyed.

Crippen's wife, Belle Elmore, had appeared there, advertised in small print as one of the lesser attractions on the bill, and as a result of this engagement is said to have told her husband that she gave up her career as a great singer in order to marry him.

Lush red velvet curtains parted in the centre and swept up on either side of the proscenium to reveal the small stage. On either side of the stage was an illuminated box showing a number to correspond with an artist's number on the programme (price one penny). An advertisement screen slid down in front of the proscenium curtains during the interval. The first or last item on the programme was always the "Bioscope" - a film. Usually a rather out-dated newsreel, or a one-reel comedy. If the stage programme was running a bit short, there would sometimes be two doses of the "Bioscope," which was no doubt cheaper than engaging an extra act.

I did not see Gracie Fields' "Mr. Tower of London" which played there about 1919 and paid a return visit some six months later. But some time during the later twenties I saw "Bessie Runs Away," and this brings me to the link with Mary Cadogan's article. "Bessie Runs Away" was a touring revue, presented by a small company of about a dozen artistes. The "Bessie" of the title was Bessie Bunter. The various scenes were representing in and around Cliff House.

A number of Cliff House characters were featured, and comedy was supplied by "Jemima Carstairs." As I was not a reader of the School Friend then, I asked "Who on earth is Jemima Carstairs?" A friend assured me that she was now a prominent character in the stories.

So far as I am aware, nobody else has any recollection of this revue. Does anyone in our ranks recall it? One of these days I may contact the editorial department of "The Stage," and try to get a line on it.

Talking pictures gradually wore down the resistance of the Grand. For the last year or two of its existence as a theatre, the famous Denville Stock Company was in residence, but the support given to stock companies in the thirties was not great. Nowadays, a compact little theatre like the Grand would have been ideal for rep. companies such as have played with great success in post-war years in towns like Leatherhead and Colchester. But the Grand closed finally in the early thirties, though the bars were kept open until a bomb in the vicinity during the war put an end to this historic old theatre.

Today, a pub named the "Callboy," appropriately enough, stands on the site, but I have no idea whether any of the old theatre is built into the new structure.

Finally, there is considerable mention of the Gravesend Grand in the famous play "Ladies in Retirement."

The Postman Called

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

W. TITENSOR (Trentham): A Thought: Most of us, at some time, have experienced the great thrill of hearing from a fellow collector who has taken the trouble to look out those odd numbers we need to complete a series or a run. Why not spare a moment and give the same pleasure to others?

LEN WORMULL (Romford): Tod Slaughter became a big attraction at the Elephant & Castle Theatre, and I can remember my father taking me to see him in Sweeney Todd and Maria Marten. My happiest memories of the place are associated with the season of Pantomime. These were truly wonderful occasions, despite the endurance test of 'queuing round the back' and wooden gallery seats. Two famous names there were Dorothy Ward and Nat Jackley. Sometimes I would be given a double pantomime treat with a visit to the South London Palace, round the corner in London Road. But no doubt Eric Fayne has memories of this famous music-hall too. If I remember rightly, the pillars at the rear of the Elephant & Castle cinema (now A.B.C.) were once part of the old theatre.

May I join W. Lister in congratulating R. Hibbert on his clever piece of writing, "Bloodshot." Like him, I found it most amusing and entertaining, and read it through several times. I particularly liked the style, which reminded me of another writer well-known to readers - W. Lister himself. Let's hope this new "blood" will not be a "shot" in the dark.

GORDON SCOTT (Wishaw): I find that writing a letter to your column is the only way by which I can thank all the people who have helped me in my work as a Sexton Blake collector. You see, I am only fifteen, and many people have gone out of their way to help me.

The one who I must convey most thanks to is Mrs. Josephine Packman, who writes in the Blakiana Section in this paper. She sent me four of the S.B. titles from the 5th series and a 1919 U.J. and a 1939 D.W. I am still deeply touched by this.

It makes me feel very humble when I think of all these people who have helped me and am sure there are still a very great number of friends to be made. It just goes to prove true those words from that old Jim Reeves record: "A STRANGER'S JUST A FRIEND YOU DO NOT KNOW."

N. M. KADISH (Edgware): William Lister's article 'Double for your money' proved very interesting to me as I also enjoy the introduction of different well-known characters into one story. This process creates a feeling of cosiness and a fictional family atmosphere. I would like, however, to rectify a mistake of the writer. He states that the author was E. S. Brooks, but in the copy before me Martin Clifford is the name printed.

It is intriguing to think of Charles Hamilton reading E. S. Brooks' stories and vice-versa. The former author can certainly sum up the salient character of Handforth by the words which he puts into Lowther's mouth (p.3):- "Ye gods and little fishes. This fellow is as stubborn as a mule. He's big and brawny, with a rugged sort of face. He's got a punch like a steam-hammer, and his favourite pastime is to biff people over --- He's a chap with fixed ideas and nothing can shift them --- As straight as a ramrod and thundering good-hearted. In fact there's nothing really wrong with him."

(Editorial Comment: Brooks wrote many substitute stories for the Gem, and, in later years, introduced some of his St. Frank's characters into his St. Jim's stories.)

G. CLARK (Australia): I have just completed my first year of reading the excellent S.P.C.D., and I am writing to thank you for all the pleasure it has given me.

HAROLD TRUSCOTT (Huddersfield): In the June C.D. there is a brief article on the

Goldhawk books by Roger Jenkins. In fact, in spite of his page and a third he deals, cursorily, only with No. 1 and spends most of the rest of his space on stating that Hamilton, post-war, was not able to portray subtleties of characters such as Cardew. This is certainly not true, in spite of his enlisting a remark of Hamilton on his side. Would you accept a short article from me dealing with the eleven Goldhawk books in rather less summary fashion, where this question of character could be cleared up, at least with some appropriate quotations? Such dogmatic statements without anything in the way of quotations to back them up make me see red, whether it is dealing with such a matter as this, or music, where such writing is rife, or anything else. There is also a Spring book, TROUBLE FOR TOM MERRY, one of the finest St. Jim's stories "Martin Clifford" ever wrote, in which Cardew is handled with all Hamilton's pre-war subtlety of characterisation.

F. W. BENNETT (Runcorn): Congratulations on keeping up the high standard of the C.D. It's always a pleasure to see the coloured cover and read the interesting and thought-provoking contents. Keep up the good work and congratulations to all the contributors.

LES ROWLEY (London): I was saddened to read of the passing of that fine old character Mr. Chips. I remember him with affection for he was probably the most individual cat I have ever known!

He would regard me with unblinking eye and often I would pass such scrutiny and come up to scratch. I shall never know, but shall always hope, that he numbered me among his friends.

Pets have often rescued me from solitude, bless them. I know well how you feel. We owe them more than we can repay.

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

MIDLAND

Meeting held on 25th May, 1971.

This was the A.G.M. with eight members attending and five apologies from other members for unavoidable absence.

Ian Bennett from the chair thanked all members for their support in a successful year and drew attention to some of the activities during the year.

Then followed reports from the librarian and the treasurer, and after this Ivan Webster was elected new chairman, with other officers being re-elected.

The anniversary number was N.L.L. (O.S) 155, Turning the Tables, dated 25.5.18, and so 53 years old to the day. The collectors' item was B.F.L. (1st S.) 393, The Stowaway's Quest by Edwy Searles Brooks. The next two meetings will be on 29th June and 27th July, both at the Theatre Centre from 7 p.m. onwards.

TOM PORTER
Correspondent.

NORTHERN

Meeting held 12th June, 1971.

A smaller attendance than usual, with five absentees due to illness and the Chairman, in his opening remarks, impressed the wish that all would return to the fold, fit and well, before very long.

Formal business was soon completed and the nine members gathered round to discuss the Greyfriars Press booklet from W. Howard Baker. Various views were put forward as to the publication of a single copy each week instead of bound volumes and also to paperback editions as well as the hard cover, as these alternatives should be cheaper and so enable interested people to collect more than will be possible by the issue of just a hard cover bound volume each month.

However, our very best wishes go to Howard Baker in this venture, which we hope and are sure, will be a roaring success.

In view of the length of the discussion we had hardly time to include two very different quizzes. The first, by Ron Rhodes consisted of ten hobby questions, and the second by Mollie Allison gave us a baker's dozen of Famous First Words, being the first sentence from works as varied as Agatha Christie, John Keats, Mrs. Beeton, Frank Richards, etc.

We started our various ways home about 9.20 p.m. in preparation for the next meeting on 10th July.

R. HODGSON

Hon. Secretary.

LONDON

Sunday, 20th June, 1971.

Our usual dry summer's day (but minus Frank Richards' glorious sunshine) was the weather to greet us at the Wokingham venue, home of Eric, Betty and Graham Lawrence and 16 of us turning up filled the Greyfriars' driveway with mechanical hardware and the roomy living room with woodland views visible through all windows. Don Webster played the role of Chairman and I was roped in as scribbler. After the usual business formalities, Bob Blythe read us two newsletters

covering meetings for June and July, 1954, and then displayed the magnificent new edition of the Edwy Searles Brooks' Catalogue and Bibliography, now available to all OBBC members. Josie Packman read us an article which will appear in a later SPCD entitled, "Railway Employees, Post Office Employees and the Sexton Blake Library," by Raymond Curé. Don to the fore again with an amusing quiz which made us rack our brains, the clues being "blurbs" on (mostly) pre-war celebrated advertisements. Bill Lofts won with 9 out of 10. Taking us right up to tea-time a game was introduced by Winnie based on one by Millicent Lyle called "OWL" in which the initials had to be used as the words of the answers to the questions "How did Bunter get to the party?" (O), "What did he consume there?" (W), and "What was the consequence?" (L). Luckily we were allowed ridiculous answers: ('orse and cart for O - I hask you!) so there was much of Dickie Nugent's "harty larfter" when we read our answers. Following a grand spread we repaired to the grounds for talk and photos. Meeting time again and Bill Lofts gave us one of his information-packed talks on "The First Papers for Boys and Girls." He passed around copies of "The Boys and Girls Penny Magazine" circa 1832 of which Bill owns more copies than the three in the British Museum. This brought on a most interesting discussion regarding publishers of the bloods being taken over by the Aldines, eaten up by the A.P. and then the emergence of the D. C. Thomson papers as the big rival in the early twenties. This triggered off a second discussion as to why we collect the papers that we do. Several members gave titles of favourite hard-cover books and papers that were the first they ever wanted to save and re-read. 7 p.m. soon rolled around and we all found ourselves again running our wheels over the scenic railway that the recent heavy rains have turned Hollybush Ride into. Next meeting at 29 Strawberry Hill Road, Twickenham, on Sunday, 18th July. Please advise host Sam Thurbon if intending to be present (tel: 892-5314).

UNCLE RAY

"THE JOY OF LIVING
FOR A FEW PENCE"

by Gerry Allison

'BORROW BOOKS THIS WINTER, AND HELP TO STAMP

OUT T.V.' That notice is displayed in our local lending library. As a busy librarian myself, and a devoted book lover, who has no time to waste on that mental cataleptic - the Telly - I would like to adopt the above slogan as the motto of our club library.

Every month I receive many letters saying what enjoyment and happiness the old boys books have given to people. One recent letter ran - 'I wish I could tell you what your parcels do to me, Gerry. If the medical profession could only put it into bottles and sell it to the public, mankind would live for ever.'

That was from a high official in the aircraft industry - a man who borrows 3 Boys' Friend Libraries, 3 S.B.L's and 3 S.O.L's every month. As he says, the nostalgic joy of seeing the favourite old books, plus the fine reading they contain, makes a wonderful mixture, and provides a safe and satisfying 'escape' from the swinging life we live today. He has no temptation to indulge in canabis!

Another letter ran - 'why have I not discovered the books by David Goodwin before, Gerry? There should certainly be a few pages devoted to this great writer - and others who wrote for the B.F.L. in the pages of C.D.!' The writer is one who cannot limit his reading to the exploits of Billy Bunter. Perhaps a few words about David Goodwin - real name Sydney Gowing - would be of interest. My introduction to him is just another debt which I owe to Herbert Leckenby, whom I regard as the real founder of this wonderful hobby of ours.

Mr. C. M. Down, chief editor of the Magnet and other libraries from 1920 to 1940 once wrote: "Do you remember David Goodwin? He was a very popular author and a writer of great ability, whose large output was mostly published by the A.P. Few popular writers had a larger public than David Goodwin, and none was more deserving of success."

Here is what Tom Hopperton once wrote about the same author. "Frank Richards only paid indirect attention to most of his contemporaries. It is therefore quite a testimonial to David Goodwin that one keeps coming across evidence that Richards read him with some care. And Goodwin received about 15/- a thousand words for his work. One thing is certain: neither the reader, nor the Amalgamated Press ever had better value for fifteen bob."

David Goodwin could write about anything. School-stories, highwayman yarns, football, the turf, the canals, the mills of Lancashire, tales of invasion, etc., etc., etc. What a scope he had. But it is his sea-stories which I consider his most enthralling writing. He knew the sea as thoroughly as did C. S. Forester, and like G. A. Henty owned his own yacht. As an introduction to his work I usually suggest 'Middies of the Fearless' (B.F.L. 149), with its superb sequel 'Midshipman Drake, D.S.O.' (B.F.L. 151).

Recently, however, I was fortunate enough to acquire four more David Goodwin stories of the sea in the B.F.L., for the library of the Northern Section O.B.B.C. They are 'The Fool of the Navy' (265), 'Max the Middy' (268), 'The Middies in Morocco' (271), and 'Sealed Orders' (281). The first three are under another nom-de-plume, John Tregellis, and tell of the adventures of Max Strong, Midshipman. I prefer Max to Forester's Horatio Hornblower! 'Sealed Orders' is another story of the exploits of Midshipman Bob Hardy.

For powerful reading, you should try the Court-Martial scene in 'The Fool of the Navy.' Chapter 30 ends thus:-

The whole Court rose, and the oath was administered. Then the judge-advocate, standing up, faced the prisoner, and read the charge. "It is charged against Midshipman Strong, that, being a person subject to the Naval Discipline Act, and wearing the King's uniform, he did on the fifteenth of June last, give an order which resulted in the torpedoing and sinking of a gun-boat, the Juan Fernandez, of the Mexican Navy, a country with which His Majesty's Government was not at war, in contravention of International Law."

There was dead silence as the words of the charge were heard, and the captain's letter to the admiral was read. Then the judge-advocate turned to Max.

"Guilty, or not guilty?"

"NOT guilty, sir!" The midshipman's voice rang true and clear. There was an instant's pause, and the prosecutor said:

"Call Lieutenant Juan Almeda!"

Either in fiction or on the stage, trial scenes are usually exciting and dramatic. To the reader of "The Fool of the Navy," who knows what has happened before, this Court-Martial is soul-stirring indeed. Before Max, as he defends himself, is a table, upon which his dirk is lying. At the end of the trial, if he should be proved innocent, its hilt would be placed towards him. But should he be found guilty, he would find himself met by its point, and it would be taken from him for ever.

If I watched T.V. for a hundred years I should not receive such mental stimulation as this one book by David Goodwin gave to me!

