

STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS DIGEST

Volume 35

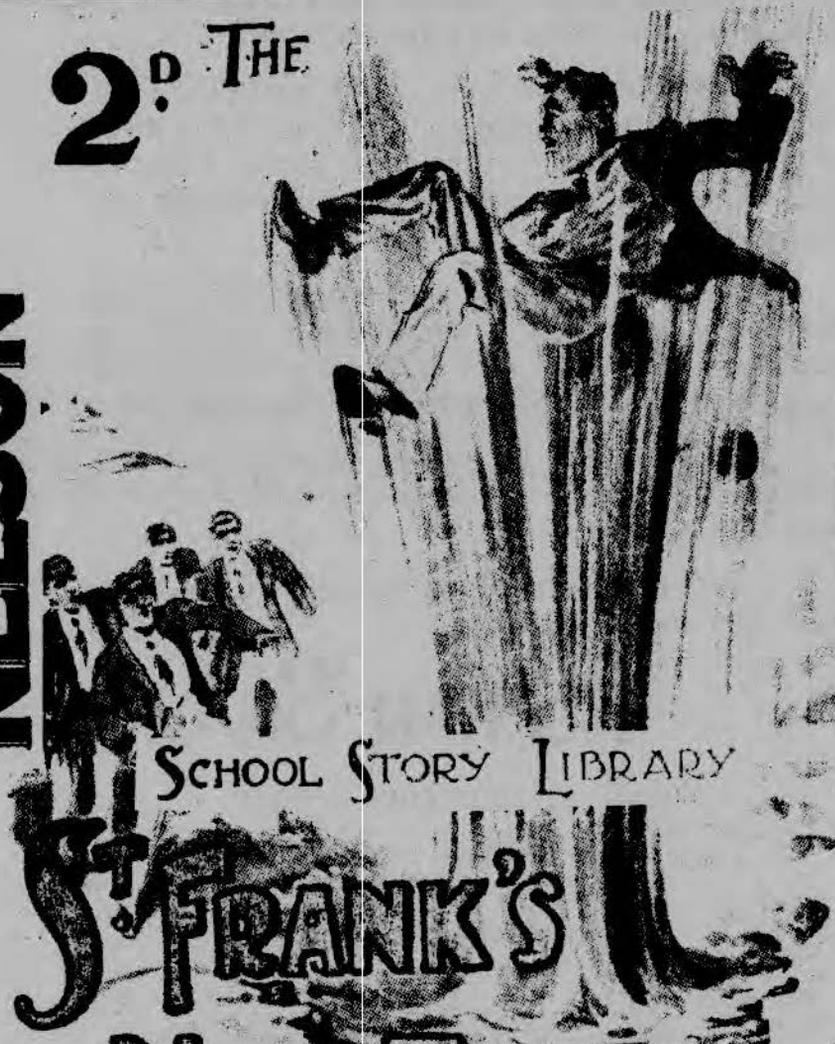
Number 409

JANUARY 1981

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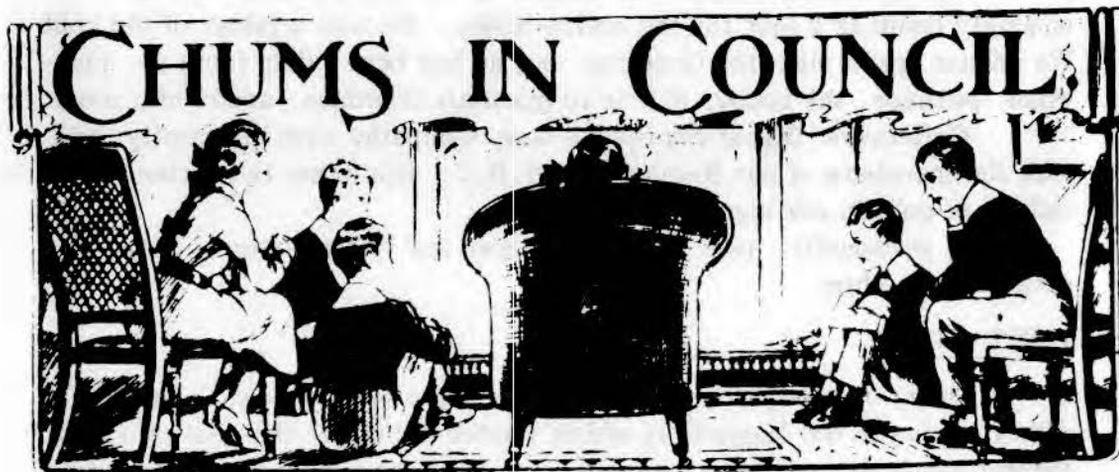
Vol. 35

No. 409

JANUARY 1981

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GEOFFREY WILDE

With a sense of shock, grief, and of loss, I learned that our friend, Geoffrey Wilde, had died suddenly of a heart attack early in December. A scholarly man who was, quite simply, a great friend.

Geoffrey will be sadly missed in Collectors' Digest, the magazine which he loved, and for which he wrote so many first-class articles. His most recent major contribution was on the work of Anthony Parsons, an outstanding feature in last year's C.D. Annual. But what we shall miss the most is his reports on our Northern Club's meetings, which he

always signed with the name Johnny Bull. Short and witty, these reports invariably covered so much with an admirable economy of words which delights the heart of any editor.

I met Geoffrey at a Northern meeting, and the item of that visit which lives in my memory is the musical tour of Greyfriars which he conducted with himself at the piano. Clever and novel, it was unforgettable.

He was the chairman of our Northern Club for twenty years or so, and he acted as master of ceremonies at so many of their social functions. Under his leadership the club never looked back, but went from strength to strength. He maintained those traditions which were rooted in the O.B.B.C. right from the beginning.

Our Northern friends will miss him the most of all, but his untimely death is a loss for the entire hobby. He was a pillar of the hobby. We cannot spare men like Geoffrey, but he has been taken from us, just when, perhaps, the hobby, if it is to maintain tradition, needs him most.

Collectors' Digest expresses deep sympathy with his family, and with the members of our Northern O.B.B.C. His name is written in letters of gold in our annals.

I, personally, have lost a very dear and valued friend. I can never replace him.

FIRST-CLASS

Danny recently drew our attention to the 50-year old Cavandale Abbey series in the Magnet, in which Bunter hid under the seat of a first-class railway compartment, emerging to save the life of Lord Cavandale who was being attacked by a thug. It was one of the many occasions when Bunter hid under a railway seat, and he usually escaped observation from other travellers in the same compartment.

In Agatha Christie's story "The Plymouth Express", a naval officer tried to push his suit-case under the seat of a similar compartment, and found the body of a woman obstructing the passage of his case.

I have never travelled first-class on trains myself, but my impression of the first-class pre-war train compartments is of very thick layers of upholstery which almost went down to the floor. Would there really have been the space for anybody to conceal himself under such a seat - and, especially, a body of such circumference as Billy

Bunter possessed?

It's a carping question, of course. Had it not been possible, then Bunter would never have gone to Cavandale Abbey, and we should have lost a fine series.

TOWSER

In the new Slade story in the C.D. Annual, Mr. Buddle had fond memories of Herries's bulldog. Some year ago, our contributor, Roger Jenkins, wrote of Towser: "Considering how boring Herries's bulldog was, I should have been quite content to see the last of the tiresome creature."

Mr. Jenkins was right in regarding Towser as a bore. Still, most of us, like Mr. Buddle, have a silly soft spot for Towser.

But I wonder how many of my readers know that the original Towser at St. Jim's was a bulldog which belonged to Taggles, the porter. Taggles's "Towser" was never heard of again after Herries's "Towser" came on the scene. It, surely, cannot have been the same Towser?

THE PRINCESS SNOWEE'S CORNER

The Princess has been out on the tiles. The adjoining property to her home is a very old, double-fronted cottage. Long years ago, the cottage was the only habitation on the edge of a big orchard which covered many acres. It was called Ferneries Cottage. As well as fruit-trees, there were vast glasshouses where they grew very special ferns which were used to decorate Britain's giant liners like the "Queen Mary" and the "Queen Elizabeth" - and, no doubt, the "Titanic" in her time.

In 1935, the owner of Ferneries Cottage built another house nearby to be the home of his mother. He called the new habitation "The Ferneries". Today, "The Ferneries" is named Excelsior House. After the war, more houses were built over the orchard site, though many of the trees remain.

Ferneries Cottage, still so-named today, is a lovely old place with oak beams. It has a long roof with a steep slope running down to within a few feet of our fence. Yesterday I looked out of the side window from our upstairs passage. A pleasant enough view, normally, but this time I had a shock. High up on the roof of Ferneries Cottage, at the very

top of the steep slope, was a cat. In fact, THE cat. The Princess Snowee. How she had got up those steep, slippery slates, I do not know.

As I watched, she moved to the edge and looked over the top. Not so far down below, there is a glass verandah. I thought she might jump on the glass, and I held my breath. But, as I watched, she commenced to come down that steep, slippery slope. I hurried down-stairs, and through the front door. And as I emerged, she came trotting to meet me - safe on terra firma. How do they do it?

A HAPPY NEW YEAR

To every single one of my readers I wish you all that you wish for yourselves as we move into 1981. Most important of all, may the New Year bring you good health and happiness. In the last wish, I especially think of my dear old friends, Bob and Louie Blythe. Bob, who was co-founder of our London Club, has been poorly of late, and has had a spell in hospital. I know you will all join me in wishing him a speedy return to robust good health.

Finally, 1981 is the year we celebrate our Coral Jubilee. Thirty-five years of C.D. May God bless us every one.

THE EDITOR

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FOR SALE: 1st Sexton Blake Omnibus (Howard Baker) containing "Laird of Evil" (Martin Thomas) and "The Break-Out" (Wilfred McNeilly); 2nd Blake Omnibus (H. B.) containing "Murder at Large" (Ballinger) and "Let My People Be" (Desmond Reid); 6th S. B. Omnibus containing "An Event Called Murder" (Thomas) and "Murder Goes Nap" (Rex Dolphin). All in brand-new condition; £1 each. Red Magnet No. 313, "Factory Rebels" (excellent copy but minus back cover) £2; Gems 1310, 1311 and 1312 (fairly good copies) 75p each; 1402 (first two pages damaged, but otherwise fair copy) 10p; Gem 828 (rough copy) 40p. Baker facsimile of Gem No. 826 (immaculate) 50p. Postage extra on all items.

Write ERIC FAYNE. (No answer if items already sold.)

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A Very Happy New Year to the Editor, Staff, and Readers of the Collectors' Digest. Has anyone news yet of "The Katzenjammer Kids" or/and "L'il Abner Yokum"? If so, please contact -

J. P. FITZGERALD, 324 BARLOW MOOR ROAD
MANCHESTER, M21 2AY.

DANNY'S DIARY

JANUARY 1931

I started the New Year well. Dad took Mum and me to London's newest theatre, the Dominion, on the corner of Tottenham Court Road, and we saw "Aladdin". Ella Retford was Aladdin, Nellie Wallace was Widow Twankey, and Lupino Lane was Wishee-Washee. After the matinee, we crossed the road, and had tea at London's newest Corner House, the Oxford, built on the site of the Oxford Music Hall. A lovely day.

In the Modern Boy, the Captain Justice stories have ended and Ken King is back in a new series. The Captain Justice tales, which ended the present series, are "By Right of Might", "Wolf of the Seas" (a smashed-up submarine is drifting and Capt. Justice stands on the twisted, rusty bridge), "The Secret of Desolation Island". I enjoyed this series, and hope that Captain Justice comes back.

The first Ken King tale is "The Return of King of the Islands" in which Ken comes up against a ruffian named Barney Hall. Then "Spectre of the South Seas", with a haunted bungalow on the island of Loya.

Also in Modern Boy there is a new series about motor-racing by Alfred Edgar, and some western tales by Uncle Mac of the B.B.C.

Early in the month there was a railway accident at Carlisle. The engine and four coaches were derailed, and three people were killed and thirty injured. On the railways there is a new system of signalling. The semaphore signal arms are being replaced with beaming lights, which are a big improvement in fog. In some places they have red, single yellow, double yellow, and green.

The first story in the Gem in 1931 is "St. Jim's on the Bust", and it's too silly for anything. The Fourth jape the Shell, the Shell japes the New House, and the New House japes the School House - and they all play the same jape.

Next week "Captain - and Cheat". Kildare is caught cheating, and Cyrus K. Handcock says "For the love of Mike", and Bully Burkett glares. And Dr. Holmes announces that the school is closing for a time owing to scarlet fever in the New House, and Sir Napier Wynter says "Good gad!".

And Kildare runs away to join the Foreign Legion, and Sir Napier, George Darrell, Rex Saville, Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. set off to Algeria in that giant airship S.1001 to find Kildare. And I say "Well, well!"

Next week "Kildare of the Foreign Legion". Surrounded by Bedouins . . . parched with thirst in the ghastly heat . . . They're looking for Kildare, who is singing the Marseillaise and talking in kilometres. But he's back at St. Jim's in the end, having been awarded the Croix de Guerre.

To cap it all, the real Martin Clifford was back next week in "The Man from Angel Alley". Rogue Rawdon, one of the Angel Alley gang, introduces himself as Mr. Linton's nephew. A Talbot story.

Wonders will never cease. The final of the month is also by the real Martin. "Figgins in a Funk" in which Cousin Ethel, inexplicably no longer at the awful Spalding Hall it seems, makes Figgins promise not to fight, so Figgy has some embarrassing moments. Good fun. I hope it's not too good to last.

There has been an explosion at the Whitehaven colliery, in which 26 men died, and an earthquake in Mexico which had a heavy death roll.

The King's eldest sister, Princess Louise, the Princess Royal, has died in her sleep. She was a very old lady.

The Popular plods on with its weary collection of stories. The early Rookwood tales are pretty good, and the Greyfriars tales have their little section. The last one of the month is not by the real Frank Richards, which seems absurd.

On the 19th January, somebody telephoned to a small chess club, held in a cafe in a Liverpool suburb. The caller, a man, asked whether Mr. Wallace, an insurance agent for the Prudential, was there. He wasn't, so the man left a message with Mr. Beattie, the secretary of the chess club.

"My name is Qualtrough", said the caller. "Tell Mr. Wallace that if he will call on me tomorrow night, I have some insurance business for him." He gave an address in Menlove Gardens East. Mr. Beattie promised to deliver the message.

When Mr. Wallace arrived he was given the message.

"Where is Menlove Gardens East?" he asked. But everybody

said that there was no Menlove Gardens East.

The next evening, Mr. Wallace left his terraced home, and set off to find Menlove Gardens East. He asked many people, on the way, for directions. Later he came home, and could not get into his house. He asked assistance from neighbours. They all went in, and found Mrs. Julia Wallace battered to death on the sitting-room floor.

A little later, Wallace has been arrested for the murder of his wife.

The tales in the Nelson Lee Library have been below standard this month. The short series about gangsters ended. It is followed by a barring-out series, with Mr. Pycraft as Headmaster with a weird lot of masters. Not very enthralling.

Two excellent stories in the Schoolboys' Own Library this month. "The Broken Bond" is a fine Bounder-Redwing yarn, in which the Bounder, angry with his chum, mentions the fact that Redwing is at Greyfriars on a scholarship specially provided by Mr. Vernon-Smith. And Redwing throws up the scholarship - till the Bounder, apparently, loses all his wealth. The second S.O.L. is "Kicked Out of the School" in which Levison plays a dirty trick on the St. Jim's day-boy, Dick Brooke. And the St. Jim's juniors kick out Levison, till he redeems himself by rescuing Cousin Ethel from a bull.

We have seen some good films at the local cinemas. I liked Richard Barthelmess in "Young Nowheres". An all-colour picture was Ralph Forbes in "Mamba". Will Roger in "So This is London" was amusing, and with it there was a Laurel & Hardy comedy "The Hoosegow". Then there was Mum's picture, "A Lady To Love" starring Vilma Banky. Richard Barthelmess and Constance Bennett in "Son of the Gods", and, finally, Lawrence Tibbett and Laurel & Hardy in a musical "The Rogue Song".

There has been rather a curious affair in Northumberland. At a village named Otterburn, a family named Foster run a taxi service. At tea-time, one evening in January, Evelyn Foster, the daughter, said that she was driving a customer to Ponteland, twenty miles away, and was charging him £2. Some hours later, one of the Foster buses was coming over the moor when he saw the remains of a burning car. He found that it was one of the Foster cars - Evelyn's own car, in fact - and a short

distance away was poor Miss Foster, with most of her clothing burned away. She lay there, sucking ice from the frozen moor.

Back home, where she was taken, she told her mother: "That dreadful man has murdered me." Evelyn died in the night from her terrible burns.

The police are seeking the man, and do not think it will be long before they make an arrest.

The marvellous Magnet has gone merrily on its way. The first story of the year is "The Secret Sniper", the last tale in the lovely series about Christmas at Cavandale Abbey. Ferrers Locke is now on the scene, and the would-be killer of Lord Cavandale is unmasked. I am irritated that Mr. Shields, the artist, gives away the ending in one of his pictures, with the caption telling us that Parker is the sniper. They did exactly the same thing with the story of the Courtfield Cracksman. The editor should have his head examined.

Then another fine series. It opens with "The Boy Without a Name". Leaving Bunter at Cavandale Abbey, the Famous Five are winding up their vac at Wharton Lodge. They come across a youngster who is known as Tatters. Tatters has always wondered who his parents were, but Tinker Wilson won't tell him. It turns out that Tatters is the grandson of Sir George Cholmondeley, and he has a villainous cousin named Cyril Rackstraw, who had hoped to be the Cholmondeley heir. Next week, in "Chumley for Short", Tatters goes to Greyfriars where he causes quite a sensation. Then "The Mystery of the Paper-Chase" in which Tatters disappears while running as a hare. And, through Mr. Quelch's remembering something, Tatters, who has been kidnapped, is found.

Last tale of the month is "Tatters of the Remove" in which cousin Rackstraw, with the help of Carne, is trying to disgrace Tatters. A tip-top series which I am enjoying a lot. Lovely reading.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S. O. L. No. 139, "The Broken Bond" comprised four Magnet stories from the autumn of 1918. The original titles were "Smithy's Scheme", "The Broken Bond", "Rough on Redwing", and "Fallen Fortunes". A lovely series which, of its type, was never surpassed in later years. It must have been some compensation in 1918 for readers in that year in which there was no Christmas story and no Christmas Number. S. O. L. No. 140, "Kicked Out of the School" comprised two consecutive blue Gem stories of the summer of 1912.

Original titles "The Shadow of Shame" and "The Schoolboy Mutineers" (reprinted in Gems 1417-1418). Brooke, the day-boy of St. Jim's played a leading part. It is a puzzle as to why Hamilton ever created a day-boy for St. Jim's.

The real life case of Evelyn Foster is one of the unsolved mysteries of the century. Though Danny stated in January 1930 that the police expected to have no difficulty in finding her murderer, they were never successful. At an inquest, four weeks later, the coroner brought in a verdict that she had set fire to the car, and had accidentally spilt petrol over herself. The verdict was regarded as unsatisfactory by those who knew her well - and it is likely that the matter is still talked about in Otterburn today, fifty years later. Why should she set fire to her own good car? She was a non-smoker, and no lighter or signs of matches were found in the area.

The Wallace case at Liverpool is second to the Crippen case as a crime classic. Dozens of authors have written on it, and John Rhode wrote "The Telephone Call" based on it.)

* * * * *

BLAKIANA...

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

As we start on this New Year 1981 I should like to say thank you to all my contributors of 1980 for keeping up the good standard of Blakiana. I have received a number of letters saying how much the writers appreciate all the good work that goes into Blakiana and the Collectors' Digest in general. We must see that this happy situation continues. I hope you will all enjoy this month's Blakiana, the article on Donald Stuart did not reach me in time for either the November or December issues, but I am sure it will be appreciated just the same in this New Year issue.

I would be grateful for some more material so that 1981 may be as good as 1980. I wish you all a Happy New Year and a more prosperous one if that is possible.

THE COLOUR BAR

by S. Gordon Swan

"It is such a pity that he is brown!"

One can conceive that a remark like this in a modern story, made by an Englishwoman about an Arab, would create an uproar. Letters of protest would be sent to the newspapers, the Racial Discrimination Board or whatever it calls itself, would sue the author, editor and publisher of the story, questions would be asked in Parliament and even Idi Amin might be moved to comment on the matter.

Yet in the year 1915 there was no outcry, apparently, when this

remark appeared in Union Jack No. 595, "Abdulla the Horse Dealer", by Andrew Murray.

A Persian youth who had spent some time in London and had been befriended by Tinker, wrote a letter from his home in Shah-il-Den, entrusting the letter to Abdulla the Horse Dealer to post. Abdulla was a member of the Indian Secret Service and a friend of one Major Lord Cecil Menzies, adviser to the Afghanistan Army.

Later Abdulla came to England to see Lady Beatrice Menzies, sister of Lord Cecil, and tell her that her brother was a prisoner in the house of Tinker's friend. Two Germans had poisoned the Khan's mind against the British and the Khan had had Lord Cecil imprisoned but would not order his execution.

The death of a Turk who had been spying on Abdulla brought Blake and Tinker into the case. The detectives, Abdulla and Lady Beatrice all set out for Persia to rescue Lord Cecil. They were to encounter peril on shipboard in the shape of two Turkish agents who lost their lives while attacking Blake and the Arab.

In Shah-il-Den the party found that Tinker's friend was virtually a prisoner in his father's house because of his pro-British sympathies. (Incidentally, one was to hear no more of this youth in the course of the story.) The two Germans set out with a caravan carrying a load of guns and ammunition for the Khan and took Lord Cecil with them. Blake and Abdulla made an attempt to rescue Lord Cecil but were captured and buried up to their necks in sand while a trail of honey was led to them to attract the ants.

Lady Beatrice and Tinker saved them from this fate and now Abdulla set out to trick the two Germans. He removed certain stakes which marked the trail and led them in the wrong direction. He gathered a caravan which duplicated that of the Germans, even to using the brother of their camel-driver and dyeing another camel to resemble the leader of their train. When the enemies' caravan stopped so did the duplicate until the Arabs thought it was a mirage as it kept the same distance away. Finally, when the second caravan approached at night lit up by phosphorous, the superstitious Arabs deserted. Lord Cecil was rescued and the false caravan, bearing dummy packages and the two trussed-up Germans, was sent along to the Khan flaunting the British flag. The Khan, finding that

the Germans had been so easily tricked, decided that it was good policy to leave them to their humiliation.

The story ended with the classic remark with which this article began:

But as the little steamer left Beyrouth one pair of eyes looked rather sadly at a tall, white-clad figure that was standing watching the vessel move out.

Lady Beatrice waved her handkerchief to the tall man; and Abdulla, raising his hand, gave her a final salaam.

Lord Cecil linked his arm through that of his sister and drew her aside, then smilingly he glanced into the beautiful face.

"A fine man, that, isn't he, Betty?"

Lady Beatrice nodded.

"It is such a pity that -- that he is brown!" was her curious response.

From which one may conclude that Lady Beatrice had developed more than a feeling of friendship for the Arab but was deterred from pursuing the relationship any further by the colour bar. (A few years later, when E. M. Hull and Rudolf Valentino popularised sheiks, the story might have been different.)

I do not think Andrew Murray was any more of a racist than the majority of us. I have read many of his stories in which he introduced characters of varied nationalities and he always dealt sympathetically with them -- Burmese, Japanese, half-castes and others. In Lady Beatrice's remark he was simply expressing the attitude of the time.

A TRIBUTE TO DONALD STUART

by J.E.M.

The last couple of years or so of the Union Jack and the early infancy of the ill-starred Detective Weekly provided my introduction to Sexton Blake. In the opinion of many Blakians this was not exactly the sleuth's finest hour but, for me, it remains an exciting and nostalgic period.

Favourite authors were quickly established: G. H. Teed, Anthony Skene (for his Monsieur Zenith), Gwyn Evans, Gilbert Chester, Robert Murray and Donald Stuart. I suspect that these were not untypical choices for Top of the Blakian Pops. Yet of this group, Stuart contributed

no more than four stories to the UJ and only a further three to the DW, plus a reprint of one of his UJ tales. Even for the whole of the Sexton Blake Library, Stuart's score was fewer than forty yarns, including a couple of re-writes. I rarely saw the SBL at that time, in any case, and of the four UJ stories he penned I read only three, Mr. Midnight, The Witches' Moon and The Crimson Smile; of the DW stories, only two, The Clue of the Crimson Snow and A Christmas Card Crime, both Yuletide mysteries.

So how was Stuart able to establish himself so quickly with me - and doubtless many others - as a major Blakian writer? Well, for one thing, he carried a definite aura of prestige. About the time of my introduction to it, the UJ had started to publish photographs of its authors and Stuart's was one of the earliest faces presented. Then there was his play, Sexton Blake, staged in 1930 at a famous London theatre and novelised in the UJ as Mr. Midnight. I also recall noting with much excitement Stuart's name, as author, on the credits of a British-made detective film in the early Thirties. And, finally, there were his hard-back novels under his real name of Gerald Verner.

All these things seemed to lift Donald Stuart, and indeed the periodicals for which he wrote, to heights of impressive respectability. You can see that at the age of thirteen or so I had the awful makings of a literary snob - but of course there was, and is, much more than this to my admiration of the man.

It has always seemed to me that, like Gwyn Evans, Stuart made Blake a more credible human being, a figure of true flesh and blood, as the phrase goes. Stuart's Blake was capable of real mistakes and second thoughts, and thus his ultimate triumphs were the more convincing. Unlike Evans, however, Stuart was always painstaking in the construction of his plots; there were never any of those irritating gaps or loose ends. More than this, he was alive to every trick of technique. Just consider the opening chapter of The Witches' Moon. It consists of six very brief sections relating a series of dramatic and apparently unconnected happenings. This kaleidoscopic treatment immediately sets up pleasurable tensions in the reader, whetting his appetite for the rest of the story and the final solution. The last chapter in the tale takes the form of an extract from Blake's own diary, neatly tying up the mystery of that

sinister, derelict inn, *The Witches' Moon*. A final terse sentence completes the yarn with the effect almost of a pistol shot.

The other stories referred to are equally memorable. *The Crimson Smile*, which formed the subject of a piece I wrote for *Blakiana* in December's C.D., 1978, was one of Stuart's Christmas mysteries and only Evans' Yuletide yarns had as much appeal. Other Blakian authors, of course, brought us exciting gifts: Teed was unsurpassed at tales with foreign settings, none could match Skene for glamour and the unexpected, while Gilbert Chester and Robert Murray could pen convincing thrillers of gritty menace. But few, perhaps, brought greater realism - or polish - to the writing of the Saga than Stuart: a remembered talent who gave some of us unforgettable pleasure.

(U.J. stories: *The Green Jester* (1379); *Mr. Midnight* (1422); *The Witches' Moon* (1488); *The Crimson Smile* (1523).

D.W. stories: *The Clue of the Crimson Snow* (44); *A Christmas Card Crime* (96); *Murder at The Microphone* (111); *The Clue of the Painted Smile* (304) - reprint of *The Crimson Smile* (U.J.).)

* * * * *

Nelson Lee Column

THEY GO -- THEY COME BACK!

by Len Wormull

Roll up, folks, for two of the unlikeliest dandies ever to walk St. Frank's. See how a couple of swells hoodwinked authority and pulled off the biggest gamble of their lives.

There was of course a lot of the showman in E. S. Brooks, and the events of which I speak were the kind that could hardly fail to miss. Let's face it, you would hardly expect anyone sacked in disgrace to bounce back under a false name, would you now? But that's the mind-boggling stuff you could expect with Edwy in charge, and if you think only the good guys were thus privileged you would be wrong. They came no badder than Bernard Forrest, and here he was staking another claim to infamy! But more anon. For the first and more agreeable of such masquerades we go back in time to the year 1919, those early days of St. Frank's when everything was happening (was it ever otherwise?).

Nipper had fallen from his high estate, the Guv'nor was abroad on business, and a desperate situation was calling for desperate measures . . .

'I don't think any other fellow in the history of the school had received such a humiliating send-off . . . I'm not ashamed to say that I felt like blubbing.'

Nipper speaking and inviting the sympathy of readers in the aftermath of his expulsion, for an alleged assault on Sixth Form prefect and bully, Walter Starke. Kicked out of school, kicked into the village, and kicked onto the train - 'kicks too numerous to mention' - such was his painful experience. Where was authority to allow such wanton goings-on, you may well ask? Back at the Grays Inn Road headquarters, he ponders his next move. St. Frank's would have been the poorer without its benefactor, Lord Dorriemore, and he it was who chances by in Nipper's hour of need. With typical boyish enthusiasm, he connives in a comeback plan that was right up Nipper's street. Who better than he in the art of make-up and impersonation? Good old Dorrie!

St. Frank's saw some odd-ball characters in new boys, and none more so than Algernon Clarence D'Albert (Under False Colours, o.s. 207). A good name for a bogus schoolboy, you'll agree. In fact, the very comicality of his appearance and foppishness of manner - a combined 'dandy and noodle' - suggested a not-too-serious approach to Nipper's plight. We knew he would triumph, anyway, despite the elaborate precautions. Like: elevator shoes, dyed hair, false eyebrows, platinum gum shield (a Nelson Lee invention), big feet, change of voice and walk, tight-fitting Etons. In the weeks ahead, Nipper defies detection and establishes his innocence, albeit on the flimsiest of circumstantial evidence. Starke, in turn, is expelled.

On the face of it, the expulsion and drumming out of Bernard Forrest had seemed conclusive enough. Retribution had come after weeks of fanning hatred between the Remove and Fourth Forms (N.S. 68-71). 'It will be a good thing for St. Frank's to be rid of him', Nelson Lee had told Dr. Stafford, to which the Head had concurred. Purged of the trouble-maker, the Remove settled down, Claude Gore-Pearce filled the vacancy in villainy, and Forrest was forgotten. What the reader didn't know at the time, and was to discover some two years later (!), was that Mr. Forrest had brooded over his son's expulsion, having

wanted him to go right through St. Frank's ... 'It wasn't that he did not want to send Bernard to any other school. It was simply that his plans had been thwarted.' Failing several attempts to get him back, Mr. Forrest himself plots the final solution ...

Described as a dandy, a studious-looking youth with wavy hair, wearing pince-nez and exquisite Etons, rides up to St. Frank's on a powerful motor-bike. With a lisp likened to D'Arcy of St. Jim's, and speech punctuated with "Bai Joves", he presents himself as Percy Woodhouse, cousin to Bernard Forrest. Clever the last bit because suspicions were already aroused by the likeness (see "In Another's Name, N.S. 179). And that's how Forrest the dandy made it back, a pose quickly dropped once safely back in Study A with former dupes Gulliver and Bell. Gore-Pearce, now deposed as leader of the "nuts", blackmails Forrest by threatened exposure. A no mean hand at blackmail himself, the wily Bernard strikes back. Nelson Lee, like any detective worth his salt, later confides to Nipper that he saw through the deception from the start. Another case of authority turning a blind eye.

Forrest was never again to hog the limelight, these being perilous times for the old school. In fact, his return to the fold seemed hardly worth the candle.

* * * * *

WHERE HAD ALL THE MOTHERS GONE? by Tommy Keen

I am attempting to briefly peruse the Greyfriars and St. Jim's stories appearing in the Magnet and the Gem from their inception until the late 1920s (an arduous, but pleasant and worth-while task), and it is extremely noticeable that there was a considerable lack of mothers, where the boys of these famous schools were concerned.

Fathers cropped up, and guardians galore, but the feminine touch usually supplied to help rear growing boys, was sadly (or otherwise) missing from the homes of many of our favourite characters. The mention of mothers in the stories, generally arose when difficult minors arrived at Greyfriars or St. Jim's, to plague their elder brothers, as in the cases of Dicky and Frank Nugent, and Reggie and Harry Manners. George Bulstrode's Mother and Father, way, way back before World War I, were introduced, and in fact visited Greyfriars, prior to the

death of younger brother Herbert.

The new boys too, and there were legions of them (usually arriving at any time during the term), were mostly orphans, or with a guardian (often a very rascally one) in the background.

Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, Hurree Singh, Tom Redwing, Vernon-Smith, Monty Newland, Dick Russell, Lord Mauleverer, Sir Jimmy Vivian, Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, D'Arcy, Digby, Talbot, Cardew, Bernard Glyn, Alonzo Todd (and maybe Peter Todd also, although Peter's father was often mentioned), were all motherless, and in many instances, fatherless too. Even when the fathers were mentioned, especially in the very early days, of such sterling characters as Tom Redwing, Mark Linley, and Dick Penfold, they were always described as old, although as a concession, the kind old faces were often quite bronzed.

Perhaps ages were rather a problem to Frank Richards/Martin Clifford! Peter and Marjorie Hazeldene were certainly not twins, but they appeared to be of the same age. Supposedly, Peter was the elder of the two? Also, according to the illustration in the Magnet, Dr. Locke looked a little too aged to have such a young daughter as Rosie Locke, featured in the very early stories, but in my Magnet days, this young lady was never mentioned.

I have just recently read, for the first time, "The Greyfriars Pretender", and in this very commendable Lancaster series, found some rather contrary statements. In Magnet No. 1209, Lancaster says to Harry Wharton, "I am my own master to a great extent, my people are abroad, and nobody keeps an eye on me except a tutor, and a solicitor".

A few paragraphs later (still in the same column), Lancaster says to Harry, "I've heard Colonel Wharton spoken of many times while I've been staying about here . . . and my father knew him".

"Really", exclaimed Wharton, "Your father?"

"He was killed on the Somme" said Lancaster quietly, "I've no parents".

Therefore, who were the people who lived abroad?

But what did it matter if mothers were missing, if parentage and relationships were sometimes rather odd? - it was the boys we were interested in.

Our Classic St. Jim's Serial from Early in the Century.

THE REFORMATION OF MARMADUKE

Jack Blake was himself again in a couple of hours. Marmaduke was put to bed in the New House, and a doctor sent for. Blake walked over to the New House early in the evening. He met Monteith in the hall, and the prefect scowled at him.

"What are you doing here?" growled Monteith. "Why can't you School House whelps keep over on your own side. Be off with you!"

"I've come over to see how the new kid is."

"He's all right; so now you can go!"

"Oh, hang it, Monty!" broke in Baker, a New House senior. "Don't be rough on the kid after what he's done today. Let him see Smythe if he wants to."

Monteith set his lips. He often had friction with Baker, who did not feel the respect for his head prefect that Monteith considered himself entitled to. He walked away without a word. Baker gave Blake a friendly nod.

"You can go up and see Smythe, Blake," he said. "Here's Figgins. He'll take you up."

Figgins slapped Blake on the back.

"Of course I will!" he exclaimed.

"Come along, you heroic rescuer."

Blake turned red.

"Chuck it!" he said. "No chaff!"

"I'm not chaffing," said Figgins seriously. "We all know you might have been drowned in the Pool. We're proud of you, my son. What a pity you belong to that measly old casual-ward of a School House when --"

"If you want a thick ear, Figgins, you've only got to say so," interrupted Blake wrathfully.

"Don't get ratty!" said Figgins soothingly. "I tell you we all admire you. It was a funny specimen you pulled out of the water, but he was a New House chap, and it was decent of you. Come along."

"Right; but, I say, what makes Monteith so beastly ratty? He seems to be more piggish than he ever was."

Figgins grinned.

"Can't you guess the reason?"

"Blessed if I can!"

"It's all your fault," chuckled Figgins.

"My fault!" Blake echoed, staring at Figgins.

"Yes - yours! Didn't you pull Marmaduke out when Monteith struck out for the bank, and thought only of his own precious skin? He's jolly well ashamed of it now, and some of the chaps have been chipping him."

"Oh, I see!" said Blake. "Come to think of it, he doesn't show up as a hero. Hallo, here we are. How are you, Marmy?"

Marmaduke was in bed. He was looking pale and shaken. He gave Blake an unusually cordial look.

"They say you pulled me out of the river, Blake," he said, in a rather weak voice, with a wistful look at the chief of the School House juniors.

"Well, I helped," said Blake. "It was really Kildare who saved both of us. How are you feeling?"

"I'm all right," said Marmaduke.

"There's something I wanted to say to you, Blake."

Blake sat down on the bed.

"Right-ho! Fire away, kid!"

"I've been thinking. I played a mean trick on you once - when I first came to the school. I was a cad!"

Blake stared at him in astonishment.

"I'm sorry!" stammered Marmaduke.

"It would have served me right if you'd left me to sink. I shouldn't have gone in to save you."

"Well, you can't swim," said Blake practically. "It wouldn't have been any use. I'm glad to see you're getting on all right."

"So am I," said Figgins. "Smythe, old man, you're not half the howling bounder I thought you."

"I'll just stay and have a jaw with Smythe," said Blake. "I won't detain you, Figgy. I dare say the Co. will be missing you."

But Figgins was not so easily got rid of.

"Oh, that's all right," he said.

"I'll stay, too, Blake, old chap."

"That's very kind of you, Figgy, but I won't deprive the Co. of your company."

Figgins looked at him suspiciously.

"Got anything particular to say to Smythe?" he asked.

"Nothing special," said Blake hastily. "Fact is, I want to have a jaw with Smythe."

"It's all right, Figgins," said Marmaduke unfortunately. "It's only about the con ---"

"Shut up, you young ass!" howled Figgins.

"But Blake knows all about it."

"You've told him!"

"No; I thought you had. He --"

"Hold your silly tongue," said Figgins. "He's been bluffing you, you cuckoo!"

Marmaduke looked at Blake in astonishment.

"Don't you know all about it, Blake?"

Blake could not help grinning.

"Well, to tell the exact truth, I don't know anything at all about it," he said. "I was on the trail for information, my son, and you would have blurted it all out if Monteith hadn't interrupted us that time."

"Good thing he did, then," said Figgins grimly. "Now I'll see you safely out of the New House."

It was evident that the chance was gone, and Blake had no object in lingering. He returned to the School House, more puzzled than ever.

"What have you got on your mind, Blake?" asked Herries, as the chief of the juniors entered Study No. 6. "What are you scowling for?"

"Ass, that's a thoughtful frown. I can't get on to Figgy's game. They're getting up something for Saturday, and it's Monday now. Marmaduke half let something out. It's something beginning with 'con'. What is there that begins with 'con'?"

"A conservatory", said Herries.

Blake grunted.

"Constantinople begins with 'con'", was D'Arcy's brilliant contribution.

"What about a conversazione?" asked Herries. "Might the bounders be

giving a conversazione?"

Blake shook his head.

"That wouldn't worry us. It's something else."

"Look it up in the dictionary," suggested Herries. "Go through the words beginning with 'con', and you'll be bound to come across it."

Blake thumped him on the back.

"Jolly good idea. Chuck me over the dictionary. Here we are. What a thundering lot of words begin with 'con'. Concentanation - concave - conceal - conceit. They've got plenty of that over in the New House. Concentration - concern - concert! My only hat!"

Blake sent the dictionary flying through the air.

"I've got it. A concert. They're going to give a concert."

The famous four stared at each other. In an instant the truth rushed in upon each mind. Blake had hit it.

"A concert!" said Herries. "By Jove, that's it."

"That accounts for the frightful row Fatty Wynn has been making on his cornet lately," exclaimed Digby.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "And that accounts for the top notes that Figgins has been getting off his chest in the past few days."

"Come to think of it," exclaimed Herries, "I saw him coming out of Green's, the printers, the day before yesterday in

Rylcombe. They've been having bills printed."

"We've got it," said Blake. "The bounders are going to give a concert on Saturday. Kids, we've got 'em."

"How?" asked Herries. "I don't see what we can do to muck up the concert, and, if it's a success, St. Jim's won't be big enough to hold the conceited bounders."

"You trust your uncle," said Blake serenely. "I've got a plan in my little brain for making the New House Amateur Dramatic Society wish it had never been born."

"Spout it out, then! Get it off your chest!"

"We've got to get hold of that bill of Figgins's, and learn all the items of the concert by hook or by crook."

"What's the good of that? We should know it all on Saturday evening, anyway."

"But we've got to know it all before Friday evening."

"Why?" demanded the three in unison.

"Because," said Blake - "because we're going to give the giddy concert ourselves on Friday evening; then the New House can give it over again on Saturday evening if they like."

For a moment his chums stared at him, their breath taken completely away by the magnitude of the scheme. Then, with a whoop, they threw themselves upon Blake and hugged him.

(More of this Old, Old Story Next Month)

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LOUIS WAIN - THE CAT ARTIST

by W. O. G. Lofts

Cats being to the fore (or paw) of late, with a really delightful Louis Wain drawing adorning the cover of the November (1980) C.D. it is worth recording some details about this very amusing and talented artist. Briefly it tells a story tinged with great sadness about a man who gave such pleasure to millions of people in his time.

Louis William Wain was born at Clerkenwell, London, on the 5th August, 1860, though his family originated from Staffordshire. On leaving school he first studied music, then switched to art work and journalism, one of his first jobs being on the Illustrated London News. It was in 1883 at the age of 23 that he first drew an amusing cat, and in a very short time concentrated all his energies to drawing amusing looking felines, acting like human beings even to the extent of standing upright. By 1900 his work had become so famous that it was known in every household. Books, calendars, postcards, china figures, oil-paintings, children's literature and magazines all featured his work, and there was even the yearly Louis Wain Annual. It was estimated in this period that he was drawing at least a thousand different sets of cats a year for various publications. Later on there was even cartoon films, but unfortunately he did not cash in on his fame, being a bad businessman. Often or not he sold his drawings cheaply, only for the publisher then to churn them out again and again in dozens of reprints.

In real life, and like most creators of comic situations he was a very sad and melancholy man, the complete opposite that the public imagined him to be. The early death of his wife suffering with an incurable complaint after only two years of marriage certainly did not improve matters. He then lived with his three sisters at Queens Park, London. It is not known how many cats he kept as pets, or indeed if he ever kept any at all - but there is no question that he loved them very much. He was not only President of the National Cat Club, but on the Committee of many other cat charities.

With his popularity fading fast after the First World War, plus the fact that he had lost all his savings in some disastrous new lamp invention in the United States his health broke completely. Eventually certified as being insane, in 1923 he was placed in a mental Institution.

It was a visitor in 1925 who gave him a new lease of life. Recognising him amongst the other inmates staring vacantly around him in the large then open ward - she was so shocked at how a man who had entertained so many in his day, was seemingly doomed to spend the rest of his life in such gloomy, bad conditions, that she launched the 'Louis Wain' fund.

This was to enable him to be moved to a more modern hospital, where he would not only have his own room, but painting and drawing materials - where he could amuse himself all day long. Visitors found him a much happier and improved person when this was shortly achieved. Bert Brown the famous comic artist who visited him in the early thirties told me it was an amazing experience to see the hundreds of cat drawings in his room, drawn on the walls, ceiling, and floor. Probably he drew more cats in his new 'home' than ever he did in his professional career.

To end our story, about the mid-thirties he suddenly ceased his cat sketches, and never drew another. He switched to complicated patterns and designs - and yet - astonishingly one could see the outline of cats inside these almost masterpieces of jig-saw designs. Louis Wain died on the 4th July, 1939, aged 78, leaving for posterity his work as the greatest amusing cat artist that ever lived.

* * * * *

News of The Old Boy's Book Clubs

MIDLAND

December 1980

It was a jolly and interesting meeting full of lively discussion and two readings, which showed Charles Hamilton at his very best.

With Tom Porter back amongst us our usual feature Anniversary No. and Collectors' Item was on display. These were Gem 1658, "The Boy with a Bad Name" dated 25th November, 1939, and part of the Silverson series published just before the "Gem" folded up. Another interesting item was Union Jack No. 106, "The Fifth Form at Fernley", published 21st October, 1905, and a very early Charles Hamilton story.

Two very interesting readings were given by Ivan Webster and

your correspondent. Ivan read an extract from Howard Baker's "Greyfriars for Grown ups" regarding Dr. Locke's difficulty in understanding what Gosling meant by the word "pinched". As someone remarked "Dense lot these schoolmasters".

The reading by your correspondent was from "The Boy without a Name" and showed the fall of Pon & Co. Surely Charles Hamilton never wrote better than this?

Refreshments were provided by Joan Golen. Joan is always doing these things and we are very grateful to her.

The Midland Club extends to all other O.B.B.C. clubs best wishes for a Happy New Year.

JACK BELLFIELD - Correspondent.

LONDON

The thirty-third Christmas meeting got off to a very good start with Roger Jenkins reading the extremely funny episode of Bunter's ventriloquism that he practised in the 1933 Wharton Lodge series whereby he fooled both Thomas the footman and Wells the Butler by imitating Wharton's voice. Loud was the laughter when the large amount of comestibles was delivered outside the room that belonged to Wharton by the unsuspecting members of Colonel Wharton's staff. Yes, indeed, a very good start to the festive season's meeting.

A musical quiz conducted by Larry Morley whereby the first letter of each answer had to be taken to for a topical message was won by Roy Parsons. The message was "Bon Voyage, Mary Cadogan" who is to visit India shortly.

Then it was the turn of the Franciscans as Sam Thurbon, that admirable thespian, played over a tape that dealt with the arrival of the new master, Beverley Stokes, who was going to the East House of Saint Frank's. The tape dealt with Mr. Stokes arrival at the local station, carols heard coming from both the village church and the college chapel and his meeting with Handforth.

Roy Parsons won Jim Robinson's very fine detective quiz and completed a double when he won the Wall questions quiz, Babs Thurbon was a very good second.

Maurice King very kindly supplied me with a copy of the

Cavandale Abbey series which has had the wonderful write up in the December C.D. This for brother Bob who missed getting a copy when it was published.

Roger Jenkins proposed a hearty vote of thanks to the hosts and lady helpers and for those who were in no hurry to go home, there was a singsong and suitable refreshments.

Next meeting at Walthamstow on Sunday, 11th January.

BEN WHITER

CAMBRIDGE

The Club met at the home of Jack Overhill on Sunday, 7th December, 1980. Members were glad to welcome back Secretary Keith Hodkinson after his operation.

The main part of the early programme was devoted to a symposium on Biggles, and the work of Captain Johns. The meeting welcomed as visiting speaker Mr. Malcolm Pratt, of St. John's College Library staff, who is engaged on compiling a Bibliography of Biggles stories. Keith Hodkinson had on display a varied selection of John's works, from his collection. An interesting and animated discussion occurred, Malcolm giving much information about the publishers, dates of publication and other particulars of the 94 Biggles titles, and their variants. Members admired the many examples on view, including some fine first editions.

After enjoying Mrs. Overhill's marvellous tea, to which everyone did full justice, the meeting resumed with the telling of Christmas stories. Vic Hearn led off with an entertaining story from a "Funny Wonder" annual of 1935 - an amusing story with a neat twist in the tail. Bill Thurbon talked about stories based on the Epiphany story of the Wise Men; mentioning Dorothy Sayers "Man born to be King"; Lew Wallace's "Ben Hur", and Coulehan's "Quadrantus Rex". Finally Jack Overhill told one of his wonderful personal stories, of a Christmas morning incident of 1928. Jack, as all who know him can bear witness, has a marvellous gift as a story teller, and he made a simple, happy, chance meeting live vividly to us all, alive with the spirit of Christmas.

Mention was made that this year four members of the Club had articles in the "Digest" Annual: Jack, Keith, and the two Bills.

The next meeting will be at the home of Vic Hearn on 4th January, 1981.

NORTHERN

On Saturday, the 6th December, 1980, a Star set in the Northern Club of the O.B.B.C. with the sudden death of Geoffrey Wilde, our well-beloved Chairman. He joined the Club in February 1958 after seeing the display put in the Leeds Library to celebrate the Greyfriars Golden Jubilee, and in April 1960 he was elected to the Chair he occupied ever since. A Master of Arts, his knowledge of the hobby was widespread and scholarly, and his talks, fluent and precise, gripped the audience. On one unforgettable occasion Geoffrey joined his musical ability to his talk on scenes and characters of Greyfriars. Seated at the piano he interspersed his reading with descriptive music of his own composing; e.g. he read, "Vernon-Smith was crossing the Quad" and then from his fingers a bar or two of lilting devil-may-care melody - and the Bounder was before us! Hearing became seeing! And his readings from a story displayed what a loss the Stage had suffered when Geoffrey became a Schoolmaster.

But perhaps, most of all, his quick laughter and good humour, his appreciation of other members' contributions, and his ability to see everyone's point of view, made the Meetings under his Chairmanship the happy and harmonious occasions they were. Yes, twenty years is a long time, but with Geoffrey in the Chair another twenty would not have been too long.

MOLLIE ALLISON

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The Postman Called

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

TONY GLYNN (Manchester): You never know where you'll find interesting aspects of the hobby. I've just been reading "A Whiff of Burnt Boats" by Geoffrey Trease, which deals with his early life. As a struggling writer, he was friendly with Orwell and he reprints part of the text of a letter from Orwell in 1940.

He asks if Trease has seen Frank Richards' reply to his "Horizon" article on boys' papers and says he can't make up his mind to what extent it is a fake. Possibly, he thought it was written not by Hamilton but in the editorial offices. He also seemed to think Frank Richards edited the "Magnet". He wrote: "... it's well nigh incredible that such people are still walking about, let alone editing boys' papers."

The book is worth reading, by the way, for Trease had the boys' paper bug himself. As a schoolboy, he produced an amateur paper firmly based on the "BOP" and full of adventure in foreign parts.

The C.D. continues to be enjoyable. "Small Cinema" has been very much to my taste. I spent a couple of years as a projectionist, working on Kaylee II's and this phase of my life ended in 1953, just about the time of the demise of the small cinema and I found a great spiritual affinity with much of what you have written lately.

R. J. McCABE (Dundee): Another wonderful year has passed through the pages of the Digest. My sincere thanks for all the joy it has given me.

F. STURDY (Middlesborough): I have exceeding doubt whether the "Mick the Gypsy" series is worthy of a Howard Baker "Special", when, at the same time, "D'Arcy Maximus" is presented at a much lower price. Still, if a hundred persons were asked to select and classify the yarns and how they should be published, there would be one hundred different opinions. It is in the nature of things, it would appear.

W. LISTER (Blackpool): At Christmas one could manage without the Christmas pudding or even the turkey - but not without the Annual. A seasonable treat.

CHARLES CHURCHILL (Topsham): What a nice picture of Princess Snowee in the Annual. Years ago we had a fine cat and he was called "Boz" which was the name of Nipper's dog in the Nelson Lee.

P. TIERNEY (Grimsby): Danny received the 1931 Holiday Annual as a Christmas present fifty years ago. So did I, but it was a much more memorable occasion for me than for Danny, though I didn't realise it at the time. It was my first introduction to the wonderful world of Charles Hamilton.

* * * * *

THE R100 and R101

Eric Lawrence

The mention in Danny's Diary (Oct. and Nov. C.D.) of the disaster to the airship R101 caused me to read again "Slide Rule, the autobiography of an engineer" by the novelist Nevil Shute, in which the full story of the design and construction of the R100 and R101 is recorded.

It may not be remembered that whereas the R100 was designed and built by a small private concern with a very limited budget, the R101 was produced by a team of Air Ministry civil servants with a large expenditure available for research and experiment. There was a strong suggestion that the tragic loss of the R101 and most of its occupants was due to faults in its design, but the R100 had several successful flights to its credit including one to Canada. Nevertheless, the R101 disaster had the effect of condemning all airships including the R100 for many years.

The designer of the R100 was Dr. Barnes Wallis, undoubtedly one of Britain's greatest engineers worthy to be ranked with I. K. Brunel, Stephenson and Watt. His designs of the Wellington Bomber and the bouncing bomb used by the Dam Busters were of great value to this country in the war against Hitler's Germany.

Nevil Shute too, was a fine aeronautical engineer and a Fellow of The Royal Aeronautical Society in addition to being a most successful novelist. "Slide Rule" is a really fascinating book concerned with aircraft design as well as the airship story. I have read it many times and to quote the Daily Telegraph, "The crux of his book is the story of the R101 and Mr. Shute tells it brilliantly".

THE BOOKSTALL IN MARKET AVENUE

by Leslie Holland

When I was a small boy in the late twenties and early thirties one of the popular ways of spending Saturday evening in our neck of the woods was "going up Oldham". This was the weekly visit to the shops and market, open then until 9 p. m. Oldham's Tommyfield Market was a blaze of naphtha lamps on winter evenings, and the shouts of the cheap-jacks hawking their wares sounded above the tramp of many feet and the hum of conversation. A little fairground stood close by on "The Green", operating throughout the year with roundabout rides for the youngsters, and alleviating just a little the long drag between one annual wakes fair and the next.

In Oldham two covered passage ways lead from High Street to the market, and it was in one of these, the Market Avenue, where one Saturday evening, on the bookstall half way up on the left I discovered, to my immense delight, the "Schoolboy's Own Library".

The year was 1930, Amy Johnson flew to Australia and Don Bradman rocked the cricket world, and I had just begun my long love affair with Greyfriars. St. Jim's had interested me too, though with less impact, which was not perhaps surprising, because we now know that whilst the Magnet was at its zenith at that time, the Gem was about at its nadir. At any rate, I was new to it all and as the Saturdays of 1930 came and went I was captivated by such top-class offerings as the Courtfield Cracksman, the Brander rebellion, the holiday in China, and, at the end of a magnificent year, Christmas at Cavandale Abbey.

The Magnet would be disposed of over jam and bread at breakfast. After a second browse through at lunch time things would be a bit flat and the following Saturday a long way off.

One such Saturday evening early in the year the family boarded the tram for the two mile run into Oldham and eventually negotiated the Market Avenue, pausing at the bookstall. There in the front in the right hand corner - could it really be? Yes it was! A small pile of books with red and blue covers proclaiming a Greyfriars, St. Jim's or Rookwood story inside. What an unexpected bonus! "Dad, can I have one of these, only 4d., and it's Harry Wharton & Co., like the Magnet?"

From that moment the Market Avenue held a special magic. A

lovely' extra whenever 4d. could be earned or squeezed out of an adult relative. I read about the Moonlight Footballers (prophesy of a flood-lit future?) and Jimmy Silver's burglar who turned out to be the new Rookwood football coach, and Bob Cherry in the unexpected role of swot and at loggerheads with his pals, all of which had been published in earlier weeklies and which I would otherwise have missed. I now lingered over my Sunday breakfast until I was chased out to Sunday School.

All my S.O.L's came from that bookstall. I never bothered to find them anywhere else.

It's still there fifty years later, though modernised with glass frontage and the town's record shops blaring opposite. The stalls and shops pack up by 5.30 on a Saturday now. Who would want to work the long hours of 1930?

And as I walk up the Market Avenue I sometimes steal a glance at the right-hand corner of the bookstall. It's many years now since the S.O.L's were there.

But the memory lingers.

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BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 82. LOOKING BACK

A great many of my old boys and girls keep in touch with me, and any amount of them speak from time to time of the films which we played in their particular generation. They have fond memories of the Small Cinema.

One of my very earliest pupils was a delightful girl named Susie Packham. Later she married Gerry Davey, a world-famous Canadian ice-hockey player, and went to live in Canada. When we started this series about the Small Cinema, 82 months ago, I sent a copy of the issue of that C.D. to Mrs. Davey, for she well remembered the first performance. Back came a long, long letter, full of Small Cinema memories of the early days. I found it delightful reading.

Susie is gone now. A few years back she went on holiday with her husband to Florida, and, when they were out sight-seeing one day, he dropped dead at her feet. She never got over her great loss, and passed on, herself, about a year ago.

The Small Cinema came into existence just as the era of silent films was drawing to a close. A year or so later, talkies peeped over the horizon, and, yet another year later, they started to establish themselves. For a time, both silent and sound films continued to be made, and, for several years, silent versions were released of most of the talkies, though, generally speaking, they were seldom very satisfactory, owing to the slower tempo of

dialogue films.

Our first big commercial renter was Pathe, and they sent us our first serial "The Green Archer", an Edgar Wallace tale. Serials featured in our programmes through silent days, though we never had a sound serial.

Before that first term ended, though, we started running big features, and our first came from First National, a lovely firm with which to deal. Through the twenties, First National was the most powerful film firm in America, but, when the thirties came in, disaster overtook them, they collapsed, and were swallowed by Warner Bros., who, many years on, also swallowed Pathe.

Our first feature was "Shore Leave", a charming romantic comedy starring Richard Barthelmess and the English actress, Dorothy Mackaill. I still have dozens of stills, campaign sheets, slides, posters, and even a trailer on "Shore Leave". Philip Jenkinson, who used to review TV films for Radio Times, told me that a print of "Shore Leave" is still in existence, and he had seen it only a few weeks earlier.

The greatest joy of the silent films was arranging the musical accompaniments. Most public cinemas had surprisingly good orchestras. We had to rely on gramophone records, and we built up a great stock of them to suit all moods in the films.

My favourite silents? Well, it is hard to decide, and I am purposely compiling

this article without reference to my booking lists or the previous articles in this series.

Probably our finest silent was the M.G.M. masterpiece "Ben Hur" starring Ramon Novarro, though we did not show it till it was reissued with sound, and then we played it twice.

We showed scores of splendid and memorable silent films - back in memory come "Trail of '98" and "Trader Horn", and, by no means least, a really excellent production of "Fifth Form at St. Dominic's". But a film which always stays uppermost in my memory is "Submarine" which starred Jack Holt and Ralph Graves. A tense and fascinating picture, produced on lavish lines, it was released by F.B.O., one of the smaller renters. Though we only showed a few of their releases, they were always first-class entertainment.

Another small renter whose releases were invariably good was P.D.C.

And now to the Talkies, as we called them in early days. Our first was "The Champ", and tip-top it was. We showed a goodly number of the Tarzan films, and all of the M.G.M. productions on this character starring Johnnie Weissmuller and Maureen O'Sullivan. The first of them "Tarzan, the Ape Man" was produced on spectacular lines and was magnificent, but they gradually deteriorated, until the last M.G.M. Tarzan entitled "Tarzan's New York Adventure" was pretty poor.

In silent days, we had never played many westerns. However, in sound days, we played all the big Warner westerns like "Virginia City", "Dodge City", "They Died with Their Boots On" and they were a great success.

Of musicals we must have played scores. My favourite, perhaps, was "Meet Me in St. Louis", with "Singing in the Rain" a close second. But I have happy recollections of a number of musicals starring James Cagney like "Footlight Parade" and "Yankee Doodle Dandy", and, of course, the superb

"Fifty Million Sweethearts" with Dick Powell and Ginger Rogers, plus the Deanna Durbin musicals.

Of Cagney films we played all his Warner films (and one at least from another company) starting with his second "Larceny Lane". I never recall a bad Cagney film. One of the most delightful period comedies we ever played was Cagney's "The Strawberry Blonde" which also starred Rita Hayworth and Olivia de Havilland.

A Novelty film which was a great success in earlier days was Universal's "The Invisible Man", while Paramount's "Sign of the Cross" was enthralling, better, I think, than M.G.M.'s "Quo Vadis" which we played many years later.

The worst film we ever played, without the slightest doubt, was "Atlantic City Romance" and it was the only time I was caught by the nefarious practice of "block bookings". This was to say that a renter would let you have a film of your choice on the understanding that you took one or two of their choice. So far as I remember, the culprit's were A.B.F.D., and it was the Formby films I wanted. So, for the only time, I signed for a package deal - and the result was "Atlantic City Romance".

This showed the huge advantage of booking from a few firms only in later years - M.G.M., Warner Bros. and G.F.D.

We played a huge number of the Hal Roach comedies, which were released by M.G.M. Of these, by far the most popular were the Laurel & Hardy releases, and we played most, if not all of them, and also, in silent days, a few Laurel and Hardy two-reelers which were released by Wardour Films. The Charley Chase comedies of Hal Roach were very popular, but "Our Gang", of which we played a good number, were not real winners in the Small Cinema.

THE LAST ARTICLE IN THIS SERIES NEXT MONTH