

STORY PAPER  
**COLLECTORS DIGEST**

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OCTOBER 1933

No Love For Her Sister's Child



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34P

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# COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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## MY FRIEND SMITH

Recently I referred to a Talbot Baines Reed story which I read to my resident schoolboys during the war years, reading two or three chapters an evening on successive evenings. I recalled that the story was very popular with my boys.

Recently I dug my copy out from one bookcase to form my late-at-night in-bed reading which I never miss. I thought to browse over it on a couple of nights, but I found myself delving into the story and, something of a surprise, I found that I enjoyed

it immensely.

I am not sure just where "My Friend Smith" falls in Reed's all-too-short career - he died while still comparatively young - but I think it may have been one of his earlier works. Unexpectedly it is full of little nostalgic items, and, in some ways, it makes one yearn for the good old days - this case, of course, late Victorian.

"My Friend Smith" is not a school tale - in fact, my favourite Reed tales were non-school yarns, despite the fine "Fifth Form at Dominic's", of which we played the silent film, starring Ralph Forbes and Micky Brantford, in the first term of the Small Cinema. A superb British film, though I cannot recall the renters - not one of our regular suppliers. I would have given it when we ran the Small Cinema series in C.D.

Nevertheless, "My Friend Smith" starts at school for several chapters. For no apparent reason, we find the main characters at a "School for Backward and Troublesome". That strikes a slightly false note for the leading schoolboys of the story, and, especially, for the dandified and supercilious Hawkesbury. Still, that is a mere detail.

After a school rebellion, as a result of which our hero and his friend Smith are expelled, we follow them into City Life, and there is some excellent characterisation among the clerks in the offices and also at the hero's boarding house, where full board is given for a few shillings a week. The most delightful character in the entire story is Billy, the shoe-black, and one comes across him frequently.

As in all of Reed's non-school tales, coincidence follows upon coincidence. And contrivance, if it is well done, is just what delights every reader, and especially the sentimental ones. It's not exactly far-fetched. After all, coincidences DO happen in real life. But with Reed they are the rule rather than the exception, and they make his books a delight.

There are never any loose ends in a Reed yard. At the end of this one, many of the chief characters gather at a big party, Billy the shoe-black is there, and Reed, as happens with most of his tales, drops quaintly into the first person.

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Charles Hamilton, in his early work, often did the same thing, and I have never had any doubt that the young Hamilton was greatly influenced by Reed.

One fascinating episode in "My Friend Smith" is when the hero, Fred Batchelor, goes with a rorty little crowd and drives in a horse-drawn trap from the City of London to Richmond for a day by the river. Anyone fancy a trap-ride from Mansion House to Richmond today? The mind boggles. But the story is great.

And, as I read, one thing above all struck me. Our lovely land has lost its innocence since politicians gave us the Permissive Society. And it's not a better land for that. If you ever read "My Friend Smith" it may strike you in the same way.

### THE STOCK AMERICAN

Mr. Leslie Rowley, in a letter in this month's "Postman Called" column, comments on the Jew in the Hamilton story, and notes that Hamilton was not so generous to the American. That is true, of course, though we must not overlook the superb "Rio Kid" who is a splendid character and a credit to the Wild West.

Hamilton (and Pierre Quiroule in his tale "The Mystery Box") pictures the stock American of the theatre and music hall. I have never met anyone like them in real life. The young Americans, in particular, I have invariably found courteous, kindly, and far less sophisticated than our home-grown variety of young people.

I had many American boys in my school in the later forties, and found the average American boy less advanced scholastically than the average British lad, but they were intelligent and soon picked up. Among my keepsakes is the letter from an American parent who wrote me that when his boys returned to the States they found themselves far ahead of boys of their own ages. Which says something for British education. But I never had a Fishy among them. All the same, Fishy was part of Greyfriars, and really played a noble part in its general history. We wouldn't have been without him.

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THE ANNUAL

All being well, the C.D. Annual - the 37th of them - will be coming your way in December, packed with good things from your hobby writers. Have you ordered your copy yet? If you are advertising in the Annual, or including your Season's Greetings, you should not be later than the first week of November in booking your spot.

THE EDITOR

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# Danny's Diary

OCTOBER 1933

The Yo-yo craze still goes on. I'm not much good at it myself. The thing goes down the string all right, but it won't come back up the string. Some chaps at school are very good at it.

They have had a yo-yo competition on the stage of the Trocadero, Elephant & Castle. At every evening performance some experts gave some wonderful demonstrations, and then the contestants from the audience had a go, and some of them very good when Mun and I went one evening. It was a marvellous show. Sophie Tucker appeared on the stage and sang "Some of These Days", "If your kisses can't hold the man you love, then your tears won't bring him back", and "My Yiddisher Mumma". She brought the house down, and said how proud she was to appear at this "beautiful, beautiful theatre". I like her very much.

The two big pictures were Ronald Colman and Kay Francis in "Cynara", a very sad film, the sort the ladies love. And Gracie Fields in "This Week of Grace" which was pretty good.

The Gem has been a bit flimsy this month storywise. All lovely reading but all very light. "The Four-Footed Phantom" is a fearsome ghost horse with steaming nostrils which invades St. Jim's, alarming masters and boys. It's an invention of Glyn's. Far-fetched but good fun.

Then "Fooled by Figgins", a rib-tickling story of rivalry

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between the School House and the New House. Third of the month is "D'Arcy's Dud Eleven". Gussy recruits a dud eleven to play soccer. It gets whopped. Ponsonby, who is junior captain of Highcliffe, sees the game, and, as St. Jim's has a coming fixture with Highcliffe, Pon thinks the game will be a walkover. But Tom Merry's team wipes up Highcliffe.

Final of the month is "The Prisoner of the Moat House". Tom Merry & Co find an appeal from a man who is being kept prisoner in the Moat House. They get him free. But he is a lunatic, harmless, in the charge of a doctor who is the owner of the Moat House.

The St. Frank's serial continues, and there is a new serial in pictures entitled "Mick o' the Mounted". But who wants serials in pictures? I don't. They've got one of 'em in Modern Boy.

In the Boys' Friend Library out this month there is "The Kid from Texas". It's the series about the Kid getting Donna Extrella and her father across the plains and out of Mexico, while Don Guzman and his followers are out to slay the girl's father. Lovely tale from the good old Popular.

The clocks went back on 8th October, so winter is here, and it will soon be Christmas, and the new Holiday Annual is in the shops, but I shan't get mine till Christmas.

The latest Biggles series has ended in the Modern Boy in the third issue of the month. The Biggles tales have been "Scotland for Ever", "Biggles Falls in Love", and then the last one, "Biggles Last Flight". It brings the end of the war, and Biggles making friends with a German who was once his enemy. It looks as though this might be the end of Biggles altogether, but we shall see. The Biggles tales have been replaced with a motor-bike series of Red-Hot Horton - and his Trusty Norton, by Kaye Campson. The series about Captain Justice and the Buckaroo series continue in the paper, as does the adventure serial and the Rio Kid serial in pictures.

Two really tip-top tales in the Schoolboys' Own Library. The Greyfriars one is "The Joker at Greyfriars" about a chap named Carboy who has a propensity for practical jokes. The other one is

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"Masters on Strike" about Rookwood. Both tales are really out of this world. Just perfect.

Some exciting pictures this month we have seen at the local cinemas. Ida Lupino is good in "High Finance"; "Hell Below" is a thrilling picture about submarines starring Robert Montgomery, Walter Huston, Madge Evans, Robert Young and Schnozzle Durante. Great. Tom Walls in "The Blarney Stone" is a light comedy. And Noel Coward's "Cavalcade" starring Clive Brook, Diana Wynyard, and a host of others. I enjoyed this, but it's not a patch on the stage show at Drury Lane. Wheeler and Woolsey in "Diplomaniacs" which bored me a bit. Richard Barthlemess in "Central Airport", a flying film. Edward G. Robinson in "The Little Giant" with Mary Astor which is a gangster comedy and not very funny. Another flying picture and tip-top is "The Eagle and the Hawk" starring Fredric March, Cary Grant, Carole Lombard, and Jack Oakie. And finally one I liked a lot: Buster Crabbe in "King of the Jungle".

A new Post Office Research Station has been opened at Dollis Hill. The ceremony was performed by the Prime Minister, Mr. Ramsay Macdonald. But it still costs 1½d to send a letter and a bob to send a wire.

Though we are in October the Greyfriars chums are still on holidays, hiking - with a Holiday Annual. First of the month is "The Hiker's Prisoner". The prisoner is Ponsonby - and he is made to hike. And to earn his keep with the hikers. And Mr. Chapman seems to be doing all the illustrations now. I expect Mr. Shields is ill or on holiday.

Next tale is "The Bounder's Capture". There is a robbery and the robber plans that the blame shall fall on the hikers. The robbery is at Gadsby Croft. (When you visit me, ask the way to Danny Dugout.) But the Bounder takes a hand. And then, in the third week of October, they are back at Greyfriars. The story is entitled "The Secret of the Holiday Annual" - and at last we have the history of the mystery.

Final of the month is "The Ace of Jokers". Mr. Quelch catches a cold, and a temporary master, Mr. Spofford, arrives to replace him. And he gives Greyfriars a high old time. Awful far-

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fetched, but a gurgle all through, even when it turns out to be Wibley in disguise.

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

S.O.L. No. 205 "The Joker at Greyfriars" was the 5-story series about Christopher Clarence Carboy, the practical joker, from the Magnet of the autumn of 1928. The story is severely pruned in this medium, which was really unnecessary for it would easily have made two consecutive S.O.L.'s - but it still reads well enough. The original series has recently been published in full by Howard Baker, and we reviewed it last month. S.O.L. No. 206 is the 9-story Rookwood series from very early in the Boys' Friend of 1918. However, only the first 5 and the final story are included in the S.O.L., and it is not harmed at all by losing three tales about weird and wonderful masters who turned up to take the place of the "Masters on Strike", the overall title. The series is discussed in this month's Let's Be Controversial article.

In the Gem "The Four-Footed Phantom" had been "Glyn's Great Wheeze" in the Spring of 1910; "Fooled by Figgins" had been "The Leader of the New House" from a month later in 1910; "D'Arcy's Dud Eleven had gone back to the very start of 1910 to pick up "The St. Jim's Footballers"; and "The Prisoner of the Moat House" had been "The Mystery of the Moat House" in mid-summer 1910. It is hard to see why they were dodging about so much with their selections at this time, for the result, inevitably, was that some good tales got omitted entirely from the reprints.

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# BLAKIANA

Conducted by Josie Packman

Just a short preamble this month as the articles are slightly on the long side. I should be pleased to have some more material for Blakiana and also for the Annual, perhaps they could be sent direct to Eric Fayne thus saving a double lot of postage.

## MURDERS ARN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE

by Raymond Cure

Murders aint what they used to be. Of course not. They used to be a rather select kind of thing. One murder was enough to keep the whole country agog for several weeks, Sunday papers made the most of the trial and gave lurid accounts of the guilty

one's screams for mercy as he or she took the 8 o'clock walk to the gallows. If you wanted any more murder thrills than that, it paid off to order the Union Jack weekly. For the outlay of twopence your adrenalin buds would bloom as Sexton Blake investigated into "who done it" after he viewed various corpses, some laying in bed, others laid on the floor, on board ship, in Great Britain and abroad. **Take** your choice. One can be murdered in a variety of ways. A knife in the back, a bullet maybe. The Boston Strangler had his way. How about poison? No matter what form the murder took Sexton Blake and Tinker had come up with it before. All exciting stuff these fictional murders, filled the time in until the Sunday papers came up with a real life one.

However, as I said, murders arn't what they used to be. At the rate of two or three, or more, real life ones a day. Add to that anything from one to ten a day on T.V. they can get boring.

One finds that the best way to enjoy a good murder is to return to the pages of the Union Jack of years gone by. Not just murder for murder's sake, everyone committed with a purpose in mind - with a motive and Blake's job is to unravel the mystery step by step. Turning from the hurly burly of the daily newspaper and T.V. programmes I alighted on a copy of the Union Jack for 27th October, 1928, number 1306 "The House of Fear" a mere matter of 50 years ago. One treated murder with respect in those days. If you contemplated committing one you understood that when caught you would hang by the neck until you were dead. A rather depressing thought. It forced you to approach murder with respect if only for the sake of your own guilty neck. So here goes - the Editor of the Union Jack boosting the tale "The House of Fear" presents us with this question "What dreadful thing lay behind the locked door of this House of Fear? If you are curious get behind Sexton Blake and Inspector Thomas as they break into the empty house. Allow me to quote - "Come on" Blake whispered "I've got it - we're in". He stepped over the threshold and advanced cautiously, then stumbled and crashed over an object at his feet. "What on earth! Good heavens it's a man" exclaimed Inspector Thomas. It was indeed the body of a man, sprawled out on the

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carpet face down. It took them only a few moments to discover he was dead, with a great gaping wound in the back of his head. "It's murder sure enough" muttered Thomas (end of quote).

Now stick around folks while we pursue Blake and Inspector Thomas down to the basement, into the kitchen, the drawing room and upstairs. A tour that yielded nothing, but as they entered a large bedroom at the back (again I quote) "They gave vent to an ejaculation of grave concern. And well they might for stretched out on the bed lay the rigid form of a women!" (end of quote). Sexton Blake starts from there, two dead bodies, nay two murdered bodies. Step by step Blake unfolds the mystery and pin points the murderer. And there is lots more. If you enjoy a murder mystery, enjoy it with Sexton Blake at the helm. If you do not have a copy borrow it from Josie Packman's S.B. Library and all will be revealed.

THE END

#### A CRIME TALE OF QUALITY

by J.E.M.

When, some months back, our good Blakian friend Christopher Lowder personally recommended to me the stories of Lewis Jackson, I immediately recalled two things. The first was that, many years ago, I had in fact much admired Jackson's famous creation, Leon Kestrel the Master Mummer, though I remembered very little about the actual stories. My second memory was of the chapter on Sexton Blake in E. S. Turner's Boys Will Be Boys. This contains a reference to a Lewis Jackson story entitled The Case of the Night Lorry Driver (SBL, 3rd Series, No. 126) which seems to have amused Mr. Turner, partly because of its sexual "frankness" (mild enough by today's standards) and partly because of its use of a wide vocabulary. Mr. Turner suggests that Tinker, for one, must have found words like "empirically" and "militating" a bit of a strain!

Well, I have just come across this 37-year old story myself and, to be sure, Lewis Jackson does occasionally overdo the fancy words. For him, things don't hang from ceilings, they "depend" from them; questioners become "interlocutors" and so on. But his command of language can also make for freshness. For example,

one character makes "a tigrine leap", which is at least a nice change from the usual cliché.

Knowledgable references to the writings of Goethe and Balzac, to say nothing of Shakespeare, show Mr. Jackson to be a literary, as well as a highly literate, chap. And he is not just a name-dropper either. Blake is made to give a shrewd analysis of Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, with some very sharp insights into theories of split personality. There is also a fine account of the psychology of an ex-prisoner of war. Blake, in fact, solves this case as much by his knowledge of the human mind as by the normal processes of detection.

But if, by now, you have decided that *The Case of the Night Lorry Driver* might be just a little too highbrow, you could not be more wrong. The story of "Hoppy" Knight, lorry driver and lover of fine literature, and his connection with the murder of Mildred Kennaway, provide an unputdownable mystery. It has a powerfully authentic background (you can almost smell those lorry-drivers' caffs), real suspense, genuine clues and a sound and satisfying conclusion. Not every Blake story was a true detective yarn in this sense.

There is also plenty of excitement of the more familiar kind involving a gang of murderous hi-jackers and a hair-raising car chase. Even here Jackson has done some extra homework. If you ever get to read this tale, bear in mind the rather superior mechanics of the Lanchester car in 1946 ...

A point of further interest: Much of the story - at least 75 to 80 per cent, I would say - is told in the form of straight dialogue. This makes the yarn simply zip along, though convincing dialogue is not the easiest thing to write. Clearly, Lewis Jackson would have made a first-rate writer for cinema and modern T.V. and indeed on one occasion he did write the script for a successful children's adventure film called *The Snakeskin Belt*.

I couldn't claim to know how typical of Jackson's work as a whole *The Case of the Night Lorry Driver* is but it certainly stands comparison with far better known hardcover crime novels from that period of almost 40 years ago. And it still makes a darn

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good read today.

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# Nelson Lee Column

A SERIES OF MYSTERY AND CRICKET

by R. J. Godsave

In the year 1921, E. S. Brooks wrote some of his finest series, one of which was that of Jerrold Dodd's arrival at St. Frank's. An Australian used to the open air life of his father's sheep farm would no doubt, find life difficult as a scholar at St. Frank's. Rather to his surprise Dodd was suddenly sent by his father to England in order to be educated and study for the Bar, and become a great lawyer later on.

The real reason that Mr. Dodd sent his son to England, apart from the fact that he wished his son to be educated at St. Frank's, was for Jerry to avoid contact with the followers of a Burmese religion who were worshippers of a so called god of Rhoon. Mr. Dodd, when young, had married a Burmese young lady who unfortunately was bitten by a poisonous snake two hours after the wedding ceremony, the snake having concealed itself in a large basket of flowers. Mr. Dodd had been obliged to submit to the indignity of being branded with the Twin Stars. As one of the sacred laws of the worshippers of Rhoon was that all male children upon attaining the age of fifteen should be branded with the Twin Stars no matter who the mother may be. In their religion it is the father that matters.

It was after a visit to Mr. Dodd by the brother of the young lady who had died from the snake bite that Jerry's father realised that according to the religion, of which he had been a member, that if the father was branded, so must the son be branded. So it was that Jerry's father sent his son to England where he imagined he would be safe from those of the Burmese sect. As events turned out Jerry was not safe. How Nelson Lee tackled the problem of keeping the Australian junior safe from those Burmese who had

followed him to England makes fascinating reading. This adventure coupled with some fine descriptions of cricket matches of which Dodd took a lead, he being a natural born cricketer.

A pair of so-called detectives engaged to look after his son during his stay at St. Frank's makes humorous reading. Messrs. Podge and Midge must have been engaged through an agency as by no means would Mr. Dodd have employed the pair had he had a personal interview with them.

Altogether a gripping story of mystery together with cricket a combination which makes this series one of Brooks' best. Perhaps I should have mentioned that Mr. Dodd met Jerry's mother when he returned to Australia after that tragic event.

### ATMOSPHERE

By William Lister

There's a lot to be said for Atmosphere! On two occasions I have had to prepare a short story for Christmas issues of magazines. I admit they were very short. Both of which saw print about the second week in December. There was a third occasion in which I submitted one for a competition on 'A Xmas in the Future' a science fiction effort. I didn't get anywhere with that. Trouble was, I think I knew more about Christmas than Science Fiction.

One thing linked all three tales. The editor's wanted them not later than July for publication in December. There's the snag!

Have you tried writing up an item with a Yuletide theme on a hot June or July day! It's chronic, it lacks atmosphere. With a cold north wind blowing, a sprinkling of snow, a frosty night or a blizzard even and one's pen can flow freely on the Christmas theme.

Edwy Searles Brooks and Charles Hamilton, the two authors uppermost in our minds, must have conjured up those captivating Yuletide tales, weeks before Christmas. In my book that wouldn't be easy.

It's atmosphere that counts! and it follows that if it applies to writing it also applies to reading. To get the most out of your tale you've got to read it in the right conditions. Mid-summer, and you need the St. Frank's Boys on a summer holiday with Lord

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Dorimore, but mid-winter? That's when the reader looks forward to a visit to a haunted castle, or school, or Baronial Hall.

Now to come to the point of an article of this nature. By all means read the summer series in mid-winter, or the winter series in mid-summer but only for pleasure - not if you want to criticise. Because your not reading it in its right setting; it's not surrounded with the right atmosphere.

Over the years, readers of the 'Nelson Lee', whether fans of Edwy Searles Brooks or Charles Hamilton, have (in articles or letters) questioned the popularity of the 'Ezra Quirke' series.

Starting in October it ran its course till December. The leading character, Ezra Quirke, needed the right atmosphere in the surrounding of the tale. Foggy nights - mysterious noises - ghostly doings. Put Ezra Quirke in a summer setting and he would have been a flop. The same applies to the reading of the tale. If critics have been reading the Ezra Quirke saga in the good-old Summer-time, they've missed the 'kick' that's in it.

Those of us who read that tale at the impressionable age of 12 or 13 on the dark nights between October and December 1925, have never forgotten it. I go further - will never forget it. For my part I was reading it by the light of a paraffin lamp, in a caracan on what was then the outskirts of Blackpool. I'll never forget some of those dark winter nights, the gale force winds shaking the van, the oil lamp flickering - and Ezra Quirke. Maybe I shall never recapture those moments; equally I shall never forget them.

If you've never read the Ezra Quirke series in those conditions then you've never read the Ezra Quirke series at all.

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IT'S IN THE STARS writes Robert Bruce of Canada

I preferred the "Gem" as a youth, identifying more totally with Tom Merry and his chums as they moved through an Edwardian setting. This, of course, thanks to your idea of judicious reprints.

Your "Collectors' Digest" has probably pondered every aspect of Mr. Hamilton's characters as they swotted in classrooms,

tramped the dew-drenched English meadows, and transported their merry humour to haunted halls and foreign lands.

But here's something that might be different.

Has anyone tried placing them in their zodiacal signs from an astrological standpoint?

The master 'Frank Richards' may have snorted at such an idea because Astrology was considered on the par of gypsy fortune telling during his time, but since 1966, the 'lost science' has gained wide appeal.

Computerized readings of many thousands of people have shown that their 'birth signs' are amazingly accurate viewed against the backdrop of their personal characteristics.

Of course, I favor the scientific interpretation ... i.e. The time of year one is born (as opposed to star placement).

For example, I was born in January ... a Capricorn, but on the 'cusp' of Aquarius - so that I have the characteristics of both 'signs'. When things go badly, I retreat into the safe, sure, cool, businesslike methods of that sign... but when the sun shines in my life, I become the positive Aquarian "water carrier" to the entire world.

At any rate, such an exercise as classifying Harry Wharton & Co. "astrologically" would amuse readers - and they could come up with an even better suggestion of the birth months of the Greyfriars and St. Jim's personalities, I've no doubt.

You are still with me? This item hasn't hit the waste basket? Good!

Let's take Harry Wharton - a NATIVE OF SCORPIO. I'm inclined to believe. Scorpio is deadly serious ... looks life and death squarely in the eye. Harry Wharton will go along with the establishment while it makes sense - but if the 'order of things' should suddenly appear ridiculous or unfair, he becomes the total rebel.

But in Tom Merry - we have the perfect LEO ... no rebellion there. Leo relates to creative expression, enterprise, recreation, humour, strength, self confidence. These individuals are positive and outgoing, concerned for others, born leaders.

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Billy Bunter? VIRGO in its lower expressions - selfishness, judging by externals, manipulating. Greed is common to all signs, as is the stretching of truth. Billy was no coward in one sense. He went to great lengths to get his way... and only the bravest could remain hidden in Wharton Lodge, cadging and pilfering, while the Colonel breathed fire with a horsewhip.

"Gussy"? VIRGO in its better aspect... tidy, striving for, if never obtaining efficiency... dependable... loyal to his friends... a power near the throne... extroverted.

Mr. Quelch... CAPRICORN in tote... probably born on 1st January. Fair - but if the occasion commands, the cane comes into painful use. A mature goat... not a young kid. Studious (who can doubt that?). Gifted at writing... The History of Greyfriars.

Frank Nugent... CANCER, of course. Long suffering with his volatile chum, Frank has the empathy and capacity to help - often pouring oil on troubled waters. Even males born under Cancer show strong feminine characteristics - although this is sometimes disguised by a rough exterior.

Bob Cherry... AQUARIOUS to the full... happy buoyant personality, helpful to all, especially the underdog, the ideal team mate... a friend for life. Hallo hallo hallo!

Johnny Bull... TAURUS - the Bull. Common sense, stamina, loyalty to land of birth, practicality, dullness... brings people and situations 'down to earth'. The 'glue' the Famous Five needed to be such a viable force.

Harold Skinner... PISCES at its worst... cowardice, masquerade, deception, self-undoing... but there's imagination and humour. If the 'Magnet' hadn't died with World War 2, Skinner would have regenerated past Levison.

The Bounder Vernon-Smith... ARIES only... impulsive, lacking in restraint, overbearing, brutal... yet with great powers of leadership and courage... adventurous - always to be relied on when the chips are down.

(Must leave out 'Inky' as he was created along 'national lines'.)

Figgins (back to St. Jim's) SAGITTARIUS... most of them are long legged, frank, bold... with too much zeal - and they are ham-handed enough to lose 'Cousin Ethel' to Cardew. But life would be dull without the positive Sagittarians.

Redwing... LIBRA. Harmony is the keynote and their byeword is partnership, union, co-operation - even with the rebellious worst. Appreciation of life's simple things - such as a walk along a seashore of a boat trip on the bay.

Jiminy Crickets... I nearly forgot GEMINI. Who would you suggest? SKIMPOLE... as they are given to VERBOSITY, such as an Open Line Radio Commentator we have here in Victoria... or you'll be thinking of me, but that's not fair... I'm Capricorn and Aquarius. They have a sense of Pragmatism... capacity for words and ideas.

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# The Postman Called

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

FRANCIS HERTZBERG (Wirral)

Canon Doyle did become heartily sick of Holmes. There probably was some Victorian snobbishness involved: Doyle complained that Holmes 'kept him from better things' - i. e. the massive, and superb, historical novels. Unlike these latter, which were carefully researched, the Holmes stories were thrown off like squibs - one was written whilst Doyle waited his innings at cricket; the resulting discrepancies gave Father Ronald Knox the opportunity of using the Holmes stories in his attack on German form critics of the bible, thus inadvertently starting the whole mock-scholarship business with which so many involve themselves in the 100 or so Sherlock Holmes societies in all the continents. That Doyle did as you mention, bring Holmes back to life is true: but that does not disprove the image so well presented of a massive Doyle held shackled to a diminutive Holmes, who is busy attempting to asphyxiate him with pipe smoke, in the Partridge portrait in the National Portrait Gallery. Doyle held out against constant editorial blandishments for ten years (not counting the 'retrospective' adventure of The Hound of the Baskervilles which appeared 8 years after the 'death'). The public thought the series really was at an end - and so did Doyle. That he did resurrect his nemesis had nothing to do with affection, but rather the offer of what eventually became, in present-day equivalent, over £40,000 a story: no typing error, forty thousand pounds of our present money for one short story.

I was interested to read of the incorporation of Wood Green and Darford as municipal boroughs, in Danny's Diary. In 1986, with the abolition of the metropolitan authorities, the first steps at dismantling the iniquitous 1972 Local Government Act will be taken, probably

resulting in a re-emergence of what will be much the same as the former county boroughs.

### LESLIE ROWLEY (Penzance)

I read with great interest and sympathy "let's be controversial" No. 241. The Jew in the Hamilton story. The world of literature has not always been so fair as Hamilton although I would agree with you that there is a slightly patronising air in the stories about Newland and, I suppose, Julian. Hamilton was less fair, I think, in his treatment of Americans. Fisher T Fish was good for the laughs but he does not measure up to the American boys I have been privileged to meet, and whose respect for their parents might, in some cases, be fruitfully copied here. I remember with affection a very generous and considerate Jewish landlord under whose roof I lived in London just as I remember the Americans I met overseas, hospitable and sincere, on official and social occasions. These characteristics are more general than those of Dickens' Fagin or Hamiltons' Fish. Author's license sometimes deceives!

### JACK OVERHILL (Cambridge)

I'll never forget the sunshine that came in my life when I received the July 1962 copy of C.D. from you. The delightful picture of the boy looking over a bridge into the river, the banks covered with trees - all so typical of Greyfriars and St. Jim's and just like Brasley Bridge over the River Granta dividing Trumpington and Grantchester. My happiness that day was akin to my meeting the Magnet and Gen when I was a boy. That's over 21 years ago and I am now MIDDLE-AGED. Impossible to believe it. Well might I say 'Where have the years gone?'

### W. O. G. LOFTS (London)

The writer who ghosted for Wally Hammond the famous cricketer was F. J. Bolton. In fact practically all the stories alleged to be by famous sports personalities were 'ghosted', Jack Hobbs in CHUMS by Sydney Horler. Patsy Hendren by Alred Edgar - whilst I can recall my old friend author John Hunter ghosting for a famous Arsenal centre-forward who was supposed to be the author of a football serial. Holiday Annual was mentioned in stories purely to give free advert for same, and to remind boys to buy it! Charles Hamilton I seem to recall mentioned the Daily Mail a lot - which was of course, a Northcliffe newspaper - that owned Amalgamated Press Ltd.

### ESMOND KADISH (Hendon)

Your comments on Hamilton's Jewish characters were most interesting. My own feeling is that Newland and Julian were, indeed almost identical characters, and, perhaps a little too good to be true, but this is less important than the simple fact that Hamilton bothered to create two sterling Jewish characters in whom young Jewish readers of the "Magnet" and "Gem" could take pride, and with whom they could identify. Of course, Hamilton also created, from time to time, some incidental characters who were both Jewish and rogues, and there is nothing wrong in that; what is less defensible it seems to me, is when every Jewish character is either sharp,

shady or sinister. In this connection, the early "Magnets" show some of the serial-writers to be too ready to overstep the bounds of good sense and good taste in their depiction of Jewish "baddies".

Of course, it can be argued that, in an ideal world, there should be no call for a Jewish junior at Greyfriars or St. Jim's, anymore than there should be a need for a Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Indian, or New Zealand boy, but, as we are all only too painfully aware, the world is far from perfect! As Hamilton himself puts it: "The rain falls equally on the just and the unjust". There's not much any of us can do to change things, but we still - all of us - crave to be noticed and accepted. Incidentally, I see, from the "replies to correspondents", in the early issues of the "School Friends" in the twenties, that there were several requests for a "Jewish girl" to attend Cliff House, although no such character materialised.

So, say I, bully for Mr. Hamilton - by all accounts a human, tolerant and broadminded gentleman - for creating Newland and Julian, whatever their imperfections as characters! Come to think of it, bully for Mr. Brooks, too, who created Solomon Levi for St. Frank's! (Perhaps Mrs. Brooks gave him a nudge or two to help in this characterisation.

I loved Danny's comment on "Allison of Avonshire" ("The Magnet serial has just finished its run. I wonder what it was like"). I have to confess that I rarely read the serial at the back of the "Magnet" or "Gem" - St. Frank's excepted. I could never see the point of including them.

### NORMAN KADISH (Edgware)

Just before my holidays I finished the series of Bob Chery's Trike and the Ravenspur Grange series (118-1125) as well as E. S. B. 's The Treasurer of El Safra and Christmas at Travis Dene (O.S. 213, 220 and N. S. 187, 189). In some ways how different the two authors are in their techniques of composing stories. With Hamilton one becomes almost a member of the party becoming jocular, annoyed and angry according to the moods of the chief characters. In E. S. B. 's tales, I find I am on 'tip-toes' all the time wondering how the chief personages can get out of one scrape after the other. There is very little time to react personally to the others. Both authors are fine boys' writers without doubt. I at least revert to my boyhood again when reading their stories. E. S. B. I think provides us with sheer escapism. But what of it! So long as we find the psycholological outlet we are looking for.

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FOR SALE: Boys' Friend Libraries Nos. 5, 40, 41, 55, 58, 59, 61, 63, 150, 152 (H. St. J.), 73, 82, 141, 535, 674, 692 (J. North), 156, 162 (D. Goodwin), 624. (R. Randolph), 43, 97 (M. Storm), also 38, 50, 84, 116, 405, 584, 472. All mint; also bound vol. 153, 276, 288 (C. H. no covers) also 1 Aldins E. Craborian.  
S. Smyth, P.O. Box 366, Mona Vale, 2103, Australia.

# News of the Old Boys' Book Clubs

## LONDON

Despite inclement weather there was another very good attendance at the Leystonstone residence of Reuben and Phyllis Godsave, and, as could be expected, there was a strong emphasis on Nelson Lee and St. Frank's. Reuben, himself being an eminent Fransiscan was ably supported by his fellow writer of the Nelson Lee column in of *Collectors' Digest*, Jim Cook who had recovered from his recent accident. Jim was the adjudicator in the club's youngest Fransiscan, Duncan Harper's grid quiz of St. Frank's characters. Jim Cook was the winner and in second place were Ray Hopkins and Maurice Corkett. Terry Beenham won Josie Packman's Sexton Blake quiz and in second place was Ann Clarke who was followed in third place by Horace Owen.

Ray Hopkins read some extracts from S.O.L. 216, "The Wizard of St. Frank's".

Then followed a reading by Roy Parsons of P. G. Wodehouse's poem "To William ("Whom we have Missed"). Then Roy spoke of "Our Gang" and illustrated it from the D. C. Thomson book First Number One.

With votes of thanks to the hosts, the ladies for making the tea and good wishes to Jim Cook for his safe return to Auckland and N.Z., it was homewards bound. The Ealing luncheon party will take place on Sunday, 9th October, at 12.15 p.m.

BEN WHITER

## CAMBRIDGE

The Cambrdige Club met at the Ely home of Mike Rouse on Sunday, 11th September. This being the first meeting of the new season there was a fair amount of correspondence to deal with. Neville Wood wrote to suggest that a series of tape recordings with members of the club, each recalling special memories, should be begun. Already two members of the Club had died, and others

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moved away and records of their voices would have been memorials of them. The Club thought this a good idea, and Tony Cowley was asked to become custodian of the tape library as it was built up. The next meeting on 2nd October will be at the home of Vic Hearn when Bill Lofts will talk on Eric Parker. Mike Rouse talked interestingly on the B.B.C. "Out with Romany" talks that had been so popular. These were delightful atmospheric broadcasts of "Romany" and his dog Raq. Romany was Rev. George Bramwell Evans and he was an ordained Methodist Minister. His mother was a sister of the well-known evangelist of the early years of the century, "Gypsy" Smith.

In the intervals of Mike making innumerable cups of tea, and the members enjoying the splendid spread he had provided, Mike put together a fascinating talk about a boy ventriloquist which led through the autobiography of Vernon Cross, the Ramsdale family of entertainers, (Vernon, Fred and Alice), Will Judge, Barry Burns, illustrated by many postcards, etc. An interesting example of what can be built up from many small clues. Jack Doupe had brought up his bound volumes of the Aldine Dick Turpins. It was particularly interesting to Jack Overhill and Bill Thurbon to see these, which had been published around the dates of their respective births, and which they vaguely remembered as seeing as very small boys. Bill Thurbon commented on a coincidence of handling within three days two books with the same title "The Sniper". One was a documentary novel about a real person, the other a copy of a Sexton Blake Library, 5th series. Jack Overhill congratulated Mike on his Mayoral portrait.

The meeting closed with a very warm vote of thanks to Mike for his hospitality.

#### NORTHERN

Meeting held: Saturday, 10th September, 1983

We had thirteen present for our meeting and a warm welcome was given to a visitor - hopefully a potential member - Robert Kaye who is just seventeen years old.

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We were sad to learn of the death of a well-known figure in hobby circles and a member of our Northern Section since its formation over thirty years ago - Mr. Breeze Bentley. Apparently, Breeze died whilst on holiday, at the age of 74. Since his retirement, he had paid very few visits to our Club, his last being in August, 1981. Breeze was well-known for his many contributions to the Collectors' Digest and the Annual and will be missed in hobby circles. He died at the beginning of September.

Geoffrey Good presented each member with a Sexton Blake story in booklet form, he had prepared on his home photocopier. The two latest Bunter books in the Quiller Press publications were on view - Bunter's Postal Order and Billy Bunter's Benefit. Seemingly, Miss Kay King, the author of the books, would be doing some promotional tour and would be in Leeds on 27th September. It was hoped that we could call a special meeting for that evening, so that we could meet Miss King.

Keith Atkinson gave each person a packet containing squares of paper each having a letter. We had put the letters in order to form the names of seven Removites at Greyfriars. A very clever game, with much thought provoking and amusement on the part of members. Molly was the winner.

After refreshments, Molly stated that next month she would be visiting her brother in Australia and wondered what she could take as a gift to his grandson. So, Molly had bought a copy of BRER RABBIT as a "starter" and gave a reading from same. Then, she suggested that her relative might progress to better things - and took a reading from TIGER TIM'S WEEKLY. From there to CHIPS - and finally THE MAGNET - but Molly did not make a reading from that particular paper, as she considered we know quite a lot about it, anyway! A novel item by Molly.

This was our last meeting at the Swarthmore Centre. Owing to new regulations, we cannot continue to meet on Saturday evenings at that particular accommodation. So, in future we gather at the usual time on Saturday evenings at the CITY OF LEEDS ROOM, at Leeds Parish Church, Kirkgate, Leeds 2.

JOHN BULL MINOR

SANDERS OF THE RIVER

Christopher Lowder writes: A couple of points sparked off by Bill Lofts (Letters, April C.D.), Ernest Holman (May C.D., and Letters, August C.D.), and Ron Beck, concerning Edgar Wallace's character "Sanders of the Rivers".

First of all let's nip in the bud what could well become a source of appalling frustration for collectors. The Sanders stories printed in the Topical Times during 1938 had all been published elsewhere and collected in various Sanders' books, and when Bill wrote of finding "stories of Sanders... not recorded before in our Bibliography", he meant a series of reprints not noted in the Lofts/Adley British Bibliography of Edgar Wallace (1969). There are to my knowledge no Sanders' stories lurking in old periodicals which have never been published in book-form.

At least, I'd better qualify that by saying that there is in fact one called "A Maker of Wars", which appeared in the American short story magazine Adventure in 1914, and was never collected between hard covers. However, this story was rewritten by Wallace for the American market to include Sanders (mostly in an off-stage role). The story from which it was revised, "The Linchela Rebellion", appeared in England in the Weekly Tale-Teller in 1909 and did not feature Sanders at all.

Wallace did the same sort of thing with "The Forest of Happy Thoughts" (Pall Mall, 1909), a non-Sanders story which he later revised into "The Forest of Happy Dreams" (Sanders of the River, 1911).

Wallace mentioned in a letter to his wife (circa 1931) that he had been asked by one of the large-circulation American slicks - I think it was Colliers Magazine - to write more Sanders tales, which, he said, he was going to do. However, he died in Hollywood before he could start the new series.

There are two 'ghost' titles which have caused some confusion amongst collectors - "Bosambo of Ochori" and "Mr. Commissioner Sanders". The first is the Ur-title of Bosambo of the River (1914), while the second is merely the American

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re-titling of Sanders (1926).

Ron Beck notes The River of Stars (1913) as being part of the Sanders' cycle, and in a way it is - although it must be pointed out that Sanders only makes an appearance in the Prologue to the book (a story of murder and high financial chicanery hinging on the discovery of a fabulous diamond mine in Africa) and in two Chapters later on.

For the record, Wallace wrote 129 Sanders' short stories and one novel (Sandi the King-Maker, 1922), which consists of 12 connected but largely self-contained episodes. Francis Gerard wrote a further 34 stories. Which must be some kind of record in genre fiction.

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BOOK REVIEW  
by Mary Cadogan

OLD HEROES NEVER DIE...

And neither happily do they fade away. Dent have published a new series of Classic Thrillers which aims to re-issue titles by John Buchan, 'Sapper', Edgar Wallace, Dornford Yates, Leslie Charteris and other masters of detection and suspenseful adventure. The first four books, which are already in the shops, are John Buchan's CASTLE GAY, Dornford Yates's BLIND CORNER, Sapper's BULLDOG DRUMMOND and Edgar Wallace's THE MIND OF MR. J. G. REEDER. These cost £2.50 each, and are sturdy paper-backs (not the kind that fall apart after one reading). They have attractive and nicely nostalgic covers which convey the mood of these immensely absorbing stories from the 1920s and early '30s. Each book includes an informative and entertaining introduction about the author and his works, and further titles are promised for October. Long may the series continue!

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FOR SALE OR EXCHANGE: Early Magnets, Gems, Holiday Annuals, The Story Paper Collector. WANTED: Comics, Rookwood, B.F.L.'s, S.B.L.'s.  
MARRIOTT, 27 GREENVIEW DRIVE, TEL. NORTHAMPTON (0604) 711874.

WANTED: H. B. Facsimiles No. 21 and 22. Also Bunter hardbacks "Bunter Butts In", "Bunter's Postal-Order" (dust covers).

J. Conroy, 256 Townsend Avenue, Liverpool, L11 5HQ.

I was quite intrigued by the letter from Mr. Heath, in the last issue of C.D., as by chance, during the past few months, I had not only been looking through the Boys Own Annual that contains "A Fifth Form Mystery", but had also attempted to read (unsuccessfully!) "The Mystery of a Hansom Cab", which has been in my collection many years.

According to Haycraft, the "Hansom Cab" by Fergus Hume (not Hulme) was in fact published in Melbourne in 1886, and the only known copy of the original imprint is in the Melbourne Mitchell Library. Hume was a Barrister's Clerk, but wanted to be a writer and had the work published by an Australian firm at his own expense. However, its modest success "down under" encouraged him to come to London in 1887, where the story was sold outright for £50. It was issued as a cheapish "Yellow-back" - a 19th century paper-back, and in this form sold over 350,000 copies. Since then it has been reprinted by many firms, and in many forms, so that, world-wide, it must have achieved well over the million - poor Hume never got a penny, beyond his initial £50! He did go on to write over 130 hack-works, mainly detective-cum-mystery novels, but none had the "freak" success of the "Hansom Cab". Its phenomenal sales did however prompt the formation of "The Hansom Cab Publishing Co." and from this, one hopes, Hume got some financial reward. Personally I didn't find the story or style, readable today - unlike Conan Doyle's "Study in Scarlet" which first appeared the same year, and is still considered a "classic".

Strangely, Doyle and Hume were also born the same year, 1859, and died with only two years between them - Doyle in 1930 and Hume in 1932. Altho' Haycraft terms "The Hansom Cab" a "shoddy pot-boiler" it was nevertheless probably the biggest commercial success in the history of detective fiction! It was not the very first detective story, but it holds a pretty early place, and one realises almost with surprise that this was only seven years before Harry Blyth, the immortal Sexton Blake!

As to "A Fifth Form Mystery", this first appeared as a

serial in the Summer of 1922, and features complete in the Boys Own Paper Annual, Vol. 44. It was illustrated by T. M. R. Whitwell, a competent enough artist, but lacking the style and panache of Gordon Browne, Thos. Heath Robinson, or the Brocks. Moreover he always seemed to use "wash" and not "line", which did not usually reproduce well. However, I thought the story well-written, and characterised, easily readable, but, for me, lacking in any real action or excitement. But I thought the same about Michael Poole, Hylton Cleaver, Jeffrey Havelton, et al. I quite enjoyed their books, but never found the thrill or interest that Charles Hamilton or E. S. Brookes engendered. Poole, also, I seem to recall, was - like the B.B.C. - obsessed with Rugby, which I considered as a boy, a crude and uninspired activity. The passage of close on 50 years has only strengthened this view. Thank goodness C. H. (and E. S. B.) opted for Soccer, when they created their famous schools! However it might be interesting to both Mr. Heath and the writer to hear other views.

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NOT ONLY TOM, DICK, AND HARRY... But ALSO!

by Tommy Keen

Perhaps, and in fact I am almost certain, that the names inflicted on the many characters invented by Charles Hamilton in the MAGNET and the GEM, have been written about, or discussed, many times in the past, but to me it is a new theme. Christian names of course... so many repeats.

Admittedly, when St. Jim's and Greyfriars first hit the bookstalls, good solid English names were the order of the day - Tom, Dick, and Harry - but somehow Frank Richards and Martin Clifford (names we prefer to Charles Hamilton) became decidedly in a rut with the names of our heroes, the cads, and the also rans. Without doing much research, to me, the most repeated names, appeared to be William, Herbert, Dick, Arthur, and George. So very many Georges. Harry was not overdone, three good characters whom the name seemed to suit - Wharton, Manners, and Noble

(Kangaroo). Merry, the most famous St. Jim's character of all was named Tom, and at Greyfriars we had Brown, Redwing and Dutton. North, of the Sixth, was, I believe, also Tom. In the very early days, Herbert appeared to be a popular choice, there was Skimpole of St. Jim's, Trevor, Lord Mauleverer, and the most notable Herbert of all, Vernon-Smith, the Bounder, and there was Bulstrode's minor, who came to an unfortunate end.

Few Richards were called by their correct name, it was almost always 'Dick' - Penfold, Russell, Rake, Nugent Minor (Dicky) of Greyfriars, and Redfern, Julian, and Brooke of St. Jim's. One Greyfriars character, of whom I wish more had been heard, was Richard Hillary, what a superb name that is, but evidently, after appearing in a couple of stories during World War I, he almost vanished from the scene.

William was the Christian name of the fatuous Bunter, who was to become known in all corners of the world as Billy Bunter, but he was not the only William. In the Remove at Greyfriars, there were Wibley and Stott, and in the Fifth, William Green, a close chum of the great Horace Coker (at least, when provisions were around). The third member of the Coker Trio was George Potter, and as Coker's friends were William and George, so were the henchmen of the very boring Grundy at St. Jim's - William Gunn, and George Wilkins. Not very inspired casting, this!

As for the name George... it cropped up all the time. Apart from Bunter's second name being George, and the aforementioned Potter and Wilkins, we had Bulstrode, Wingate, Blundell, Grundy, Gore, Herries, Durrance, Figgins and Kerr - maybe many more.

Again, way back in the early days, there were numerous Arthurs, maybe not regulars, but Arthurs seemed to come and go. The most famous Arthur of all, was a permanent fixture, the beloved Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of St. Jim's, and one of his chums of Study 6 was Robert Arthur Digby, but at Greyfriars, I can only think of Carne, the bully of the Sixth. There was another popular Arthur, Wingate's great chum Courtney, but the ending of Courtney is now history. A few of the many Arthurs that came, and went, were

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Carlton, Jolly, Talbot, Banthorpe, Brandreth, Carthew and Lynn.

Gerald, I assume, is a name F. R./M. C. disliked, as this was usually chosen for the bullies and rotters - Loder, Knox, Cutts and Crooke (sometimes known as George Gerald Crooke) - and Aubrey was handed out to two young rascals, Angel of Greyfriars, and Racke of St. Jim's. Names which I personally consider of rhythmical quality, and not all popular characters, are Mark Linley, Peter Hazeldene, Anthony Treluce, Herbert Vernon-Smith, and the splendid Richard Hillary of Greyfriars, and Sydney Clive, Reginald Talbot, Ralph Reckness Cardew, Eric Kerruish, and a final St. Jim's character (who was seldom featured in the GEM), Clifton Dane. To me, this is a superb name, but I have an idea that Clifton Dane may have been a sub-writer's invention.

Two names with no originality at all were Tom Brown, and John Bull. Maybe they went down well in 1910, but surely, after "Tom Brown's Schooldays", one Tom Brown was enough. However, when I first read of Master Bull, he was Johnny, so that was alright, and Johnny, in fact, became one of my favourite characters.

Oddly enough, one name noticeably missing - Charles!

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HAMILTONIA FOR SALE. Magnets, Gems (many blue and white;  $\frac{1}{2}$ d series), sols, plus Baker Volumes and singles (disbound). S. A. E. for list to Neil Beck, 54 Barons Way, Polegate, East Sussex, BN26 5JJ.

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WANTED: the combined WONDER BOOK OF SOLDIERS AND SHIPS, published by Ward, Lock and Co., I think just prior to World War One. It contains, among other things, a story about a boy bugler in the Boer War. I believe the story was written by Edgar Wallace.

BOB WHITER, 837 South Bronson Avenue, Los Angeles 90005, Calif., U. S. A.

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WANTED: Sexton Blake Library 2nd series: 3, 20, 53, 57, 76, 101, 143, 151, 201, 214, 221, 266, 281, 316, 433, 435; Union Jacks before 1918. H. A. OWEN, 28 Narcissus Road, London N. W. 6.

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SALE: C. D. Annual, 1978 - £2; 7 School Friends, 1921 - £1 each; Billy & Bessie Bunter Hamlyn Books. Magoveny, 16 Matilda Gardens, Belfast 12.

HAVE YOU ORDERED YOUR C. D. ANNUAL YET?

In the extracts which we present from his Diary this month, Danny reminds us that it is exactly 50 years ago that "Masters on Strike" featured in the Schoolboys' Own Library. This story, the plot of which is peculiar to Rookwood, had first appeared in a series in the Boys' Friend a dozen or so years earlier. It seems appropriate to offer once again the comments of our Let's Be Controversial essayist which featured in C. D. a good many years back.

### LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

#### MASTERS ON STRIKE      No. 242

In recent years, striking schoolmasters have been very much in the news. Too much. Personally, I find something distasteful in schoolmasters striking for more pay. Schoolmasters should be dedicated to their work. A dedicated schoolmaster thinks first of the young people in his charge. A striking schoolmaster is thinking first of himself.

A schoolmaster's lot is not an easy one, and nobody knows that better than I do. But a man who is striking one week can hardly be surprised if he finds that he is unable to gain obedience and respect from his class the following week. Our society being what it is, with so many distorted values, schoolmasters and the like should be dedicated people who follow their chosen vocation because they love it. And if they don't love it, they should be doing some other job where a bad example can do less harm.

Which brings me, in a rather roundabout way, to the masters' strike at Rookwood which occurred in a long series, fifty years ago.

Rookwood is notable as a Hamilton school in which certain plots were tried out first, or to which certain plots are peculiar to this day. The masters' strike was one of the latter.

The character pictures of Dr. Chisholm and Mr. Bootles were brilliant. Beautifully told, with utterly convincing dialogue, the first three tales in the series have never been surpassed, not even in the golden age of the Magnet. The general lay-out of the plot is well known. Mr. Bootles, deeply conscientious, stood up against Dr. Chisholm when Jimmy Silver was sentenced to a punishment which Mr. Bootles considered unjust. Mr. Bootles was asked to resign, refused to do so, and was then dismissed. In the

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end, the other masters supported Mr. Bootles, and "withdrew their labour". The sequence was a rare masterpiece from Charles Hamilton at his wittiest and best.

"Any way," boomed Mr. Greely, "why, sir, should not we, because we happen to belong to the professional class - the intelligentsia, in fact - why should not we exercise the privilege, sir, that is exercised by workmen and others in similar circumstances? Have we no right? Have we no dignity? Are we, sir, slaves to be trodden upon?"

This was superb reading, even more delightful for adult readers than for youngsters, possibly. And when the masters eventually faced the Headmaster:

"Is it possible?" The Head almost gasped. "Is it possible, Mr. Greely, that the staff of Rookwood contemplates a strike like discontented hands in a factory?"

These scenes which led up to the strike were so splendidly written that there was almost bound to be an anticlimax, for the adult reader, at least. The high standard of writing was not quite maintained after the strike began, and the series became a string of episodes in which various people tried to take over the Rookwood forms, the members of which all wanted their old masters back.

There came along the stock characters of school fiction - the bullying master, the cracksman, the effeminate teacher, and the alcoholic. Everything was vastly entertaining for the boy reader. As adults, we love it still, even though we know that, after the strike began, the quality slipped just a trifle.

The single story about the alcoholic was a bit of a tragedy. Schoolboys must have chuckled over it, and in a way, it was harmless enough. But the frailties of mankind are thin material for humour, and the adult reader realises only too well that there is nothing funny in the plight of the secret drinker, the alcoholic.

The pair of tales concerning the schoolmaster cracksman, though a wee bit incredible, were of high quality. Read now, they seem slightly hackneyed - many schoolmaster cracksmen have fascinated juvenile readers since the time when Mr. Egerton

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plied his nefarious trade during a fortnight at Rookwood. But at the time it was a novel theme, and readers loved it all.

I believe Danny commented, in an extract from his diary we printed recently, that, at the end, "the series fizzled out". And so it did. The Headmaster, worn out with the succession of weird masters whom he had been unfortunate enough to engage, climbed down. And Rookwood returned to normal in the course of a paragraph or two.

It is a series which never really quite reached the heights which it might have done, but the opening stories give ample proof of the Hamilton genius. It remains today, still one of Hamilton's greatest successes.

As seen from this great distance, it is obvious that Hamilton's word for the Boys' Friend had the result of so many substitute tales in the Gem and Magnet. But, with the Masters' Strike series in mind, among plenty of others, it is a fair conclusion that Rookwood was very worthwhile.

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Two STAR Attraction in the 1983 C. D. Annual:

THE LAST CHAPER? by Leslie Rowley.

SLIPS OF THE PEN by Harold Truscott.

Have you ordered your copy yet?

