

STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL.51

No.610

OCTOBER 1997



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PORTRAIT
of
MRS. BUNTER



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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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OUR COVER

Recently 'Our Man in Los Angeles', Bob Whiter, sent me a copy of the C.H. Chapman picture of Mrs Bunter, very much in her heyday, which adorns our cover this month. It also serves as an illustration for Margery Woods's article about enigmatic aspects of Bunter's beloved 'mater'.

OUR ANNUAL

I'm delighted to be able to inform you that a wonderful crop of items for the Annual has already been received. Much of this is already with the printer so that, as always, our bumper book should be ready for despatch fairly early in December, in good time for pre-Christmas browsing.

Amongst the splendid contributions to which you can look forward are Roger Jenkins's article about Rylcombe Grammar School and Una Hamilton Wright's exposition of the views of her uncle, Frank

Richards, on politics and politicians. Anthony Cook, with Mr Quelch as his hero, has provided *Christmas Gaudy*, Margery Woods continues the seasonable mood in a story which brings together the Greyfriars and Cliff House juniors, while Ted Baldock shares with us some more of his *Greyfriars Pictures in the Fire*.

Further Hamiltonian items are promised, and the Nelson Lee is well represented in a Yuletide article *The Mystery of Forest House* by Bernard

Thorne as well as in excerpts from a Christmas number of the St. Frank's Magazine.

Sexton Blake stars in an atmospheric contribution from Reg Hardinge on *Success by Design* and more articles on this celebrated sleuth are expected to arrive on the editorial desk soon.

John Beck nostalgically recalls highlights of many childhoods in *Christmas with Rupert* while tougher characters are explored by Donald V. Campbell in *The Female of the Species* (as featured in the novels of E. Phillips Oppenheim) and by Bill Bradford in his article on John Gordon Brandon.

Of course there is much more - and next month I shall be giving you further 'trailers'.

I am grateful to those of you who have already ordered the Annual, and would remind others please to let me have their orders as soon as possible to help me to estimate the required print-run. (The price, including postage and packing, is £10.50 for U.K. readers and £12.00 for those living overseas.)

90 GLORIOUS YEARS

Last month I promised to inform you of a special tribute to Eric Fayne which was in preparation. I am now happy to provide details of this: John Wernham and I have compiled a book which celebrates both Eric's life and work, and 90 years of the *Gem* and the *Magnet*. *90 GLORIOUS YEARS* is described this month in a detailed review by Brian Doyle, and this large and lovely volume, published by the Museum Press, can be obtained from me (see order form enclosed). The number of copies is limited, so don't neglect to order your copy without delay.

A TRIBUTE TO ENID BLYTON

To mark Enid Blyton's Centenary year, the Roehampton Institute of the University of Surrey have produced a book entitled *ENID BLYTON: CELEBRATION AND REAPPRAISAL* (which includes a contribution from myself on *The Magic of Enid Blyton*). Norman Wright has reviewed this publication for us in this issue of the C.D. and it can be obtained direct from the Roehampton Institute (see the blue order form, enclosed).

I have only just realised, by the way, that the birthdays of Frank Richards and Enid Blyton, surely the two most prolific of all writers for young people, are very close to each other. Frank was born on the 8th and Enid on the 11th of August (in different years, of course). Another similarity between these two giants of juvenile literature is that each created a group of characters known as the Famous Five - which has proved long-lived and seems set for fictional immortality!

Happy Reading,

MARY CADOGAN

Wanted: All pre-war Sexton Blake Libraries. All Boys Friend Libraries. All comics/papers etc with stories by W.E. Johns, Leslie Charteris & Enid Blyton. Original artwork from Magnet, Gem, Sexton Blake Library etc. also wanted. I will pay £150.00 for original Magnet cover artwork, £75.00 for original Sexton Blake Library cover artwork.

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THE ENIGMA OF MRS BUNTER

by Margery Woods

One of the minor mysteries of Greyfriars was the shortage of mothers. So many of the boys, like the unfortunate Mr Worthing in *The Importance of Being Ernest*, seemed to have been extremely careless with their maternal parents. True, they had sisters, cousins and aunts - Coker had his Aunt Judy, who was worth ten mothers when it came to the protecting of her beloved Horace - but the Greyfriars mums who did manage to survive obviously knew that their place was firmly set in the domestic region and would not dream of interfering in a man's business at school. Of them all, surely the most self-effacing was Mrs Amelia Bunter, mistress of Bunter Villa (sorry! - Bunter Court), and ever-loving mother of three somewhat circumferentially challenged offspring; William George, Elizabeth Gertrude and young Samuel.

Little was heard of her and even less seen of her during the decades of her eldest son's sojourn at Greyfriars, but surely she should be renowned for possessing the greatest blind spot in the history of motherhood with regard to her eldest and dearest. Perhaps this could be explained by the fact that she saw so little of him, considering his long absences at school and his unflinching ability to land himself elsewhere for the holiday periods of the year, nor did she seem to enjoy much more of the company of the other two. In view of this we cannot accurately assume that Mrs Bunter was the caring, bustling motherly keystone of the Bunter menage.

It is true that the unselfish mother-figure whose sole concern is the welfare of her family and home is not really the stuff of great dramatic conflict which makes paper-stirring literature, unless the family is of the Aga-saga type, simmering under the peaceful village surface with drugs, teenage pregnancy, and adultery with a spot of incest and pink business thrown in for extra seasoning. Somehow, even by the ultimate stretching of imagination, the Bunter clan does not seem to lend itself to any of these scenarios. Firstly, their sole addiction is food, as much and as often as possible; secondly none of them was at home very much, except, presumably, Mrs Bunter. So what did her life consist of, day to day?

She had a small staff who would deal with the more tedious side of domesticity, while the one job which could have filled the major part of her day - catering for the voracious appetites of her brood - was taken care of by those redoubtable institutions of Cliff House and Greyfriars. Mr Bunter would depart daily on the 8.20 for the City and not be seen again until 5.30 or thereabouts, when he would arrive home with an irascible outpouring of the latest iniquity inflicted by the Inland Revenue and the appalling state of the rush hour transport these days. It is unlikely that he would have a sympathetic ear for any small domestic trauma of the day experienced by his long-suffering spouse.

Did she fill her days with a round of morning coffee and afternoon tea with her friends, a little embroidery or flower arrangement, a stint at the Women's Institute or the church, the occasional jumble sale, assistance with the local fund-raising for charity, and the inevitable expeditions to the hairdresser? She did not appear to do much letter writing, if any, certainly not to her children. That odd little role reversal was left to the master of the home. Her secret idea of bliss was probably to curl up with a romantic novel and a box of her favourite chocolates, her ears long trained to screen out the drone of irritable complaining from her husband.

So this rather sad and placid lady was no enigma after all, and was simply relegated in spirit if not in body to the rest of those other non-existent beings in the lives of the maternally bereft lads, those Greyfriars semi-orphans.

But occasionally authors do relent and give the readers an insight into the personal background of their characters.

One such glimpse came in the story, *Billy Bunter's Windfall*, after he has spotted a robber escaping with his loot from Chunkleys, and Billy is able to give vital information to the police, which results in his receiving a reward of fifty pounds. Mrs Bunter is ill and Billy hurries home to present the money to his mother so that she can have a convalescent holiday at Bournemouth. (The Inland Revenue sharks and the Stock Exchange bulls having driven Mr Bunter to penury yet again.)

Mrs Bunter greets her son warmly but is allowed very few words in edgeways when her lord and master gets going. At last Billy is allowed to explain how he came by this vast sum, and she says warmly:

"It was very clever of Billy to discover the man and earn the reward. A dear, good, clever boy . . ."

And then:

"My own dear boy," said Mrs Bunter with a fond look at the fat Owl. "It is just like him . . ."

Everyone needs someone to love, and someone who loves them. Billy Bunter and his mum dearly loved each other, even if no-one else shared that great blind spot in Mrs Amelia Bunter's eye.

N.B. Any Remove junior reading this and daring to put a hand to his mouth while pretending to puke will receive five hundred lines, and six! Henry Samuel Quelch

A ST. JIM'S "PAIRS" QUIZ

by Peter Mahony

1. What were the extraneous ingredients in:
 - a) Figgins' fig pudding (1907)
 - b) Jack Blake's Christmas pudding (1939)
2. Who was:
 - a) Ashamed of his sister (1911)
 - b) Ashamed of his name (1913)
3. Who was:
 - a) The fighting schoolmaster (1911)
 - b) The fighting prefect (1914)
4. Who was:
 - a) The boy with a bad name (1938)
 - b) The boy with a bad name (1939)
5. Who was the schemer of:
 - a) The plot against Tom Merry (1935)
 - b) The plot against Tom Merry (1939)
6. Who was:
 - a) The cowboy of St. Jim's (1921)
 - b) The cowboy of St. Jim's (1933)
7. Who was:
 - a) A rank outsider (1910)
 - b) A rank outsider (1928)
8. Who was:
 - a) The rambler's recruit (1933)
 - b) The Rylcombe recruit (1938)
9. Who was:
 - a) Trimble's pal - the Prince (1921)
 - b) Baggy Trimble's chum (1925)
10. Who was:
 - a) Gussy's Canadian cousin (1935)
 - b) Gussy's wild man (1939)

(Answers on page 30)



SEXTON BLAKE: FIRST IMPRESSIONS

by Ted Baldock

The call for Blake's services came from every corner of the globe, from Rajahs and Red Indian Chiefs, from the Lord Chancellor, the Bank of England (repeatedly) and even from a local authority worried at the number of men who were disappearing and leaving their wives chargeable to the rates.

E.S. Turner (*Boys Will Be Boys*)

I suppose that most of us have, at some point in our careers, drifted into the orbit of the Sexton Blake world and succumbed in varied degrees to the spell of his adventures, some to become dedicated devotees while others have, after a time, moved into other fields of interest. Most of us made his acquaintance in youth or childhood. Few, I imagine, can pin-point the precise circumstances and time of this initiation. I have vague memories of my parents casting a disapproving eye upon the *Union Jack* as being unsuitable reading for me, although I am sure they saw nothing remotely immoral in the adventures of Sexton Blake. My elder brother probably stated the case fairly exactly when he said, "You are not old enough yet for these stories". A bald statement and possibly true, to my no small chagrin.

My introduction to the world of Sexton Blake took place on the east coast, at Sheringham, where my family were on holiday. I must have been ten or eleven years of age at the time. I was the happy recipient of sixpence to defray on whatsoever I desired - a goodly sum for a small boy in those far off days: (when I recall the purchasing power of that small silver coin, the humble 'tanner' against the background of our 'enlightened today' I sigh). After long and careful consideration of its most satisfactory outlay, I expended fourpence on a copy of the *Sexton Blake Library*, possibly because it contained a very attractive cover illustration - that of an Indian Rajah or Prince, a very important looking fellow at all events. He was clad in a splendid jewelled turban and silken jacket. The title now quite escapes me, as do the contents of the story. But it signalled an event, the beginning of a particular reading era, a species of love affair. There was, there must have been, something in the tale which, once read and absorbed, led one on more deeply and widely into those interesting and shadowy realms of detective literature.

I imagine it would be possible to trace that story and issue, even with such flimsy evidence. The time factor may be narrowed down to the period of 1927/28. It was an oriental tale, almost surely with an Indian background. Sexton Blake had, until this time, been a relatively unknown quality for me, although I do remember the weekly issues of the *Union Jack* some years before this time with their orange or buff tinted covers, and excessively small print in narrow columns. How we managed to read this print by candlelight, even with young eyes, is now beyond me!

Blake appears to me as a kind of anvil upon which numerous authors (estimates hint at over one hundred such) have hammered at their varied talents, each in a small way adding a further dimension to the character of the great man. The finished product has become a more or less faultless detective-figure upon whom the worst villains of the

criminal underworld have, over the years, wreaked their choicest techniques - with little seeming effect. With the possible exception of Sherlock Holmes, he is the one man to whom (were we to be private investigators) we would most care to be likened. Such is hero-worship, such is the Blakian legend.

There have been many interpretations of Blake, each adding one more layer to his complex character; some fresh facet in his methods of work. This is one of the advantages in the Sexton Blake saga - one never arrives at the point of saying with any completeness of knowledge that 'We know the man': always there is some new talent emerging. There he was, small print notwithstanding, a very tangible factor in our lives; to be read and studied. This does not imply discipleship. I was never a fully dedicated follower of the Blakian adventures but felt bound to keep somewhere near the mainstream of events in that dark world in which so much of his work was accomplished.

It always appeared to me (possibly erroneously) that the majority of the stories lacked sunshine and light. It could be that crime is best planned and executed in darkness and shadows. It always seemed to be foggy and gloomy when Blake was on the trail. Perhaps I made - and still make - too great a distinction between the Blakian atmosphere and the breezy sunlight and exhilarating mood of the *Magnet* and the *Gem* stories. Charles Hamilton frequently alluded to the weather in setting a scene. Contrast for instance the freshness of a bright summer day on Courtfield Common or along the River Sark and the Greyfriars fellows disporting themselves in festive mood, with the foggy dampness of the Embankment on a dismal wet night, so very often the setting of the *Union Jack* crimes: the swiftly and silently running Thames then projected a menace all its own, and the glistening lamplight seemed only to emphasise more deeply the surrounding darkness.

This is Blake's world; this the milieu in which the amiable Tinker thrives. The night seems pregnant with possibilities. It is very unlikely that the 'Guv'nor' will be left for long relaxing in his dressing gown and perusing the evening papers by the fire.

"Can I come in now, Guv'nor, or am I de tropp?"

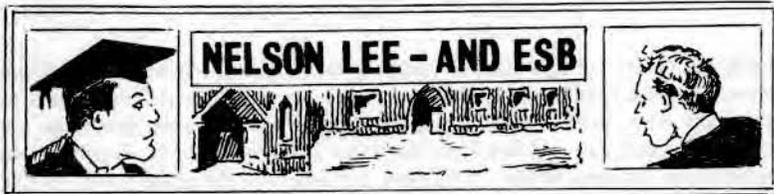
"You usually are de tropp," rejoined the detective, "but you can come in anyway. And, incidentally, the 'p' in 'tropp' is silent as in 'phthisis'".

At any moment Mrs Bardell will appear with the announcement that there is a stranger at the door seeking admittance: "He says it's important sir, and he looks very odd". The scene is being set for the total ruination of Blake's quiet evening, for we know that soon the hunt will be on once more.

The little gas-lit newsagents on the corner appeared to have been the usual locale for the purchase of Sexton Blake adventures alongside myriad other weekly and monthly journals. Sherlock Holmes was usually to be found in the 'pukka' bookshops of the town centre. It was perhaps a case of water finding its own level. Blake reigned supreme over a vast section of young - and not so young - readers from an impressionable period of their lives - while Holmes, his rival in popularity, has never ceased to appeal to the erudite. There existed a very real social divide between the two great detectives which has now - happily - ceased to be of any importance. It may have been connected to the fact that Blake was presented by a wide range of authors covering a wide spectrum of literary ability, whereas Holmes remained the brainchild of one writer, who, strangely enough, may not have been wholly happy with or fond of his creation.



It helps the C.D. if you advertise your 'wants' and 'for sale' items in it. (4p per word, or displayed ads. at £20 full-page, £10 half-page and £5 quarter-page.)



YOUNG ERN OF ST. FRANK'S

by Ray Hopkins

It is somewhat startling for Bob Christine and Co. of the College House to discover that their new Housemaster, Mr. Smale Foxe, is like no other. He invites them, together with Ernest Lawrence, a recent new boy, to accompany him to Bannington for an 'afternoon out'. They are dismayed but unable to persuade him that they have more boyish things in mind to enjoy on their half holiday. He insists on their going with him and his first shock is to offer them cigarettes when they travel in a smoking compartment on the train. Christine refuses, telling the master they think it a rotten habit for boys.

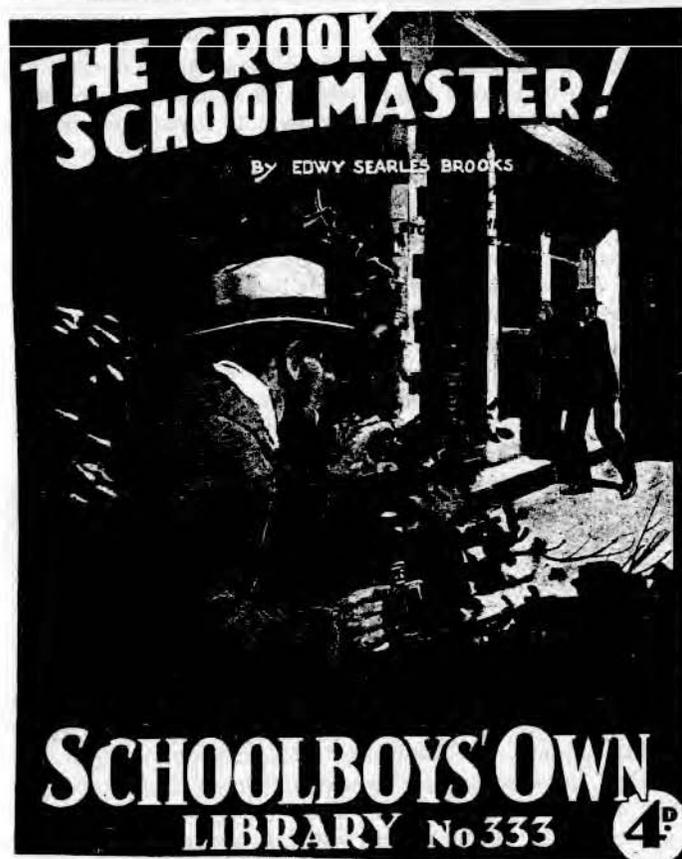
Mr. Smale Foxe's next little treat for the juniors is to invite them to accompany him into the saloon bar of the 'Fox and Hounds'. Christine feels compelled to tell the new Housemaster that all public houses are out of bounds for St. Frank's juniors and such visits would result in expulsion, but the master says they are quite safe with him and they may come and have a drink with him. He suggests whiskey and soda - a double for himself! He suggests the same for them, certainly not lemonade which is gassy and unpleasant. But Christine, Talmadge, Yorke and Lawrence insist on the latter. By this time they wonder what Mr. Smale Foxe is at in suggesting such unorthodox 'treats' for schoolboys.

A tent erected in a field is the Housemaster's next objective. It is a boxing-booth run by a low type of ex-pugilist. Again the boys object as the type of brutish boxing they would be subjected to would not be approved of or indeed allowed by the Headmaster. Jake Gubbin, the owner of the boxing booth, urges them all to go inside - "Only a tanner a time" - and see his new boy 'Lightning Left Ned' in action. He's a lightweight and will, says Mr. Gubbin, "in a couple of years be the champion of England!"

Gubbin invites anyone in the audience to win twenty quid by boxing Ned out in eight rounds. He even invites Smale Foxe or any of the boys to have a go and win some money. Ned takes a dislike to the St. Frank's juniors and says he might as well chuck all four of them out for all the good they are as an audience. Christine jumps up and says they'll quickly deal with him if he tries anything on. Ned blusters - four against one - just their sort. Then, to the surprise of all, including the other juniors, Lawrence offers to box the belligerent Ned, although he looks far too frail and boylike to tackle this. Smale Foxe persuades Lawrence to sit down and Gubbin hastily starts the bouts to quieten the audience who are mainly of the same calibre as the brutish boxer and his boss.

This unpleasant altercation with Ned has given Lawrence an idea. He was contracted to attend St. Frank's as a new boy by his father who, after a successful career as a professional boxer, had bought a large ironmonger store in Kensington which had prospered so that he had been able to afford to send his son to St. Frank's. Now, however, his bank has failed and Mr. Lawrence has lost everything. The new boy, thinking of the twenty pound offer to out-box Ned, and how much his father could use that little extra if introduced into the family coffers, returns later that evening to Jake Gubbins' boxing booth. There, attired in different clothes and wearing a black, silk mask, he accepts the challenge to beat Lightning Ned in eight rounds. Because he has been expertly schooled in fisticuffs by his father, Lawrence knocks out the big, burly Ned in well under eight rounds, his expert footwork and scientific punches showing up Ned's lack of finesse, and his non-skill of slogging blows which never find their mark.

Outside the booth and in a hurry to return to St. Frank's, Lawrence is accosted by a boxing promoter from Helmford, a gentleman, not a rough, who tells him he had a match lined up the following week, a lightweight for which his own boxer, due to an accident, will be unable to participate. "I never dreamed that I should see such an exhibition," says the Helmford man, Norman Rook. "You have a mastery of the game which is positively



staggering." Mr. Rook assures Lawrence that he will be able to defeat the opposing champion easily and it will mean thirty pounds. He also promises a handsome present which will be even larger than the purse, this because of a private bet he has on the match. He won't, however, be able to wear his black mask, but the boy boxer feels there is little likelihood of anyone being there from St. Frank's. Lawrence, flushed with success and knowing that boxing blood is running through his veins, is thrilled that he will have another opportunity to help out his father financially.

In the gloom of the Triangle he drops over the wall of St. Frank's, and is startled

to discover that Smale Foxe is waiting for him. He has returned from the boxing booth, sure that the masked boxer is standing before him. Knowing that the junior has his winnings in his pocket, he demands half of it. Refusal to comply will mean expulsion because the Headmaster will be told of the boy's transgression instantly. Lawrence realises he is in the clutches of a ruthless blackguard and a blackmailer, incredible traits in a man who has the responsible position of a Housemaster at St. Frank's!

After the eulogies from Norman Rook, Lawrence is re-named 'Young Ern from London' for the bout at the Helmford Ring Pavilion, and urged on by the confidence the promoter has shown in him, and by the large sum he will be able to send to his father. He will not be able to identify this money as coming from himself, of course (his father wants him to become a gentleman, not a professional boxer). Lawrence finds the stamina to beat

the challenged lightweight Jimmy Rhodes, and returns to St. Frank's with eighty pounds in currency notes, gladly paid to him by Mr. Rook. But shocks are to follow.

Fullwood and Co. have been talked into purchasing 10/6d. tickets for the balcony at the Ring Pavilion by a bookmaker friend who has just lost seven pounds playing cards with them. As they had bet heavily on Rhodes winning the match, they turn their hatred upon Young Ern, whom they incredulously recognise as Ernest Lawrence, by typing out an unsigned letter to Dr. Stafford, the St. Frank's Headmaster, to get their revenge. They have left the Pavilion long before Lawrence, who is worn out and takes some time to tidy himself up, so they catch an earlier train which gets them to St. Frank's before him. Lawrence no sooner returns for a rest in his study than he is called by the pageboy to report to the Head instantly!

Dr. Stafford shows him the anonymous missive, forbids him to utter a word and sends him to the punishment room. He is to be expelled on the following morning. The injuries to his face, the Head tells him, reveal that the contents of the letter are the exact truth. So the unhappy boy is unable to tell him that he is only performing this forbidden action in order to help his destitute father!

Mr. Smale Foxe, as Lawrence's Housemaster, is sent for and astounds both Dr. Stafford and the junior by stating that he cannot have been boxing at Helmford as he spent the time with his Housemaster at Caistowe, his facial injuries being caused by his attempting to beat off a ruffian who was ill-treating a dog. The ruffian had turned on the junior with the results which can be seen on his face.

The Head apologises to the junior for this supposed miscarriage of justice and, back in the College house, Smale Foxe faces the boy and demands thirty-five pounds for his rescue. Lawrence refuses to accede to another blackmail demand and says that if the master goes back to the Head Lawrence will denounce him as a blackmailer, and as an unscrupulous liar in the process. What can this travesty of a schoolmaster be up to?

At a secret meeting with Mr. Rook in an old barn in the paddock behind the Head's garden, Lawrence is told by the promoter that he has a third match lined up for him at Helmford on the following Wednesday. This will guarantee him one hundred pounds, if he wins, for a twenty-round contest with Mike Connor, a young Irish-American lightweight of some repute. Mr. Rook urges Lawrence to do as much training as he can as this will be a more difficult contest than the previous one. Lawrence, thinking of another windfall for his father, agrees.

Smale Foxe, who has taken to shadowing Lawrence whenever he leaves the College House in an effort to keep apprised of his boxing plans, has overheard everything and confronts the boy after Mr. Rook has left. He demands fifty pounds of Lawrence's winnings, and the junior again vehemently refuses to comply. This astonishing conversation is overheard by Handforth and Co. Observing that the Housemaster was following the junior they had decided (or rather, Handforth had so decided, his detective instincts being strongly aroused) to fathom out this mystery. The fact that Lawrence is evidently a prize-fighter and being blackmailed by his Housemaster is a shock to the Ancient House juniors who go to Nipper to decide what to do about these incredible events. To Nipper and Co., as well as Christine and Co. of the College House, Lawrence reveals the only reason that had started him boxing in public, and the fact that all his winnings have been sent to his father anonymously. They decide to back up Lawrence, help him with his training, and figure out a way to intercede with Smale Foxe if he attempts, as he has threatened, to expose the boy boxer to Dr. Stafford on the night of the next bout.

The Headmaster receives another anonymous letter telling him that Lawrence is a professional boxer going under the name of Young Ern, and that he can be caught in the act next Wednesday at Helmford in a match with Mike Connor. Dr. Stafford is inclined to disbelieve this unsigned report but, in order to make sure, assigns Smale Foxe and Mr. Padgett, Master of the Fifth Form, to visit the Ring Pavilion together. The two masters leave for Helmford in the Head's car but their journey is interrupted by a youthful country yokel who implores them to come to an adjacent farmhouse where an old lady has fallen down a flight of steps into the cellar. Smale Foxe is all for driving on, but Mr. Padgett insists they stop briefly and then send a doctor from the next village. Once inside a poorly-lit building they take to be the farmhouse, the rustic youth indicates an open door and cautions them to be careful of the steps going down. As they get halfway down, the door is slammed behind them, two bolts are shot home and a key is turned in the lock.

Smale Foxe assures Mr. Padgett, who is afraid they have been imprisoned in order to be robbed and their car stolen, that they are quite safe, as is the car, and that this has just been a ruse by friends of Lawrence to stop them going to Helmford!

And he is quite right, of course; the whole plot was engineered by Nipper and Christine and their Co.s, and in fact Archie Pitt had played the part of the country yokel; Nipper meanwhile was supplying a foolproof alibi, impersonating Lawrence, and letting himself be seen with Yorke of the College House around the dimness of the Triangle. With the aid of some makeup and by mimicking Lawrence's voice, and having his similarly coloured fair hair combed in the style of Lawrence, it was even possible for him to have a short conversation with the Head himself. Dr. Stafford, wishing to make doubly sure that Lawrence was not just on view at St. Frank's because the fight at Helmford had been cancelled, phones the Ring Pavilion and he is assured that Mike Connor and Young Ern are at that moment still battling it out. So, as far as the Head is concerned, Young Ern and Lawrence are two totally different persons!

Ernest Lawrence, as Young Ern, knocks out Mike Connor in the sixth round, Mike having lost his nerve and temper when he realises the young lad facing him has more science than he has. This was the junior's most difficult fight but he has been able to keep his face from becoming marked and returns to St. Frank's with over one hundred pounds to send his father.

The two imprisoned masters find that the bolted and locked door has been unsecured (Pitt has done his work very quietly) and race out to the car and find the carburettor interfered with and the tyres all deflated, so they are some time getting back to the school. When they burst in on the Head and accuse Lawrence of engineering their kidnap, Dr. Stafford is pleased to inform them that this was quite impossible for he was speaking to Lawrence himself in the Triangle at the time they were imprisoned in the cellar. The junior could not, therefore, have been fighting in Helmford under the name of Young Ern either! (To be concluded)

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BOOK REVIEW

by Brian Doyle

"90 GLORIOUS YEARS: Eric Fayne and 'The Gem' and 'The Magnet',

Compiled by John Wernham and Mary Cadogan. Published by the Museum Press.

This is a remarkable book of a remarkable series which appeared originally in the pages of the *Collectors' Digest* from April 1957 onwards for very many years. At the same time it is a tangible tribute to a remarkable man - the late Eric Fayne, who so sadly died earlier this year.

'Let's Be Controversial!' was the title of the series and it comprised a monthly article dealing with many different aspects of the writings of Charles Hamilton, discussing mainly his Greyfriars stories, written as 'Frank Richards' in *The Magnet* and his St. Jim's tales, written as 'Martin Clifford' in *The Gem*. Eric Fayne, who wrote them all, ended each article with the words "It's just my point of view. What's yours?" thus inviting readers to write in with their comments and reactions; these appeared the following month as 'Controversial Echoes' and were often as long as the original article.

How *Collectors' Digest* readers - a stimulating, eloquent and knowledgeable bunch - loved to pen their views and comments, both agreeing and disagreeing with Eric's opinions, often strongly, sometimes amusingly, frequently - and appropriately - controversially. But it was all civilised, good-humoured stuff, as enjoyable to read as it had been for their contributors to write, and nobody got huffy, or bad-tempered, or arrogant, or threatened to cancel their subscriptions to the magazine (so far as I know, anyway). It was absorbing literary discussion, even light-hearted scholarship, of the best kind - 'table-talk' or after-dinner debate - conducted among friends and fellow-enthusiasts, and was, for around 30 years, one of the delightful highlights (in a magazine consisting almost entirely of 'highlights!') of the *Collectors' Digest* which, of course, Eric edited for so long.

Now, in this enchanting and delectable volume, John Wernham and Mary Cadogan (who have both contributed so much to our hobby over the years) have collected the first 62 of the 'Let's Be Controversial!' columns, together with their 'Echoes', and many marvellous illustrations, and what a fine feast they make. What a cornucopia of controversies! What an ecstasy of echoes!

The topics range from Vernon-Smith to D'Arcy to Bunter to The Rio Kid; from St. Sam's to the Girls of Cliff House; from Rookwood to Hamilton's Schoolmasters; from 'Should we Bind our Papers?' to 'Was Hamilton anti-American?'; from Illustrators to 'Should the Schoolboy Characters Have Grown Up?'; from 'What were best, the School series or the Holiday series?' to 'Was there Too Much Bunter?'. And many more.

One of the most fascinating and amusing is No. 33, 'Chumley for Short', in which Eric discusses the names of various characters and how they are, or should be, pronounced. Should Quelch rhyme with Belch or Welsh, for instance. Is Kerr Carr or Cur? And what about His Lordship, Mauleverer? Is it Mer-levver-er or Mauly-Vera, or even Mer-levver-ay? I have always favoured Maul-eever-er myself, which is different again, but what do I know? And how about Lefevre or Lowther or Ogilvy? Presumably we all know, as Eric points out, that Cholmondeley is Chumley and Marjoriebanks is Marshbanks; but does that mean that the lovely Marjorie Hazeldene was really Marshazeden? Bob Cherie would have a fit! Eric also remarks that Ponsonby is called Pon-sun-bee by most of us, when it should probably and correctly be Punsby; and that I didn't know!

Another excellent 'Controversial' is 'Did the *Magnet* Decline and Fall (in its final year or so)?' Much food for thought and discussion here. Being a very late-comer to the paper, I don't believe that it did. But it probably depends on just when you started to read, and love, *The Magnet*. And maybe on other things too. You see, I've already started a discussion, or an 'Echo' - or rather Eric has (together with Roger Jenkins, who originally posed the question in an article of his own).



90

GLORIOUS YEARS



ERIC FAYNE

and

THE GEM and THE MAGNET



Roger Jenkins, by the way, is probably the most prolific contributor to the 'Echoes' - and what a brilliant writer on Charles Hamilton he was - and, thankfully, still is! Roger was one of Eric's closest and oldest friends (fellow-schoolmasters too and like-minded Old Boys' Book enthusiasts) and between them they were the fount of most Hamiltonian knowledge and expertise. Now that Eric has gone, Roger retains the crown and long may he continue to write on the work of Charles Hamilton for our erudition and enjoyment.

Other memorable 'Controversies' spotlight 'Clichés', 'Substitute Writers', 'Hard-cover School Stories Compared with Hamilton's', 'The Christmas Series', 'The Mr. Lamb Series' (a personal favourite of mine) and 'The Rio Kid' (who gets a whole 8-page section, including the reproduction of a story).

As a bonus there are four letters from Frank Richards himself, commenting on various topics. In one of them, he comments: "Memory is the continuity of life. So far from ageing us, it keeps us young." Now there's a wonderful remark. And it's so relevant to all us readers and collectors and admirers of the old papers and magazines. I think it's rather a wise and, indeed, memorable, thing to say. Don't you?

In another of his reprinted letters, Frank Richards recalls: "I have written Greyfriars stories as short as 2,000 words and as long as 45,000 words. The short ones did not contain a word too few, or the long ones a word too many." More fascinating food for thought

90 Glorious Years (the title refers, of course, to Eric Fayne's 92 'glorious years'!) also has an informative Introduction by John Wernham and Mary Cadogan (the *Collectors' Digest's* worthy editor) and lovely Tributes to Eric by Una Hamilton Wright and Bob Whiter. It's a large volume, roughly the same page-size as a *Collectors' Digest Annual*, has almost 200 pages and more than 130 gorgeous illustrations, which are a constant delight, including reproductions of original drawings, covers and portraits from *The Gem*, *The Magnet* and other papers and books. The cover alone (designed by Alex Cadogan) is itself worth the price of admission, depicting a smiling Eric Fayne, flanked by D'Arcy and Bunter. The portrait of the great Frank Richards/Charles Hamilton, by C.H. Chapman (done in 1954) on the page preceding the title-page, is a rare treat and well worthy of framing. And the final photograph, at the end of the book, of Eric, standing amongst his rose-garden, is both enchanting and touching.

The only small suggestion I would make is that each of the 'Controversies' might well have been dated at the end.

The Compilers say in their Introduction that they hope to publish a further collection of 'Let's Be Controversials' sometime in the future. The sooner the better, please! Indeed, there must surely be a wealth of fine material in the 51 years issues of the *Collectors Digest* that would bear reprinting in this way, as this superb and enjoyable volume proves.

As Eric Fayne used to say: "It's just my point of view. What's yours?"

90 Glorious Years costs £15.00, including post and packing, and is available from me. (An order form is enclosed in this issue of the C.D.)

Mary Cadogan

WANTED: The Hornby Book of Trains, also any Hornby or Meccano literature, badges etc. Bob Bligh, 55 Arundel Avenue, Hazel Grove, Cheshire SK7 5LD.
Telephone: 0161-483-7627.

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HEROES AND HEROINES

by Martin Waters

I am greatly enjoying the series on 'Yesterday's Heroes' by Brian Doyle. These articles caused me to reflect on those characters which had given me pleasure over the years. I think that some of my choices will be rather unusual, but I hope that they may amuse some of our readers.

As a child I had the usual juvenile heroes, though I must admit a sneaking feeling of regret for the Sheriff of Nottingham in the numerous 'Robin Hood' epics published in the 1940s. He was, after all, the representative of law and order in the Nottingham district, and in my youthful innocence I did not realise that senior public officials can be greedy and corrupt.

In the early 1950s, I first discovered the novels by the late C.S. Forrester which chronicle the adventures of Captain Horatio Hornblower of the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic Wars. Hornblower himself is a fascinating character, but the person in the novels who always aroused my attention was Hornblower's principal subordinate - Lieutenant William Bush. Bush was a fairly typical type of supporting character, he was tough, brave, highly efficient in his duties and utterly dependable. He was however rather lacking in imagination and thus fulfilled a supporting role in many of the stories. During the early 1950s, Hollywood produced a film of Hornblower's adventures. The leading role was played by Gregory Peck, and there could not have been a better choice. However Bush was played by the Canadian actor Robert Beatty, whom I consider to be most unsuited to the role, despite a competent attempt at Bush's Sussex accent. Mr. Beatty always brought a touch of humour to the characters that he played, and I'm afraid that William Bush was rather lacking in humour. Robert Beatty also did not seem 'tough' enough to represent the highly capable Lieut. Bush.



C. Aubrey Smith, Ronald Colman and David Niven in David O. Selznick's film of *The Prisoner of Zenda*.

While we are in the 1950s, let me add a word of praise for Mr. Quelch as portrayed on the television screen by the late Kynaston Reeves. I have always greatly admired Mr. Quelch and I consider that Mr. Reeves' portrayal of him was masterly. Quelch may have been a stern master, but he was utterly fair and totally reliable: even as a schoolboy I admired him greatly.

Towards the end of the 1950s I first encountered the epic 'The Prisoner of Zenda', in the form of the pre-war film starring Robert

Colman. Later I read both the 'Prisoner' and the sequel 'Rupert of Hentzau' in book form, together with watching various film and TV versions of the stories.

Like many other readers of the C.D. I have always admired the character of Rudolph Rassendyll. He was brave, honest and kindly. However, like many characters of this type, he was perhaps a bit too good to be true. In one of the stories he has the Count of Hentzau at his mercy, and yet he gives the Count a sword and allows him to defend himself. The correct way to deal with murderous villains like Hentzau is to hand them over to the judicial authorities and a subsequent appointment with the hangman. This may seem heavy-handed but, in this way, the possible loss of innocent lives in the future may be avoided. However story-book heroes do not behave like this.

For me the real hero of these books is the shrewd and capable Col. Sapt. In both the books the Colonel is responsible for urging Rassendyll to take the King's place. Sapt is essentially the 'man of duty': he is tough, brave, intelligent and, at times, ruthless. I seem to remember reading a description of Sapt as a 'decent man, but one who was not over-concerned with scruple' - "We will storm the castle, Mr. Rassendyll, and we shall leave no survivors of the garrison to tell the story".

For more years than I care to remember I have been interested in Frederick the Great. I am not sure how this interest first arose. Nowadays there is intense interest in every aspect of German military history, and numerous books are available on every possible variation on this theme from the Teutonic Knights to the late East German People's Army. Thirty years ago there was little published data, and it was necessary to explore old books published during the last century and to wade through Carlyle's epic biography - heavy going but worthwhile. The character of Frederick defies logical explanation and he has been so distorted by legend that it is frankly impossible to say what he was really like. In consequence, I was drawn to his various subordinates - Schwerin, Winterfeldt, Ziethen, Mollerndorf, Saldern, Ferdinand of Brunswick, James Keith (a Scotsman) and many others. These men were highly capable, they are some of the foremost names in military history, but most of them were attractive as men, being honest and decent. Only Heinrich Foqué, a French Huguenot, was a rather unpleasant man.

However, one man among all the generals who served 'Old Fritz' appealed to me more than the others. This was Frederick William von Seydlitz, the 'horsed hurricane' and probably the finest leader of men in eighteenth century Prussia.

Seydlitz was not only a gifted commander with a simple 'up and at 'em' type of leadership, who 'pulled the chestnuts out of the fire' on a number of occasions, but he was popular with his contemporaries and well liked by his men. He was also considerate to his enemies, and in a rather cynical age he could be truly described as 'chivalrous'. As a youth I was puzzled by the amount of time that Seydlitz spent on 'sick leave' and the fact that he was absent from a number of key battles.

More recent books are much more frank in their treatment of past heroes. Seydlitz was a heavy drinker and a womanizer. He suffered from a venereal infection which often laid him low. He died of a stroke while in his fifties brought on by sexual over-indulgence. I'm afraid that this gifted military leader no longer commands the admiration in my personal gallery that he used to do.



Friedrich Wilhelm von Seydlitz

So far in these travels through fact and fiction we have not encountered many ladies, let us therefore set the matter right. Like many schoolboys of the 1950s, I was a keen reader of the adventures of the 'Silent Three' while I delivered copies of *School Friend* in the course of my paper round. I suppose that my interest was deeper than many other readers', and was aroused by some of the supporting characters in the stories. By far the most interesting of these was Miss Ada Garfield, the stout headmistress who features in some of the stories. In the various schoolgirl stories illustrated by Evelyn Flinders, the tougher type of schoolmistress is depicted as tall, bespectacled and gaunt looking, very much on the lines of Miss Bullivant. More kindly types of mistress are usually depicted as being of average height, though still with spectacles - I later realised that these characters were based on Miss Flinders herself. However, Miss Garfield was totally different, she was very stout, and distinctly granny-like in her appearance. I have never encountered another mistress like Miss Garfield in popular fiction.

There is an interesting twist to this story. Many years later - a widower in middle age - I married a lady who not only looked somewhat like Miss Garfield, but was also a fan of the 'Silent Three'. Sometimes it can be a very small world.



I think that I must be rather fond of rather well-built ladies. I have always admired the character 'Ivy' played by the actress Jane Freeman, who runs the café in the TV series 'Last of the Summer Wine'. I know the West Riding area well - there used to be a most attractive railway branch line in the Holme Valley where the TV series is made. (In our version of the adventures of the 'Silent Three', Betty, Joan and Peggy spend their sixth form days in the district, and the café run by Ivy and her husband Sid features in our stories. On more than one occasion Compo, Clegg, Foggy and other characters from the series find their way into these.)

There are many other characters that I could mention. I have always admired the character 'Henry Morcar' from the late Phyllis Bentley's novels set in the Yorkshire textile trade. I am not a film fan but I have always admired many of the characters played by the late John Wayne. By far the best of his films were the Civil War epic 'The Horse Soldiers' (closely based on fact) and the well known 'Cavalry Trilogy' of 'Yellow Ribbon', 'Rio Grande' and 'Fort Apache'. The character of Nathan Brittles, a veteran officer on the verge of retirement, is perhaps John Wayne's finest role. His performance in higher rank in the other two films is also outstanding and deeply reflective. The only fault with these films is their totally inaccurate description of the dress and equipment of US soldiers of the 1870s. The pre-war Errol Flynn version of Custer's adventures is much more accurate in this respect.

Let us end with a character that I believe is popular with many other readers of this magazine - I refer to Ellis Peters' Brother Cadfael, the monk-cum-detective in the reign of King Stephen in the 12th century. Oddly enough my wife and I were introduced to these novels by Evelyn Flinders, who was a great admirer of the stories.

Although Cadfael is a monk in a Benedictine Abbey, he has seen much of the world, he has been a soldier and he has fathered a child. He is thus much more at home in the world beyond the abbey gates than most of the brethren. Cadfael tends the abbey's herb garden and he mixes the various medicines and ointments from its herbs. He is a kind of 'forensic pathologist', to use a modern term. He carefully examines bodies and can usually trace the actual cause of death. The stories are rather bloodthirsty, but unlike many modern novels the violence never becomes sickening. Cadfael is shrewd and modest. He tolerates bullying superiors, confident that he has a friend in high places who will aid him in his investigations. The stories have a totally authentic background and are very believable.

THE FILE ON VERNON-SMITH

by Margery Woods

Part 8 The Making of a Character (Conclusion)

The Bounder graced the Christmas number of the *Magnet* in 1925 in what must surely have been the most unseasonable tale ever to occupy the star week of any magazine's calendar. Once again we find Smithy (at his most saintly!), his character blackened unjustly, his father ruined, adrift in London and determined not to be a burden on his father. He can find no work, he has bestowed most of his valuables on the lads before leaving, after a night in a doss house he has to sell his expensive clothing in part exchange for some appalling cast-off garments to get enough money to buy food. He loses the money, except for sixpence, through a torn pocket, and he ends up at that final refuge of London's lost and despairing derelicts, a bench on the Embankment with the dark river murmuring its insidious invitation. There he befriends a homeless waif and spends his last coin on food and a drink to share with the boy, a pickpocket who rewards his kindness by planting a stolen watch in his pocket - presumably not the one with the hole in it.

One can almost hear the violins throbbing over at Fleetway House as Smithy is arrested, charged, found guilty and sentenced to three years at Borstal. Meanwhile, back at the ranch, Harry and the chums still love their Smithy (another change of heart!) and staunchly believe in his innocence. After the newspaper report and the photograph of one William Smith has shaken Greyfriars to its very foundations Tom Redwing is frantic, unable to sleep, and is allowed to accompany Dr. Locke to London to see the Bounder at the prison where he is being held pending his transfer to Borstal and hear his account of what had happened. With Dr. Locke playing Watson to Tom's Holmes, schoolboy and headmaster set out in search of the boy pickpocket, whom they trace immediately and who is filled with remorse at what he has done.

There are tears all round in this offering, even the Head suffering from moist eyes (an affliction Smithy seems to cause quite often!), until the formalities are over and Smithy is free. Mr. Vernon-Smith has recouped part of his fortune, enough to lay on a great celebration party at Greyfriars when Smith returns to his now loving school. Quite a Christmas outing! One can only surmise that editorial policy had decided on a Dickensian theme of morality to encourage the readers to remember those worse off themselves on Christmas morning.

Incidentally, many years later in a post-war annual, *Tom Merry's Own* 1949, we find Smith riding the broken bounds trail yet again and meeting a good Samaritan in the person of Jack Free, who is on the tramp in search of work. Jack refuses Smithy's offer of a fiver and Smithy says he'd probably have done the same, at least he thinks so but has never been on his uppers. Oh, but he has! Several times! Happy memories?

Today, Greyfriars would probably include a counsellor within its staff, with a link to Courtfield's social services. In moments of leisure, imagination may be pleasantly exercised by visualising the reactions of the Bounder to a counselling session intended to sort out this poor misunderstood lad's behavioural problems. Even more mind-bending would be surmise of the effect on the unfortunate counsellor landed with the task. Smith's

sharp brain and eloquence would probably run rings round all but the most skilled of social workers. Future success as a Q.C. would seem quite possible - if he'd learned to control that temper!

Another link in assessment of the Bounder's character could date back to childhood. It is safe to assume he was an only child, and only children, unless mollycoddled beyond all redemption, tend to become masters of their fate very early in life - they have little other option except that of self-reliance. While siblings will squabble among themselves, if

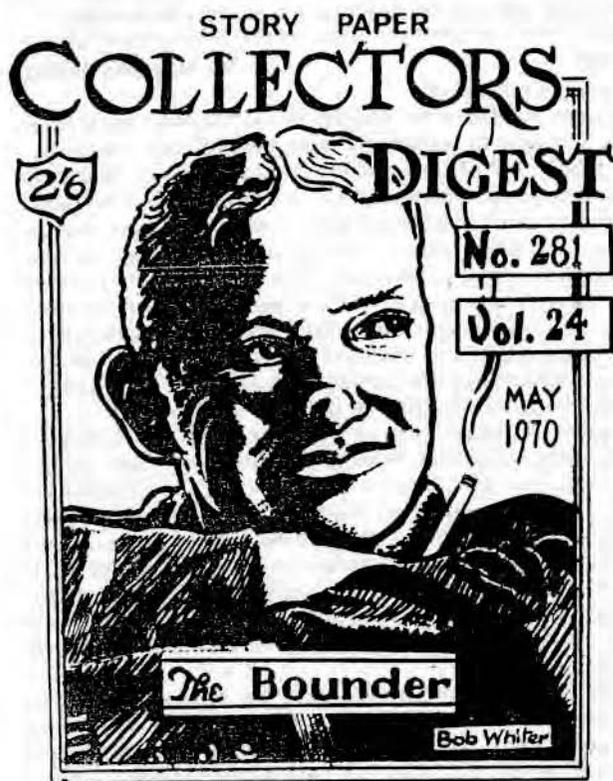
threatened they will present a united front. The only child has to fight its own battles and make its own decisions. This aspect, coupled with the decadence of too liberal a supply of wealth, could have had much to do with the Bounder's attitude towards discipline. And did he lack feminine caring during his very early years? A maternal caring to balance the hardness and ruthlessness his father would instil in him. One tiny hint of this occurs in one of the many expulsion stories coupled with being disowned and disinherited. (1361):

'...Vernon-Smith could not wholly realise it. When he left Greyfriars on the morrow, it would not be to go home. His father's home was no longer his. If he had had a mother ---'

One of the rare emotional giveaways the Bounder was ever allowed. For somewhere along his early path Smithy was conditioned, knowingly or otherwise, not to show compassion, emotion or affection, nor ever to expect

sympathy. He had learned to sneer at these human feelings as though they were weaknesses of which to be ashamed. And of course the stiff upper lip syndrome was still all powerful at that time.

But his courage was inborn. While he would never stand by and allow wanton cruelty to animals he was quite prepared to inflict damage on a human who crossed him, and he would risk his own life without hesitation. If life-saving awards were presented for his various efforts in this line they would make quite a display on the study walls. He saved Bunter from freezing and drowning under ice (why?); he dived from a high cliff into a treacherous sea to rescue Hazeldene; he hauled the undeserving Ponsoy up a cliff; he



This cover picture by Bob Whiter from a long-ago C.D. surely captures the essence of Vernon-Smith's character.

saved Skinner when that weedy youth got stuck trying to climb the ivy to the dorm window; and he saved Quelch's life on at least three occasions, twice in quite spectacular fashion, from the ruined tower and from the school roof after Quelch had scaled a chimney to escape from the punishment room. That Smithy himself had locked his form master in the punny in the first place was a mere detail! For how could Smithy be expected to foresee that a venerable gentleman of Mr Quelch's uncertain years would contrive to escape up the chimney and get himself stuck on the roof?

The Bounder's talents were many, although the arts seemed to have passed him by, apart from a visit to the opera once when Ponsonby's appalling manners should have resulted in the whole party being thrown out. But, given a sudden yen for anything, Smithy could doubtless achieve success in it. His reactions were pretty quick, too. A penchant for Eau de Cologne at fifteen bob a bottle once stood him in good stead when Wharton dived into Study 4 to warn him that Quelch was on the warpath. Of course Smithy was smoking, but he instantly smashed the bottle of cologne to replace one pungent odour with another. One more acceptable - but only just!

How much of Wharton's motivation at the times he helped Smithy out of trouble was prompted by genuine care for the Bounder or concern for his own squeaky-clean form captain reputation? One would like to think it was the former. *The Last Straw* (489) summarises quite a lot of the Bounder's deepset character and the conflicts that warred within him as well with Wharton and his form mates. A broad spectrum of characters, including Marjorie Hazeldene, enact this story, which is a compelling blend of emotion, hidden chivalry, misunderstanding and sheer physical warfare. When Smithy and Wharton are booked to fight neither wants to. The Bounder is not really sure why he should feel like this - he has warred often enough with Wharton - but he is determined not to be bulldozed into it by the Remove, even though he is quite ready to take on all other challengers. Eventually, through the treachery of Peter Hazeldene, the root of most of the trouble, the Bounder and Wharton do fight, and bitterly.

Fiction at the time of this story (1917) still held traces of the Victorian melodramatic style and sentiment still died hard. It was not until the twenties that fiction became much racier and slicker. Whatever their time of authorship, however, writers of commercial fiction have to conform to the style of the time if they want to find a market and make a living. But somehow Frank Richards succeeded in retaining the intensity of emotional conflict without resorting to too much melodrama, and adult readers have to realise that his stories do not read simply as jolly tales of schoolboy pranks, rivalries and adventure of the cliff-hanging variety. Certainly these ingredients, penned with his usual wit and style of construction, are present in abundance but they layer the turbulent adolescent emotion and bitterness which seethes under the surfaces of his stories in a way very few authors succeed in conveying. Often understated and not as sentimental as some would claim when reading with late twentieth century eyes. For instance, who would fault the sensitively written and compassionate scene the Bounder is allowed with Marjorie Hazeldene, for once free of either Bunter or some equally unwelcome interloper crashing in? It conveys a lot without actually saying it all, a writing gift not all authors possess. The tough might say 'soft' but remember that for every reader of great intellectual attainment (with expectation of quality to match) there are many hundreds no less worthy who respond to the age-old tug at the heartstrings. Richards would be well aware of what appealed to his countless readers and in his Bounder stories he did not fail them.

On the broad Greyfriars canvas many compelling characters stand out: the one and only Bunter, the quiet and elegant Mauly, the Famous Five and their true-blue captain, the idiotic but lovable Coker, even the cads and the kids as well as the masters and many guest players, but of them all the most magnetic is the Bounder, and the many faceted structure of

his character shown as the three principal influences in his school life brought out the best where some believed it did not exist.

Tom Redwing, who probably understood the Bounder better than anyone, saw past the boastful, ill-tempered facade to the hidden vulnerability beneath and had the empathy to forgive. Also, Tom had saved the Bounder's life, forging the legendary silver link between them whether they wanted it or not, or knew nothing of the strange old belief that gives the life of the saved into the care of the saver. Certainly Smithy was intensely loyal to Tom, despite their odd quarrels, and wouldn't allow anyone, no matter whom, ever to harm his closest friend.

Then Marjorie Hazeldene, whom he came to respect and care for, whose good opinion mattered more to him than anyone's as she brought out his protective instincts and gave him her trust as well as her friendship.

Lastly, Harry Wharton and the great friendship that never happened. But it was there, subtle, tenuous and skilfully drawn despite their early feuds. Those two would always haul each other out of danger when crises threatened, even as they exchanged insults in the process. Oddly, the one time they became buddies in Bounder style away from the school was the time they were most ill at ease together during that trip to the continent during Harry's downfall. With the Bounder on the rampage Wharton was out of character and they both knew it.

But whether on the rampage himself or endeavouring to reform, the Bounder was a compelling evocation of a very human person in whom good and bad perforce co-exist. He had guts and style, and an unforgettable personality - even without lip service to that much overworked word of today, charisma. Tho' he certainly possessed that in abundance.

A staunch friend - or implacable enemy.

Sinner, even saint.

Angel or devil . . .

The Bounder could be all these to all men, exactly as he chose. Whether his future would take him soaring to the heights or down to the dregs we shall never know. Frank Richards was considered by some to be past his best by the thirties, but many years later, in one of the postwar Bunter books, he gave us an insight into what the Bounder's dregs might be. The later chapters of the inaptly titled *Billy Bunter's Beanfeast* brought a powerful glimpse of his greatest character in the grip of gambling fever. Those final chapters could have come from any intense adult novel, so vividly did they take the reader right to the brink of that deadly path. Certainly they haunted this reader for many a day. But, whatever his future may hold, the Bounder will live on in the hearts of Greyfriars lovers as long as a copy of *The Magnet* lies on a bookshelf, somewhere . . . For now, some verdicts from those who knew him.

Mr. Quelch: "You are not a boy I can trust."

Harry Wharton: "Smith is a rotter to the core."

Snoop: "He's lost his grip. Getting soft, I fancy."

Dickie Nugent (to Frank): "Smithy's a better man than you!"

Dickie Nugent (to Wharton): "Smithy's a better man than you, too! The only decent man in the Remove!"

Tom Redwing: "You're a decent chap and he isn't. You couldn't descend to his (Skinner's) level."

(The Bounder: "You don't know what level I could descend to when my back's up!")

Ferrers Locke: "The good in him far outweighs the bad."

Mr. Quelch: ". . . Vernon-Smith has a reserve of integrity and loyalty."

Harry Wharton: "I want to stand by him. I know he's straight."

Many times Smithy proved to be capable of a strangely cynical philosophy for one so young. So Smithy, of course, will have the last word! On himself, when told not to start sermonising:

"Well, it would be something like Satan rebuking sin, wouldn't it?"

IN THIS ISSUE: SPECIAL ARTICLE—HATS FOR SPRING!



ANOTHER MORCOVE MEMORY

Enid Blyton: A Celebration & Reappraisal

Edited by N. Tucker with K. Reynolds

Published by: National Centre for Research in Children's Literature
price £6.00 plus £1.00 handling per copy. Available from: NCRCL, Downshire
House, Roehampton Institute, Roehampton Lane, London SW15 4HT.

This, the centenary year of Enid Blyton has been much celebrated and even as I write my postman is depositing a pile of letters, each bearing a stamp depicting one or other of Blyton's more famous characters, through my letter-box. Despite all the events and plaques and reprintings of Blyton books etc., with the exception of the Centenary issue of the *Enid Blyton Literary Society Journal* the year had so far produced little in the way of critical study of the author or her work. Now the National Centre for Research in Children's Literature has produced a book comprising the talks given at the Roehampton Institute's "Enid Blyton: A Celebration and Reappraisal" conference on April 12.

Within its 153 pages "Enid Blyton: A Celebration and Reappraisal" comprises eleven items from the conference, plus an introduction by Nicholas Tucker, a Preamble by Ann Thwaite and a talk by our own Mary Cadogan originally given at the 1997 Enid Blyton Literary Society Day (though the editor of the book fails to mention this fact). The fourteen items are wide ranging and thought provoking. Nicholas Tucker's introduction sets the scene with an overview of Blyton and her work and Ann Thwaite's preamble ensures that we do not get too sentimental on the subject. Anne Fine, a distinguished writer for children, looks at the 'politically incorrect' aspects of Blyton discovered by her eight year old daughter, Cordelia, on her return to England after a politically correct education in the USA. Personally I find shades of Orwell's thought police in the Politically Correct brigade. They would have us all reading of slim Bunter, and Just William taking up dress-making if they had their way!

The two most enjoyable pieces in the book are those written by Mary Cadogan and Helen Cresswell. Mary writes on "The Magic of Enid Blyton" and looks at the many 'magical' elements of the stories and plays. She brings in an autobiographical touch with her description of how she played the part of the Fairy Queen in a primary school production during her childhood. Helen Cresswell, noted author of dozens of children's books and television adaptations, talks of how she adapted three of the Famous Five novels for the recent television series. She was the last of the adapters to select her books and to some extent drew the 'short straw'. She writes of the job of turning a full length book into a twenty five minute television episode with her usual wit and humour.

The other contributors to the volume are: Rosemary Auchmuty, David Rudd, Sheila Ray, Peter Hunt, Pat Pinsent, Mieke Desmer and Fred Inglis. The book is finished off with a short postscript by Imogen Smallwood.

At £6.00 plus £1.00 postage the volume is very good value. My one criticism is that the book looks so drab: pale blue card covers with very plain black lettering and not a hint of an illustration. It is almost as if the publishers feel they would be letting their academic side down if they made the publication look anything other than dry as dust; which is a great pity as the contents are highly readable and deserve a more interesting presentation.

Norman Wright,

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MORE CHALLENGES FOR THE TOFF

by Peter Mahony

After his recovery from his searing experience in London, Talbot resumed the life of a Shell schoolboy. But not for long! Spectres from the past were soon looming again.

Martin Clifford/Charles Hamilton again showed how perceptive he was about 'the wages of sin'. People who 'go straight' have a touching, almost child-like, faith that everyone - old and new acquaintances - will accept their reformed persona as genuine. Life is not like that. Clifford knew it and he set about making it clear to Talbot in a series of 'problem' stories.

First of all came the question of the 'Professor'. John Rivers, allowed to elude the arm of the law by Dr. Holmes, set out to honour his promise to improve by enlisting in the 1915 army as 'Private John Brown'. With a full-scale war raging, the authorities were probably quite ready to absorb volunteers under false names with no questions asked. It is possible that a number of 'wanted' men saw enlistment as a way out of their immediate difficulties - Scotland Yard were unlikely to scour Flanders looking for missing 'Bill Sikes'. A spell in barracks in England would take off the immediate 'heat'; going A.W.O.L. could always be resorted to if drafting to the Front seemed imminent. Rivers' enlistment was a plausible development at this period in the saga.

Other people's reactions were mixed. Marie Rivers, in the first flush of reform herself, trusted that Daddy had really turned over a new leaf. Surprisingly, in view of his sufferings at Rivers' hands, so did Talbot. The Toff seemed to have a 'blind spot' where his former cronies were concerned. Because he had seen the error of his own ways, he readily assumed that Rivers, Hookey Walker & Co., and, indeed, Marie, viewed their criminal behaviour in a similar light. All they had to do was to express a desire to go straight and Talbot, for all his brains and experience, was ready to believe them. It was left to the hard-headed Tom Merry ("too good to be true?") to doubt their intentions. This gullibility of Talbot's gave rise to a host of difficulties for him, even though his trust in his dubious 'friends' was, eventually, justified.

The Rivers situation was resolved initially by Mr. Railton. The Housemaster, speaking at a recruiting campaign in Wayland, was shamed by hecklers into enlisting himself. Once in the army, Railton met 'Private Brown' and encouraged the reforming process. (One is tempted to think that the wily Rivers, aware that a word from Railton would 'blow his cover', decided to keep straight while their connection lasted. What he would have done if they had received separate 'postings' may well have been a different story.) Anyway, John Rivers, cracksman, became John Brown, noble recruit - at least for the duration of active service. Marie was delighted and so, in true Christian style, was the 'Toff'. Tom Merry & Co. rather grudgingly accepted that the 'Professor' was now 'all right'.

Talbot's next 'problem' was the ubiquitous Hookey Walker (*Gem* No. 375 "Winning His Spurs"). Having escaped from jail (yet again!) Hookey was now full of remorse, and wanted to make a 'fresh start' because of his 'wife and kid'. He turned up near St. Jim's, dogging Talbot and trying to 'touch' him for money. Once again the 'Toff' was ready to suspend his intelligence and judgement and take Hookey at face value. (When one considers that Talbot's last dealings with Walker had involved bitter animosity and a death threat, this seems to be stretching it a bit.) Tom Merry, deeply distrustful of the Angel Alley gang, and, dare one say it, irritated by Talbot's recurring lapses into foolish credulity, spoke pretty plainly to the 'Toff' about 'dealing with criminals'.

Talbot, beset by conflicting emotions, showed the 'kink' in his integrity by wishing to warn Walker of Tom Merry's intention to report the convict's presence to Dr. Holmes and Inspector Skeat. Rather than let Talbot run the risk of renewing contact with Walker, the Terrible Three agreed to 'hold their tongues'. Withholding information from the police is an offence. Little wonder that Tom Merry & Co. resented being forced to do so, by a form of blackmail. A rift opened between Talbot and the Terrible Three. Talbot, in feeling

undue sympathy for an old crony, exploited the true friendship of his honest friends. Helping lame dogs can be a costly business. In this case, the enforced silence produced lines and a gating for all four, since they had no excuse for missing call-over.

A superb exchange of views between Tom and Talbot shows clearly the difference in their approaches to 'doing right'. Clifford/Hamilton certainly knew how to 'put things in a nutshell':

"Tom! I'm sorry about the lines and gating! It's rough on you."

Tom Merry looked him squarely in the eyes.

"The lines and the gating don't matter a rap, and you know it," he said. "I don't care about it, and Manners and Lowther don't. If it were only that, it wouldn't matter. You're forcing us to keep silent about a thing we ought to report. That's where the trouble comes in."

"I'm not forcing you, Tom."

"You're going to do what may mean ruin to you if we don't hold our tongues", said Tom angrily. "I call that forcing us."

Talbot's lip quivered.

"I - I asked it as a favour, Tom. There are very few things I wouldn't do for you if you asked me."

"A jolly good many things, I think" said Tom sharply. "Having nothing to do with that villain Hookey Walker is one of them. I've asked you that and you've refused."

More plain speaking follows. Squirming under Tom's censure, the 'Toff' resorts to self-pity.

"You were reckless to make friends with a fellow like me, Tom. You might have expected the Toff would drag you into his disgrace sooner or later."

"Don't talk like that," said Tom, biting his lip. "I know you're straight. I can't believe that you have any hankering after what you've given up - I can't!"

"Then the thought has crossed your mind?" said Talbot very quietly.

Tom made an angry gesture.

"How could I help it crossing my mind, when you're willing to risk getting sacked from the school, and perhaps arrested by the police, for the sake of that criminal?"

Subtly, Talbot has shifted the emotional burden. His feeling of guilt for forcing the Terrible Three to condone a wrong course of action has been assuaged by implying that Tom is disloyal for doubting his, the 'Toff's', integrity. For all his moral progress, Talbot can still resort to the specious kind of reasoning that came naturally to the 'Toff'. In view of the way Tom Merry & Co. had stood by him in the Rivers affair, this preference for the unprepossessing Walker - even with the 'wife and kid' factor - was very much a slap in the face for the Terrible Three. Doing 'wrong', even for the best of reasons, invariably brings disaster.

The rift having been made, Talbot went ahead and saw the Walkers. Money was needed to raise their fares to emigrate to Canada. Talbot guaranteed to raise £20. (Don't forget this was 1915.) Meanwhile, he took food to them, aiding and abetting a wanted felon. (I suspect that Hookey did not really believe the 'Toff' had reformed. Talbot's new status as a schoolboy with a King's Pardon may have seemed like a good 'front' for continuing his thieving activities. The many professions of 'straightness' and contempt for past crimes were probably so much 'eyewash'. Hookey had to 'lay low' and could not

acquire his own £20. Talbot, in his apparently immune position, could filch the 'necessary' for him. Emigration may not have been as much the means of a 'fresh start' as the only way to avoid recapture and 'doing time'. As Talbot had played on Tom Merry's emotions, so Hookey was playing on the 'Toff's'. The layers of complexity in Clifford/Hamilton's treatment of this theme are truly Ibsen-ish.

Bad soon became worse. Tom Merry appealed to Marie Rivers to 'talk sense' to Talbot. She, too, was suspicious of Hookey's motives and suggested as much to Talbot. He replied by treating Marie to the argument that Hookey now needed a 'saviour' just as they, Talbot and Marie, had, a short time ago. Marie was soon acquiescing in the 'Toff's' plan of campaign.

This involved using up Talbot's scholarship fund, selling his bike, entering for the Northcote exam to win a money prize - all worthy intentions - and raising the balance from Moses, the Wayland money-lender. As usual, in such problems, the 'worthiness' was getting frayed at the edges.

Talbot was saved from that last resort by the intervention of Ernest Levison. Talbot had helped Levison with a £5 loan around the time of Hookey Walker's previous appearance (the 'Death Threat' episode). Levison, to his own cost, repaid the debt and the £20 was raised. Walker received the cash and he and his family made good their escape. Talbot had had his way - but the cost to himself, Tom Merry & Co. and Levison was considerable. The way of the transgressor is hard; but the ways of reformed transgressors are harder - especially for their friends!

Having disposed of Hookey Walker and estranged the charitable Talbot from his friends, Clifford/Hamilton had, somehow, to restore the situation. He chose the German spy dodge. Already, this theme had been heavily worked in the Talbot saga. His 'King's Pardon' had arisen from his bravery in thwarting a sabotage attempt on a troop-train. Then, in *Gem* 359 'Talbot's Christmas', the 'Toff' and Tom Merry & Co. had apprehended another spy at Huckleberry Heath. Now, sixteen weeks later, Talbot encountered another one on Wayland Moor. (Rather too much of a coincidence, I would say.)

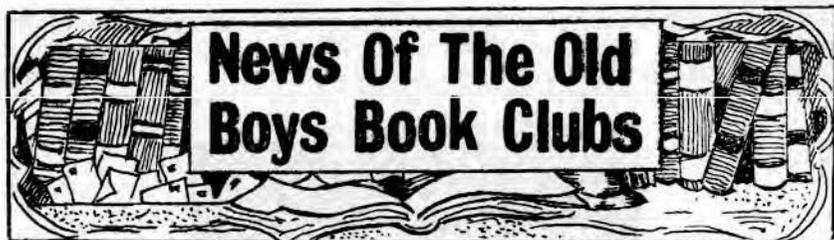
Consequently, the second half of 'Winning His Spurs' was much less convincing than the first. Nevertheless, it had its moments. First of all, Marie Rivers tried to close the gap between Talbot and Tom Merry by revealing the whole Hookey Walker history. Tom, though inclined to accept that Talbot's motives were pure, was not fully convinced. Marie, whose own word until recently was not to be trusted, took exception to Tom's doubts: "Your friendship is not worth very much to Talbot if you cannot trust him." Poor old Tom! Once again, a reformed transgressor was turning the blame for a situation created by Talbot onto him (Tom). Doing right - or at least refusing to condone wrong - produces more kicks than half in this world.

Meanwhile, Talbot had gone home with Brooke, the day boy, for the evening. On his way back, he spotted someone on Wayland Moor signalling to the sky. Unseen, he got close enough to the signaller to hear him murmur "Noch nicht!" Then the man disappeared. Talbot reported the occurrence to the police; Inspector Skeat was unimpressed.

Later that same night, Talbot left the dormitory to keep watch on the moor. Tom Merry heard him go and his suspicions that the 'Toff' was backsliding were increased. On the moor, Talbot encountered an 'American', Ephraim Gunn, a commercial traveller, who was trying to find his way to Wayland. Of course 'Gunn' was a German spy. Talbot pretended to take him at face value and decided to watch each night until Gunn could be caught red-handed.

Tom Merry, troubled by Talbot's activities, stayed awake and followed Talbot out of bounds. They confronted each other and a free exchange of views resulted. Talbot convinced his friend that he was still 'going straight' and realised from Tom's distress that his own behaviour had not been conducive to preserving trust. Reconciled, they co-

operated to deliver Gunn into official hands. The old friendship was restored: and, for a while, St. Jim's resumed its even tenor.
(To be concluded)



NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

A welcome to the seventeen present and especially to Derek Marsden our guest speaker from Liverpool. Mark gave a report on the latest developments re the Club's page on the Internet. Geoffrey brought along some superbly renovated copies of the *Magnet*. From grubby covers that had been cleaned up to restored pages, the transformation was quite amazing.

Mary Hanson then spoke on her thesis subject, 'The Sheriffs of Yorkshire'. In the 14th century the various sheriffs of the shires had tremendous responsibilities to the Country Courts and to the Exchequer. Researching the subject involves many trips to various libraries and universities and one has got have some knowledge of Latin and of reading script to interpret the records of many centuries ago. Not strictly 'old boys' material, but a fascinating insight into a different form of writings.

Derek then gave an excellent presentation on 'The Blue Bird - a Thomson Boys' Paper in Disguise?' No-one seems to know of any individual having any original copy of this paper, the only copies apparently are in the British Library. It ran for 100 issues, the last being in September 1924. As with so many other girls' papers, the Editor was a man and the unnamed authors appear to be male, too. By making comparisons with the Thomson boys' papers running at the time, it appeared the 'Blue Bird' really did seem to be a boys' paper in disguise, with a similar format, that of Editor's chat, puzzles, jokes, serials - but girls' names in the place of boys'. However, there were some unique innovations on occasions and Derek read an excerpt from one story involving one girl and her boyfriend, that may have made some parents raise their eyebrows. From the letters and jokes pages it is apparent that there were quite a number of boy readers. Despite running for only 100 issues, the paper eventually amalgamated with 'My Weekly' which is still published.

Our next meeting is on 11th October with lunch at Cedar Court Hotel, Wakefield, and later a relaxing afternoon at the home of our Secretary. Our guest speaker will be our C.D. Editor and Club President, Mary Cadogan. Please inform if you wish to attend.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

LONDON O.B.B.C.

A merry throng of members and their guests assembled at the Bull & Crown, Chingford on Sunday 14th September 1997 for the London O.B.B.C. Annual Luncheon. The tavern was brightly adorned by a spectacular array of beautiful flowers in full bloom, providing a jolly setting for the festivities.

After an admirable meal, members listened to various toasts and speeches. Departed friends Eric Fayne and Bill Lofts were toasted and we raised our glasses to the continued existence of the Club. Mary Cadogan drew our attention to the new compilation volume of

Eric Fayne's 'Let's Be Controversial' articles, and Roger Jenkins spoke authoritatively of the early years of the *Gem*. Una Hamilton Wright entertained us with a talk entitled 'His Master's Voice', which dealt with the Edwardian period that saw the launch of *The Gem* and *The Magnet*.

Afterwards, members retired to the Harper household in Longton for tea, cake and the Book Club Auction. Once again this was an entertaining and exciting event which constituted a fitting climax to an extremely enjoyable day. VIC PRATT

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- | | |
|----------------------|--|
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| b) 5 gold sovereigns | b) Buck Finn |
| 2a) Bishop | 7a) Jerrold Lumley-Lumley |
| b) Guy Vavasour | b) Victor Cleeve |
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