THE GOLDEN HOURS MAGAZINE

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Yours sincerely
H. O'Neill
"Chief Robbie"

PRODUCED IN AUSTRALIA EVERY NOW AND THEN

EDITORIAL

"Let not his frailties be remembered; he was a very great man".

Despite Dr.Johnson's pronouncement on Oliver Goldsmith our knowledge of this kind man is complete on both accounts - his life and writings. Similarly, it seems assured that our knowledge of Charles Hamilton will increase in many ways now that the restraining influence of his presence is gone. By this I do not mean necessarily that Mr. Hamilton's private life will be discussed unduly, but it will be inevitable that personal facts must slowly reveal themselves. After the complete cloak of anonymity created by Mr. Hamilton himself during his lifetime, it seems an impossibility almost for this silence to continue. However, I refer at present to his work only, though there again many of his stories could have been a reflection of personal beliefs and it seems a lot to say that he wrote nothing autobiographical into 30 years of full-time writing. But now many an article can be written discussing such of these speculations as have appealed to readers during these years. It's said all of us reveal ourselves in many ways so its reasonable to expect a writer to do so in his stories. We hope to have some such articles in future Golden Hours.

I saw a short poem recently which seems to me to strike the right note on this theme and also to counterbalance Dr. Johnson's remark.

"When I am gone, fear not to speak my name,
Nor speak of me in muted tones
As if it were a shame for me to die;
But let me figure in your daily talk,
Tell of my loves and hates,
Of how I used to laugh or go a walk,
That way you'll keep me in your memory,
Which is my hope of immortality."

The Golden Hours Club meeting this week had a rare treat. Comfortably settled in Stanley Nichols' home we listened to a tape recording of the members of the London O.B.B. Club. Or rather, their voices. Maybe one day we may get a video tape! So many members - 25 in all that we were almost crowded out of the room as voice followed voice - wellknown name after wellknown name. We were ashamed of our small number but the complete friendliness of each voice and the thick sprinkling of our own names dispelled that. A particularly warm feeling was experienced by yours truly as quite a few members used the magic words 'Golden Hours' as a link of brotherhood.

Its good to see reviews in the periodicals of books written by familiar ex-A.P. names. Such a one is Mr. F. Addington Symonds whose latest crime novel 'Death Goes Window Shopping' is now under review. One of the very nice things about Mr. Symonds is his willingness to recall obviously-enjoyed days with the Amalgamated Press.

SYD. SMYTH, 1 BRANDON STREET, CLOVELLY. N.S.W.

Hedley Percy Angelo O'Mant

By H. W. TWYMAN

THE only time I ever saw Hedley Percival Angelo O'Mant looking anything less than bright and gay and glad to be alive was on some forgotten date in 1920, when I met him by chance one lunch-time in Fleet Street.

In fact, he was looking awful, haggard and woebegone, and I was startled to find the change in him. It was quite a while since I had seen him last and I was quite unprepared for the transformation. I can remember even now my surprise of that moment.

Of course, we soon got together to bring ourselves up to date, and the reason for his unwonted absence of bonhomie was duly revealed. He wanted to get a job - something less depressing, less soul-sapping than the one he had.

I should remark here that I have just been re-reading Memories of the MAGNET Office by my other friend of those days G.R.Samways (GOLDEN HOURS No.2). His admirable memoir makes mention of Hedley O'Mant as a fellow-member of the MAGNET staff, and prompts me to refer to it by way of amplifying the theme and continuing it to a moment beyond that when 'Sam' and Hedley were still in contact. It is expedient to get events into historical perspective, and to set the record straight.

For the record as regards Hedley is slightly off-beam; and, because of a completely forgivable lapse of memory after so many eventful years between, Sam's times are out of joint and the sequence of events unclear. So I venture to give my own version, but without suggesting that my own recall-mechanism is infallible. Forty years is quite a time to keep it free from rust.

The estimable Sam has already narrated how, by virtue of his felicitous facility for concocting happy jingles, he himself attracted official attention at the MAGNET office and eventually burgeoned into a full-blown writer of MAGNET stories. An invitation for him to join the regular staff came in the fulness of time, but meanwhile other things were happening to Samways and me, and to all of us.

The time was the months immediately preceding September, 1914 - a portentous date, though we were happily unaware of its significance then, for of course it marked the onset of World War I. Sam and I were little more than schoolboys, both being recent candidates in the need of wresting a living for ourselves from a not particularly indulgent community. He was then in uncongenial servitude to a stockbroker in Southsea, Hampshire - writing MAGNET verses and substitute stories on the side - and I was an inconsiderable cog in a semi-official section of the Government machine. It was an offshoot of the Home Office called the Central Office, discreetly named and somewhat hush-hush. It may have had a longer title (I forget) but its job was the after-care of convicts on their release from durance, and likewise of boys from Borstal institutions ... in which respect I had

the edge on Sam, for even delinquents gave a greater human interest than soulless stocks and shares, and the work was not without interest.

Distance separated us now we had left school - where we had been rather special chums because of our mutual participation in amateur journalism in the shape of a colourful magazine more to the general taste than the sober-sided official one - and our friendship persisted at long range by mail. We wrote to each other much and often as I remember it, and, on my side at least, rather style-consciously.

At its destined moment came the War.

THERE was no conscription or calling-up in those days, and one of the war's first noticeable phenomena was an accelerating depletion of shop and office staffs as men won free of humdrum jobs by responding to the call of King and Country; and, another, a new slogan gaining currency, 'Business as Usual' in the shape of showcards in shop windows.

Our 'Central Office' soon began to feel the pinch of labour shortage and, coincidentally, at about the same time Samways and stockbroking parted company as he decided to return and assault the citadel of London once more. In glad anticipation I slipped in a word on Sam's behalf and got him a job.

It didn't last very long. 'Business as Usual' was beginning to lose ground to another bit of jargon, 'Redundancy'. So, last to come, Sam was perforce the first to go. However, he had a strategic line of retreat. The Amalgamated Press had been losing a lamentable percentage of its editorial experts, too, including those of the Boys' Papers Department. In the MAGNET office they welcomed such a rare, knowledgeable outsider as George Samways almost with a red carpet.

A few more weeks went by. I, in my turn, became redundant. Now Sam was the one to slip in a word, and got me a job. Like him, I joined the MAGNET. Like him too, I was thoroughly happy in the job. The life, the work, were so different, so congenial - even though I had hardly heard of the paper before, and certainly had never been one of its readers.

Sam had assuredly done his good turn for the day. It was one of the turning points of my life.

I suppose it was richly rash on my part; far from commonsensical, to put my spanner into this delightful turn of fortune's wheel - but that is what I ungratefully did. By the most unlikely good luck and through no cleverness of my own, I had fallen into the life I knew I was made for and in just a few months had abandoned it. Not enthusiastically, not with a Crusader's ardour, I must confess. Maybe I was hypnotised by a pair of penetrating eyes and a pointing finger on a poster and the repetitious admonition KITCHENER WANTS YOU!

Anyway, I went. The moral pressures of those non-conscription days transcended legal compulsion upon such sensitive spirits as my own, such useful-looking military material as seen through the sights of a rifle. They were constant and relentless, from dirty looks to white feathers, and not to be denied by weak vessels like me.

Sam, in his memoir, says that my flair was for detective rather than school stories and that I soon switched from MAGNET to UNION JACK. The horrid fact was that nearly an entire Great War was to occur before that happened.

It must have been at about the time when I tore myself away from Fleet Street, without patriotic pretensions, that Hedley O'Mant entered it. He was probably my replacement whose arrival was likewise engineered by Sam, and I have little recollection of him at that period. We were like two people using a revolving door who, on being ejected, were shot out in different directions without much chance to become acquainted.

The three of us - Sam, Hedley and I - were alumni of the same ancient seat of learning, if that is the word - King Edward VIth School in Surrey, Sam and I having been contemporaries there, and Hedley of a later generation. However, I had met him, though it was not till after the war and we had both returned to the Amalgamated Press that I made his better acquaintance as a MAGNET man.

I was fortunate in getting a fairly early discharge from the Army but, though I was somewhat ahead of the pack, was not re-recruited on H.A. Hinton's Companion Papers staff. His first obligation was naturally to his older colleagues, who had all survived but not yet been released. I was a kind of Johnny-come-lately, a wartime acquisition. Nonetheless, I was able to make myself useful in various pottering, unnecessary ways to the Editorial Director, William H. Back, that good-natured, kindly boss whom everyone loved, and whose A.P. history dated right back to the beginnings of Sexton Blake.

One day he handed me a wad of torn-up, folded newspaper and some vague remarks by way of general instructions, and behold, I was launched on a new line of endeavour - detective rather than school stories. The wad and the instructions soon evolved as my first paper, DETECTIVE LIBRARY, an inconsiderable, small-paged, unpretentious effort whose prime purpose was to make use of an unemployed printing machine, as I learned later. But I was quite proud of it, my first real responsibility. A small thing, but mine own.

This latest flowering of England's periodical journalism had been duly established and running for some months, and the department's personnel had finished trickling back from the war, when the incident happened that brings us back to the point where we came in, and I met Hedley in Fleet Street that day.

YES, the gay, debonair, charming Hedley O'Mant was looking quite down in the mouth, even haggard as if he had recently recovered from some illness. He too had gone off to fight the King's enemies, it appeared, and had emerged into the world again later than was good for him. He had found his predecessors - some of whom he had not previously met, except when they looked in at the office while on leave - sitting comfortably in their old jobs. Like Samways before him, he had been the last in and the first out.

It was only fair, of course, but tough luck just the same. He had been vouchsafed a glimpse of a heavenly job, and now he was in another that was well - not so heavenly. He was back in Fleet Street all right, but in the mood to get out of it.

In those days there was a fine, large, generous spirit about the Amalgamated Press, and it had spoiled him for anything less. He missed it acutely. He was now with the Aldine Press, running Dixon Hawke, detective. The conditions there, he told me with a flash of his old indignant irritation, that was always accompanied by a sudden shrill rise in his voice, irked him. He couldn't stand the restrictions, the niggling economies, the long hours. And one of the men he worked with was the world's worst blister; a human hair shirt. What chance was there of staging a comeback with the A.P.? he asked. He'd been to see Hinton, but he wasn't very encouraging.

It was a rhetorical rather than a hopeful question. He already knew the answer. Most of the fellows had come back and reclaimed their old jobs, and others were turning up at intervals on the same quest. I felt rather useless, for all I could do was to undertake to put in the good word if I saw a chance. There would be bound to be a place for him sooner or later and it would be good to have him around anyway.

"I think I'll have a shot at the stage," he said, unexpectedly. And that is what he did, though I didn't hear about it until much later.

We drifted on to war experiences. He too had fallen for the lure of the recruiting-sergeant's come-hither glance, but more willingly than I. It was the uniform that turned the trick, I gathered. Hedley had never worn the kilt - he had an Italian mother and an Irish father - but you didn't have to take your family tree along to the recruiting depot, and after he had signed on he was a member of the London Scottish cadets. He must have thoroughly enjoyed himself, natural extrovert that he was, marching along on their parades with his kilt swinging and the cynosure of all feminine eyes. Feminine eyes were never far from Hedley's consciousness, and he used the opportunities for conquest that his youthful good looks and charm of manner so often brought him.

Whether it was that his Caledonian impersonation eventually began to pall is speculative. However, by the time he had reached the requisite age to qualify as a combatant he got another idea and settled for airmen's blue. He signed on with the Royal Flying Corps, air crew, without losing much ground with the ladies.

Those were the days when aircraft were little more than a novelty in warfare, contraptions of wood and wire and canvas, useful mainly in reconnaisance. Bombs and machine guns were a quite later idea. At that time conflict-minded airmen were, as likely as not, liable to shoot at each other with revolvers. Hedley had the job of observer, located at the tail end of the plane and scared stiff - as he unashamedly told me.

And who shall blame him? He was no dull, stolid, slow-witted type, but a fellow of quick reactions and lively imagination; a youngster almost fresh from school in a strange and affrightening element. He described his vivid sense of isolation in a vast emptiness; his acute realisation of the flimsiness of a strip of canvas as protection from bullets; and the stomach-shrinking effect of a Boche aeroplane suddenly appearing from nowhere, diving on them out of a cloud.

Of course, by the time he came to tell me about such things, with his feet safe on the ground again, he could laugh them off gaily with no pretence of heroics and nothing but an attempt to convey the reality of the moment. But just the same one cannot but recognise the element of real heroism in youths of the same stamp as Hedley O'Mant - over-imaginative, hastily trained, facing fearful conditions in helpless solitude. Just doing the job.

He didn't collect any special decorations, but that is not to say he didn't earn them. Aerial warfare was something quite new then, and the stage of development primitive compared with what has been achieved since. Why, it was only a scant four years since the pioneer Bleriot had made history by crossing the English Channel in a machine not so very different from those of the early Royal Flying Corps - and crossing it unopposed at that, with no fear even of revolver bullets. And if Hedley had such a thing as a parachute, or an inter-com phone to the pilot up front for warnings or taking evasive action, I don't remember his mentioning it.

SO now he was in a jam of another sort - economic and human. He had got married, it appeared, and his wife was expecting. The Aldine people were not paying him what he thought they should, and worry at the office and trouble at home were getting him down.

"What's that you were saying about the stage?" I asked.

"Couldn't be much worse," he said.

I'd never heard that he had any theatrical ambitions, and he did not at that moment have any definite plans. But, surprisingly, he made it. I received a letter from him after a while. He had landed a job in the chorus of CHU CHIN CHOW - that phenomenally successful musical which was ultimately to run in London for years and years, and on the road also. He was a member of the No.1 touring company.

Hedley wasn't really star material as an actor, but he did have a good, pleasing tenor voice and a noticeably handsome appearance. It was those two assets which had doubtless helped him make the grade.

Later still he sent me a postcard. He had autographed it and added the words 'The Chief Robber' - a jocular allusion, as will be recognised by those familiar with Elroy Flecker's lyrics of his great musical play as one of its best-known numbers:

'We are the robbers of the wood ....'

Hedley's association with CHU CHIN CHOW must have been a very agreeable interlude in his life, its memories remaining with him and giving rise to much pleasant nostalgia. He had a solo part as the cobbler who sang; as he sat stitching away at a shoe:

'I sit and cobble at slippers and shoon. From the rise of the sun to the set of moon. Cobble and cobble as best I may. Cobble all night and cobble all day. And I sing as I cobble this doleful lay.'

Now and again at his desk in the MAGNET office, when the job was going well and his mood was making for tunefulness - oh, yes; the time was to come when he had made the grade there, too, and was back in Fleetway House - I have heard him singing the Cobbler's Song to himself as he worked.

It was pleasant to hear him; a nice change from the normal noises one listens to in the unlyrical circumstances - the cacophony of conversation and the jangle of phone bells - of an editorial office. It sticks in the mind.

But I am quite unable to recall the circumstances of his return, or even the date. It must have been sometime soon after the mid-twenties. Anyway, he had by then become a firmly established and very popular member of the happy band whose happy lot it was to work together for the pleasure of so many thousands of boys they had never heard of, and who had never heard of them.

There were H.A.Hinton, the editor, and his first sub, Maurice Down; the somewhat sardonic Noel Wood-Smith, third in line; G.R.Samways - 'Sam' to one and all -; and the latest returned exile, romantically from the Stage, whose name might have shone out in lights except that no theatre could have afforded that many lights - Hedley Percival Angelo O'Mant. Also there were several minor characters, including a succession of office-boys and secretaries. There had been, too, another of our number who was missing from the new post-war lineup who had likewise been one of the technical producers of Billy Bunter. This was Reggie Eves. He hadn't been fired. He had been promoted to an independent paper of his own, and was on the way to building up a separate and complete department of his own, in recognition of the good work he had done throughout the war, which he could not attend for reasons of indifferent health.

His paper was 'The School Friend', and his star performer Bessie Bunter. But her stardom soon began to slip and ultimately she occupied one of the back seats at the feminine equivalent of Greyfriars. Eves was mystified, for she should have had the spotlight, just as her brother Billy had it. Finally he realised what was wrong, as he confided to me. Fatness, to the male mind, is a matter of mirth. But to the female it is a horror. Even young girls, with no danger yet of excessive vital statistics, subconsciously dread it.

Useful knowledge, psychology!

And as to girls ..... it was always one of the amusing things around the office to observe how the editor-in-chief's secretary for the time being was attracted to the handsome Hedley. Each in turn fell for his irresistible charm. There were three of them from first to last over the period concerned, and they all seemed to have frequent need for consultation with him as they flitted round to Room 59.

It is hard to decide whether the MAGNET owed a debt to them because of the exaltation and euphoria these visits produced in him, and the consequent improvement in his work; or whether it suffered on account of time lost from his too-amiable devotion to them instead of the Famous Five and Greyfriars.

However, we must give our Great Lover due credit. He didn't just love 'em and leave 'em. He married two - Nos.1 and 3 in the series -; one at a time, of course, and quite legally. The Divorce Court was very co-operative in this.

I BELIEVE it is considered by the general run of MAGNET fans that the finest series Charles Hamilton ever wrote was the Bunter Court epic, and it may perhaps come as a surprise to them that our Hedley gave him the basic idea for it. Hedley himself told me this one day, with his usual disarming smile, and I had no particular reason to disbelieve him.

I feel I am not telling tales out of school, even if the Master were still alive, but it is a fact that we of the MAGNET staff were sometimes asked to 'feed' him with an idea or two when, for the moment, he had drained himself dry. To me the wonder is that the marvellously multiple personality who was also Martin Clifford, Owen Conquest, Ralph Redway, and others besides, and who gushed out stories by the hundred and words by the million, did not need 'feeding' all the time.

So, having on occasions been one of his ideas-men myself, I gave Hedley courteous attention and no disbelief. I do not disbelieve him even now, but an incident occurred some time later which made me ponder.

I had in some idle moment happened to hit on a verse or two of a comic song which fitted well the air of Dvorak's 'Humouresque' and formed a lively little ditty. I gave a private performance of it to Hedley, which he picked up with professional promptness, improved on here and there as to the lyric, and sang delightfully in his better voice.

Time passed, and for some reason the discarded ditty popped up again; by now I had almost forgotten the words, but Hedley still had them in stock and it was he who gave me a private performance. As an actor he must have been what they call a 'quick study'; and with a good memory. Concluding the show, he grinned in his usual disarming way, and remarked:

"Little thing I've just made up. Not bad, eh?"

He spoke in all seriousness, and obviously wasn't trying to do more than merely impress me. He had remembered the words, but had forgotten from whom he had first heard them. I did not dispute his claim; was just taken aback, I guess.

Such an incident was not untypical of Hedley. Perhaps it somehow reflected an actor's temperament; an exhibitionistic desire for applause. Anyhow, he had put forward the Bunter Court idea, and never having received a pronouncement from the late Master himself to the contrary, we shall have to be content with that.

Hedley O'Mant was undoubtedly an accomplished actor, as he proved on many an occasion on the Fleetway Dramatic Company's stage, and in straight parts as distinct from the stylised roles of a musical such as CHU CHIN CHOW. He was good in taut, nervous parts, as in that of the killer in TEN-MINUTE ALIBI, for they reflected a marked aspect of his own natural character. Eric Parker, a man with an inborn knack of hitting off character if ever there was one, dubbed him 'Pin-wire', and the nickname conveyed the image of Hedley perfectly.

Whether a person of his high-strung, volatile type was in accord with Hamilton's Greyfriars background is a question that could arouse infinite debate, but it is fairly certain there was no-one around the department better fitted to handle the PILOT and RANGER, which presently came under his

editorship. - new papers bewilderingly similar to others of the kind put out by the A.P's up-and-coming rivals, D.C.Thomson's of Dundee. Not to be too mealy-mouthed about it, they were a direct 'pinch', designed to siphon off some of the circulation enjoyed by the originators, WIZARD, SKIPPER and the like.

IT is seldom that a new concept in boys' fiction (or any other) shows itself above the horizon, but someone in Dundee seemed to have turned the trick with stories of psychological fantasy. This is of course a well-known phenomenon in the young, and in boys usually takes the form of being imaginatively endowed with some super-boyish faculty- mental, bodily, or even merely mechanical - enabling their possessors to perform marvels appropriate to the special equipment and limited only by their own wishful thinking.

The concept of Spring-Heeled Jack embodied one of the earliest examples of such equipment, which allowed Jack to leap enormous distances and thereby participate in adventures closed to the ordinary earth-bound individual. But that was way back among the Gothics of a former age. The Thomson, 20-Century heirs of fantasy and science are apt to have anything from X-ray eyes to built-in levitation as good as a helicopter's.

All such conveniences naturally give plenty of scope for unusual, boy-thrilling events to happen, and, it was believed, for plenty of profits to accrue. So the A.P. 'went after' D.C.Thomson.

I was never a student of this eclectic lore, so am unaware how far Hedley pursued it, or what success he had - such research is best left to the dedicated collector - but I do feel confident that his quick, pin-wire personality would have revelled in it, with the examples of D.C.Thomson's to outdo. He himself wrote for RANGER and PILOT, I believe, his pen-name being Hedley Scott.

IN this belated and fragmentary effort at recall I have tried to put down what I can most readily remember of my friend and workmate of other days, treating him fairly and recognising his failings as well as vaunting his virtues. But he was a playmate too, at times, and when summer holidays came round we and others of the office contingent sometimes formed a syndicate and chartered a 10-ton smack-rigged yacht and found our fun afloat. Eric R. Parker was another of the company, and F.B.Harnack, cover artist of UNION JACK and designer of its inside decorations. But that is another chapter in the A.P. story, which may best be left to the future.

I had parted from the firm to 'go freelancing' while Hedley still remained to bring out his old love the MAGNET, plus his two newcomers, RANGER and PILOT. But the semi-separation that an ordinary business move had begun was fated to be made permanent by the coming of a second war.

Maybe we are all adrift on the restless tide of circumstance, little knowing where tomorrow's ebb and flow may carry us. Me it carried far from hailing distance of the sterling friends with whom I had laboured so long, including - worst-missed of all - Hedley O'Mant; while the papers themselves succumbed in the stresses of war and foundered altogether.

Peace came at last. There were gaps in the old company of comrades, and new faces. Hedley seemed to be lost trace of and no report of him had emerged from the fog of doubt as the years passed. There were rumours that he had gone to Canada - emigrated with his wife and family. Then, towards the end of 1955, the story came full circle and once again I met him by chance in Fleet Street. Once again I saw, not the oldtime handsome, gay, debonair Hedley I had known. That very morning he had been discharged from St.George's Hospital, near Hyde Park, after a long and almost fatal struggle against a weakened heart, and was now facing a complexity of monetary and domestic troubles caused by his absence.

But he was still in the ring, fighting. He had come to the Street to get a typewriter. One of the A.P. editors had promised he would take a story.

He never lived to finish it. Before the year was out Hedley had passed on. He died on 30th December.

Rest in peace, good friend. We shall never see your like again.

End

ODDS and ENDS

by Victor Colby.

1. I understand that David Blair was a pen-name used by Richard Goyne.

2. John Creasey writes as Kyle Hunt.

3. On the evidence of a biographical note in a recent Penguin, "Public Enemy" by Hugh Clevely, this author has written stories using the nom-de-plume of Tod Claymore. I have examined five of these stories and found that they were all written in the first person by Tod Claymore, who is not only the author, but also the central character, a delightful fellow whom fate conspires to land into trouble on every conceivable occasion.

4. Sexton Blake writer Jonathon Burke, also known as J.F. Burke, is quite well-known and well considered in the serious novel field, and also in the writing of Science Fiction stories. Now, using the name of John Burke, he has achieved success in the writing of film plays into story form. Four-square Books have published his "The Entertainer", "Look Back in Anger", and "Flame in the Streets" in paper backs, and Pan has done similarly with his "Lion of Sparta". The firm of Horwitz Publications in Sydney, Australia, has quite recently produced a local re-print of "Look Back in Anger", also in paper back form.

It is most gratifying to see the success of Blake authors in other fields. Good luck to them all.

End

FLEETWAY IN THE TWENTIES

By ERNEST L McKEAG

FOREWORD: It has been my privilege to meet many editors connected with the papers we remember so vividly, but in all sincerity one of the friendliest I have ever met - and the most co-operative - has been Mr. E.L. McKeag.

Himself a most prolific author of Boys' and Girls' stories, he has written for Aldine Publications, Chums, British Boy, Champion, Triumph, Nelson Lee Library, Magnet (Serials).Boys Friend Library and girls' publications too numerous to mention. Running the Ruby, Schoolfriend and Schoolgirls' Own papers at different times (whilst retiring a year ago as editor of The Schoolgirls' Picture Library) the reader can see that Mr. McKeag would be a very interesting personality to meet.

If I also add that he was creator and writer of that popular feature in the Magnet - 'Come Into the Office, Boys and Girls'; a personal friend of Gwyn Evans, G.H.Teed, Harold May (editor of the Nelson Lee Library) and Hedley O'Mant,(who was running The Magnet under C.M.Down), the reader can well understand that I have every reason to be most grateful to Mr. McKeag for a great deal of information - which I have been able to use in many articles.

Rather than bore some readers with a lot of statistical facts, in the following article E.L.McKeag has written a most delightful account of the 'good old days' at Fleetway in the Twenties, when the reader can - for a change - see the gay and colourful life some of our favourite authors led when they were not pounding away at their typewriters giving us those stories which we still treasure today!

W.O.G. LOFTS.

It was Eric McLean who, under the name of Eric W. Townsend, wrote so many magnificent boys' yarns in Chums, Champion, Sport and Adventure, 'way back in about 1921, who suggested that I should have a shot at writing boys' stories myself.

I was living in a top front room in a Bloomsbury boarding house at the time, working "on space" for a theatrical paper and trying to eke out a rather precarious living as a freelance journalist and short story writer.

I had never tackled a boys' story but as the "British Boy" (published by Lloyds Periodicals) had just come on the market, I decided to take Eric's advice and I sent off a short story and some articles to the editor. Rather to my surprise they were accepted, and the cheque I received whetted my appetite.

In went some more stories and back came other cheques, followed by a letter from Richard Heber Poole - himself a well-known boys' writer under the pen-name of Michael Poole - who was editing the "British Boy", asking me to call. That was my first contact with the editorial side of boys' publications.

When I left Poole that afternoon I was assured of a regular market for short stories and also for long complete stories which Lloyds were publishing in a threepenny paper-backed "Library".

For the first time I found myself possessed of enough money to allow me to carry out a long-cherished ambition --- to go and live on the Continent for awhile, travelling around and taking my typewriter with me. I got as far as North Germany and there I settled, living like a lord; for my income - paid in English money - was worth five or six times its spending value in German marks. In fact, by the time I left, I was getting nearly 18,000,000,000 marks for an English pound!

Such a fantastic existence couldn't last for ever, of course, and I experienced a rude awakening when Poole wrote to me to tell me that not only was the "British Boy" closing down, but so were all Lloyds Periodicals. But Lloyds looked after their contributors and I received quite a large cheque for everything I had written up to date, even though quite a lot had not been published.

Back I came to England to start all over again and seek for new markets. I was side-tracked from boys' writing for a time, editing a short-lived weekly review in the North of England and turning out newspaper features and serials for a Syndicate. I still had a hankering to write Boys' yarns, however, and I sent a few ideas along to F.Addington Symonds, who was running the "Champion" for the Amalgamated Press.

Symonds took a few stories from me and asked me to call. I asked him for a job on the editorial side but was unlucky. Symonds already had a large staff which included John W. Wheway, Gwynn Evans, Alfred Edgar, Rossiter Shepard, Ronald Fleming and quite a number of others whose names are now household words amongst collectors of Old Boys' Papers.

However, Symonds told me that R.T. Eves, who was in charge of a number of girls' periodicals at the time, needed someone; so off I went to see R.T. and within an hour or so I was engaged to take over the Girls' paper - the "Ruby" - from Draycott M.Dell, one of the most prolific of boys' and girls' authors of that time.

"Monty" (everybody called him that) was one of the most popular men in Fleet Street. There was hardly anyone who didn't know him, and I was lucky inasmuch as he took me under his wing, introduced me all round, sponsored me as a member of the Press Club and generally showed me the ropes. Before long I was accepted by the A.P. crowd as one of themselves and I have never known a finer bunch of cheery, carefree and - to tell the truth! - more erratic characters in my life.

The early twenties were, I think, the heyday of boys' (and girls') writers. We didn't get much in the way of salaries - the A.P. in those days were not very generous so far as editorial work was concerned - but we made up for it by writing in our spare time. A guinea per thousand words was paid for our contributions - not a great deal it is true, but when a man could turn out twenty or thirty thousand words a week it was not to be sneezed at at a time when money was still worth its face value.

With beer at 8d a pint, cigarettes at 11½d for twenty, penny bus fares and a slap-up lunch for half-a-crown, money went a long way. And as most of us were bachelors, we made the most of it.

But no matter how much we drew on Friday - which was pay-day - few of us had anything left by the following Thursday; sometimes not even after the following Monday! Then it was a case of 'back to the typewriter' to get a manuscript ready for Friday morning; when - if you were lucky enough to get it passed by the editor - you could draw a "special" (that is, get paid in advance for it) on Friday afternoon.

Friday was the day the freelance authors came in with their copy - and their requests for specials, for they seemed to get through their money even more quickly than the staff men did. The result was that Friday nights, when everyone had drawn their salaries and their 'specials' - was indeed a 'balmy' night.

Everyone, staff men and freelances alike, congregated in the various Fleet Street taverns and the landlords soon found their tills denuded of ready cash and filled instead with cheques - for A.P. cheques were rightly looked upon by publicans as 'as good as gold'.

It was sometimes a bit of a struggle to get a story finished in time for Friday morning - the deadline for payment - and there is the wellknown story told of Gwyn Evans turning up one Friday morning with a 50,000 word Sexton Blake story for Leonard Pratt, who was editing the "Sexton Blake" Library at that time.

"Pratty" glanced through the first few pages, said it was good stuff, and put through a 'special' for Gwyn. It was not until Monday morning, when the editor came to read the manuscript thoroughly that he discovered it consisted only of a dozen or so new pages - to which had been attached the carbon copy of a previous story to make up the bulk.

"Pratty" was breathing fire and slaughter when the door opened and Gwyn came into the room.

"Awfully sorry about that manuscript", he explained. "I fastened the wrong copy to it by mistake. Here's the correct copy."

Gwyn had, of course, dictated the story and had it typed over the week-end. In the meantime he'd had his cheque a week in advance. But it was a very good story - all Gwyn's stories were; there was no swindle and everybody was happy.

Gwyn was invariably hard-up by the middle of the week, for when he had money he was never happy until he had got rid of it - especially when he left the firm and went out freelancing, as so many authors did in the twenties. Gwyn lived in Chelsea and wherever he went he was invariably followed by a crowd of what we would now call 'beatniks' who talked a lot about "art" but who were quite content to live on Gwyn's open-handed generosity.

Gwyn, beloved of 'old guard' Sexton Blake readers, did not have a very long life, but he certainly had a gay one. He would have lived longer if he had taken more care of himself, but he had a rooted objection to going to doctors, even when it was obvious to some of us that he was suffering badly from ulcers.

When eventually he had to go to a doctor, it was too late; and when I went to pay my last respects to him at Golders Green crematorium I could not help but notice that his Chelsea beatnik 'friends' were conspicuous by their absence.

Gwyn, however, was not as prolific an author as some of the other A.P. contributors. The output of some of them was truly amazing, although this was not apparent to their readers as they wrote under a variety of noms-de-plume. Crichton Milne, for instance, was a terrifically fast worker and would turn out a Sexton Blake yarn, a romantic love story, and a schoolgirls' adventure tale with equal facility.

I met him first when, after the demise of the "Ruby" I was running (under R.T. Eves) the "Girls' Favourite". Crichton had been talking over stories with R.T. one afternoon and joined up with me when I left the office at five o'clock. We had a couple of drinks in a neighbouring hostelry then Crichton excused himself saying he had two seven-thousand-word yarns to write, but would meet me again later in the evening.

He met me shortly after nine. In the meantime he had gone to the hotel in the West End where he was staying, written the 14,000 words and come back to Fleet Street. I didn't know until the morning that the stories had been commissioned by Eves for the "Girls' Favourite" - and it was no joke having to sub 14,000 words which had been written straight on to the typewriter at such speed!

Crichton had a flat in Paris - as many A.P. authors had at that time - and when he came to London he invariably stayed at a very expensive hotel in the West End. He was an old Etonian with a taste for luxury and he had to turn out a tremendous output of work to keep up with his commitments. But he, too, like the rest of us, suffered from a chronic shortage of cash between 'specials'.

Meeting him one evening in the West End I tackled him about a small loan until Friday.

"I was just going to ask you the same thing," he confessed. I'm in the same boat. But never mind. Have you had dinner yet?"

I confessed I had not.

"Then come and dine with me at Ciro's," he said.

Naturally I wanted to know how we could possibly dine at Ciro's - one of the most exclusive and expensive dancing and dining clubs of the time - without any money.

"Leave it to me," said Crichton and steered me along to Ciro's.

It appeared he was a member and well-known. We were not in evening dress- which was essential on the dance floor - but we had a table on the balcony; and Crichton proceeded to order a most elaborate dinner with a very excellent bottle of wine and coffee and brandy to follow. The aplomb with which he did it was a revelation to me, but I couldn't help wondering what was going to happen when the astronomical bill was presented.

It came in good time but I did not see how much it was - although I could make a shrewd guess. Crichton glanced at it, asked for a cheque book, filled in a cheque and asked for the change.

When the change was brought the tip he gave to the waiter was larger than the loan I had asked Crichton to advance.

And so, with our stomachs and wallets refilled - for Crichton had not forgotten the loan I needed - we left Ciro's; myself to seek a less expensive haunt and Crichton to go to the hotel and turn out a story to gain the wherewithal to meet Ciro's cheque when it was presented. That must have been a very expensive loan for Crichton to make.

Draycott M. Dell was another prolific writer, who was in charge of Chums when it was run by the Amalgamated Press. He turned out boys', girls' and adult stories with consummate ease. When he left Eves' department to go freelancing he did not neglect his social life. He was undoubtedly the best 'mixer' I have ever known. No matter what strange place he went into, in ten minutes or quarter of an hour "Monty" - as he was affectionately called - would be chatting with everyone as though he had known them all his life.

He once resigned from the Press Club over some trivial incident, but eventually a few of us persuaded him to put up for re-election. He did so - and fully half the members of the club signed the assentors' forms to have him back. The other half would have done the same had they not been out of London at the time.

Few people who went on it will forget the river trip which Monty organised for a crowd of us at Fleetway House - and as many freelances as could get along. He chartered a river steamer and by the time it got under way from Westminster Pier it was almost gunwales under with staff men and freelances - nobody wanted to be left out of that outing!

We hadn't got very far below Tower Pier before it was announced that the bar stocks were exhausted. Disaster had struck pretty early! However, it turned out that what had been consumed in that short space of time was the normal quota for a days' outing. In a liquor store in the bilges was the vessel's supply for a week.

There were plenty of hands to help to get it up and once more all was well. We cruised happily down to the Nore and enjoyed a crowded picnic lunch on deck. It was not until we were on the homeward journey up river that disaster struck again! The week's liquor supplies were now exhausted. The skipper of the steamer could hardly believe it. He hadn't sailed with a cargo of Fleetway journalists before!

But the bar takings proved that, indeed, the whole week's supply of sustinence had vanished. There was nothing for it but to look forward to a 'dry' journey back to London - until someone spotted an isolated pub miles away from anywhere on the Kent marshes.

The skipper at first ignored our impassioned demands to heave-to and it was then that Monty - giving an impression of Fletcher Christian - threatened the skipper that if he didn't obey orders there would be such a mutiny on board that it would make the 'Bounty' affair look like a Vicarage tea-party!

Faced with overwhelming odds the skipper capitulated and tied up to a coal barge - over which we scampered to gain the shore with the help of a local boatman who ferried us across to the pub.

Why the skipper didn't maroon us there and then I don't know - unless it was that the cautious Monty had not completed payment of the charter fee until the voyage ended.

Having slaked our thirsts and taken precautions to see that we would not again run out of fuel on the homeward journey, we rejoined the steamer and everyone was so happy that the skipper even turned over the wheel to me for part of the way. Needless to say it was well over the hour when we returned to Westminster Pier, but the Press Club was still open and most of us were members - so that the exact hour when that momentous outing finally ended remains a matter for conjecture. I have a vague idea that I didn't get home at all that night, although everyone was back in the office all right on the following morning.

Monty was also the instigator of the Friday afternoon lunch parties which were held in Anderson's Hotel in Fleet Street. By lunch time on Friday most of the staff men had finished their work and were able to relax, and the freelances were filling in time until cheques were paid out at 4 p.m.

What more enjoyable way of relaxing and passing the time than by lunching together, swapping stories, singing songs and generally having a carefree time? A banqueting room with a piano was provided by the hotel. Each paid for his own lunch at the hotel's usual table-d'-hote price and, of course, for any additional refreshment we wanted.

Once the mundane matter of eating was ended, proceedings started generally with the communal singing - if it could be called 'singing' - of the Volga Boat Song. After that there was a free-for-all entertainment which invariably consisted of scurrilous songs specially written for the occasion, Rabelasian reminisences, barrack-room ballads, and severely heckled after-lunch speeches.

Towards the end the proceedings generally became -- well, boisterous to say the least; but it would be quite untrue to attribute the eventual demolition of Anderson's Hotel to the activities of the Fleetway lunchers.

Anderson's was pulled down before World War II - if they had waited a little longer Hitler would have saved them the trouble. When a building was eventually raised on its site, it was Hulton (since renamed Longacre) House - now part of the Fleetway 'Empire'.

Probably the most successful social functions which were run at that time, however, were the annual dinners of the "O. and E.O.". The initials stood for 'Ourselves and Each Other', although certain disgruntled scribes who were not invited - and didn't think much of our literary abilities - suggested they represented "Orthers and Editers Only".

Originally they were intended as a 'get-together' of staff and contributors of R.T. Eves' department - which included both boys' and girls' periodicals - but eventually guests from other departments were included and most boys' or girls' authors of the period attended some of them.

Reginald S. Kirkham - a writer of many of the Cliff House stories and better known to boy and girl readers as 'Frank Vincent' or 'Joan Vincent' (and quite a number of other pen-names) - was the prime mover in these; and it was largely due to his efforts that "O. and E.O" continued until the outbreak of World War II.

The dinner which opened proceedings was merely an excuse to introduce what was, in effect, a 'revue' of contemporary Fleetway activities, and the pseudo speeches, songs, skits and sketches which made up the evening's entertainment -- all of which had to be strictly original and topical - frequently taxed the author's ingenuity to the utmost.

Some time later, the "Fleetway Players" -- a dramatic society largely composed of editorial staff -- produced a "Fleetway Revue"; but alas! none of the "O. and E.O." presentations could be included. They would certainly never have passed the Censor.

The "Fleetway Players" was another organisation which owed its inception largely to boys' and girls' authors. It was started in 1926 and, while most of the business side was tackled by members of R.T.Eves' department -- St. John Pearce was Chairman, Stanley Boddington secretary and John W. Wheway treasurer - the actors came from most of the "juvenile" departments of the firm.

It would be impossible to give a complete list but included amongst those who "strutted their fretful hour" during the "Twenties" were Phil Swinnerton of 'Chicks Own', Teddy Wass of 'Answers', Hedley O'Mant of 'Magnet', Rowland Jameson of 'Schoolgirls' Weekly', Henry Cauldwell of 'Nelson Lee Library' and St. John Pearce, John Wheway and myself from various girls' publications.

I had known Hedley O'Mant (who also wrote a few Sexton Blake stories) much longer than I had any of the others, for he had been on the professional stage at a time when I was a critic on a North country paper; and I had made his acquaintance when he was appearing in the first tour of the famous long-running musical "Chu Chin Chow."

I believe the "Fleetway Players" still exists, although I haven't seen one of their productions for some years. I doubt, however, if they are the happy-go-lucky, carefree, "get-together" occasions we knew in those days.

We played in the Blackfriars Theatre - a tiny but well-appointed theatre originally built by the First Lord Leverhulme as a private cinema. We generally played for three nights and quite a number of our supporters took tickets for all three. The reason was that the theatre was fully licensed and so many of the "old gang" met former editors and contributors they hadn't seen for months that they couldn't tear themselves away from the bar for more than an act. And, as plays generally consisted of three acts --

I shan't mention the name of the well-known editor who described one of our productions as the "finest show I've never seen!".

And when the final curtain fell - and the theatre closed - well, we in the cast had taken good care to see that the dressing rooms didn't run dry.

But the <u>real</u> final curtain did not fall until 1939. For the cheery days of the twenties persisted for nearly another decade, although they slowed down somewhat.

There were slumps which closed down papers; there were marriages which depleted the ranks of the "bachelors gay"; there were strange disappearances of old familiar faces; there were black-bordered cards on the notice board of the Press Club; and, finally, there was a so-called statesman who promised us that "never again will there be a war between these two great nations".

And they all added up to one thing:
"Those days have gone for ever!"

End

SOME OF MY GOLDEN HOURS

by H. Curtis.

I read with interest A.V.Holland's remarks on the reading habits of the young people of today. It does not appear to be the lack of suitable reading matter, or the counter attractions of television that is responsible for this. I have noticed for some time that young people have not the same interest in reading as we did when we were young.

Boys and girls of today are, in my opinion, more intelligent and certainly better educated than in my young time. I do not think, however, they are as happy as we were, or is life as interesting to them as it was for us.

All my boyhood was spent in a large country town in Queensland where my father was a newsagent and stocked all English periodicals, comics and boys books so, I suppose, it was easy for me to become an avid reader of them at the age of eleven. (1913) For about five years I read every copy of the Magnet, Gem, Union Jack, Boys Friend, Boys Realm, Jester and serial stories in most of the comics.

As a point of interest, twice during the war (I think it was in 1915) the English books did not arrive. We were told the boat bringing them had been sunk by a German submarine. Also, about this time, instead of coming every week two lots came every fortnight, and continued this way till the end of the war. As well as reading these books I became interested in the Boys Own Annual, Chums and the Scout, and, for some years, received them as Christmas presents. I still have these books, and of late years have become a modest collector of them. In spite of all this reading I still managed to play football in the winter and visit the old swimming hole in the summer, also became a Boy Scout. I don't know if all this reading had an adverse effect on my school work. I do know that I was always much nearer the bottom of the class than the top. Anyway, the good derived from reading would more than offset any loss.

Our town was one of the few towns in Queensland that really got cold in the winter-time, and I still have vivid memories of nights with a cold southwesterly wind whistling around the outside of the house, of settling down in front of a log fire under the soft and cosy gas light, sometimes chasing crooks with Sexton Blake, or taking part in the fun at Greyfriars. Truly Golden Hours.

(continued on Page: 59)

Some Schoolboy Hypnotists

By JACK MURTAGH

In choosing a subject for this article I have endeavoured to touch on a new, never-written about aspect of our A.P. schools. This is the result and, as I have been mixed up with hypnotism in the theatrical world for over ten years, I do feel that I know something about this subject. Before we deal with various schoolboy hypnotists let me tell you a little about the theory of hypnotism.

This art is older than the written history of mankind. It was known long before Greek civilization existed or the foundations of the pyramids were laid.

Over 3,000 years ago it was practised by the Hindo priesthood who perpetuated its secrets and mysteries by revealing them only to carefully selected youths destined to become priests in their turn.

It was the Viennese physician Mesmer, in the latter part of the 18th century, who turned the attention of the world of his time to hypnotism although not quite the hypnotism of modern days.

As recently as thirty years ago there was little literature in English concerning hypnosis. Even today the worthwhile books on the subject are too few. There is of course, much that is speculative and conjectural, even more that is simply obscurantist, high-sounding nonsense. Unhappily, gross perversions of established scientific fact in one way or another have been foisted on the public during the last 100 years. Our grandparents and great-grandparents were induced to think of hypnotism as something sinister, positively evil, by the best-seller of their time, George Du Maurier's novel, Trilby. It exercised a most pernicious and long-lived influence upon public opinion.

The novel is full of absurdities. Trilby, a tone-deaf artist's model becomes a prima donna. Svengali, a brilliant musician (with a strong aversion to soap and water) mesmerises poor Trilby without her consent or consciousness on the pretext of curing her neuralgia. From then on she is his slave. How our great-grandparents hissed Svengali in stage presentations!

Thus fiction and Hollywood have done much to injure hypnotism and bring it into disrepute. E.S.B.Hamilton, Dumas, Balzac, Hall Caine, Guy Boothly (in his Dr.Nikola stories) Conan Doyle and others have dealt imaginatively with the subject. But fiction is one thing and scientific fact quite another.

Stemming from Dr. Antoine Mesmer's theory that all bodies - animal, celestial and earthly - have a mutual attraction, hypnotism, encouraged by such men as England's Dr.Braid and Dr.Joite of France, was introduced to a sceptical world and it has taken more than one and a half centuries for the practice to win the status of an exact science.

The favourite cliche of the "anti-everything-new" is that only a weak-willed person can be hypnotised whereas the opposite is actually the case. It requires a highly concentrative mind, allied with intelligence for hypnosis to be readily induced. The stronger the personality and the better the mind, the more completely will the subject be influenced. No hypnotist would attempt to exercise influence over a mental defective, an inebriate or a person incapable of true concentration. A person cannot be hypnotised against his will.

Hypnotism can be of very great importance in medical work and there are many sicknesses, apparently physical, which stem purely from the mind, and which could, like the ordinary frailties such as nail-biting, stammering, etc., be definitely cured by hypnotism. However, only registered members of the medical profession who have the extra knowledge of hypnotism (and there are many such) should attempt such treatment.

A well-meaning amateur or medically untrained person might well eliminate a symptom which would warn the trained mind of deeper troubles.

A hypnotist works on three of the senses, namely, touch, sight and hearing, but it is not necessary to gaze into a subject's eyes and make passes with the hands although this is done and used quite a lot by stage hypnotists. However, co-operation of the subject is a definite requirement.

And now to our Schoolboy hypnotists. I have only been able to work on stories I have in my own collection and there are no doubt others that I would like to hear about. First of all in the Nelson Lee we have in No.38 2nd New Series a story entitled "Handforth the Hypnotist". In another series Ezra Quirke also wassaid to have strange hypnotic powers but this was never enlarged upon.

The story "Handforth the Hypnotist" did not have any real hypnotism in it. It was wishful thinking on Handforths part. Briefly the story went like this. Handforth and Co. went to the pictures at Bannington Palladium. The film dealt with hypnotism with a daring criminal using these powers in a sinister way to further his own evil ends. When they came out of the pictures Handforth wanted to try it out on Church and McClure.

McClure agreed for the sake of peace and to get home to tea more quickly. I'll quote a little here:-

Handforth: All you have to do is let your mind become an absolute blank.
McClure: You mean something like yours.
Handforth: Relax and think of nothing.
McClure: Then I'll think of you.

Finally McClure pretended to be hypnotised and Handforth was so excited that he couldn't get back to school quickly enough to show his schoolmates what wonderful power he had. They all entered into the spirit of it and Handforth really thought he had this uncanny gift. It brought plenty of strife to Handforth. Intent on hypnotising Buster Boots, Handforth stepped backwards in the triangle and tripped over into the fountain. Handforth picked up a handful of mud and deadleaves and chased Boots.

Too excited to discriminate he saw a figure in the East House doorway and that was good enough. S'oshl A large handful of dead leaves and mud hurtled through the air and struck Mr.Horace Pycraft in the face with a squelching sound obliterating Mr. Pycraft's features completely.

Handforth was marched off to the Housemaster and received six strokes of the cane.

Later Willy Handforth called on Handforth to borrow five bob, and Handforth agreed on the condition that Willy let him hypnotise him. Willy was very obliging and went into a trance right away. To prove to his study mates that Willy was off, Handforth demanded his 5/- back "Yes Ted" said Willy and returned the money. Church and McClure nearly fainted. Willy was brought to and told to clear off and as he was leaving he said "What the dickens did I do with that five bob." Handforth grinned, told him and said "You can have it now".

"Good man" said Willy, pocketing the 5/-, "That's the five bob I originally came for. Now, what about the five bob you hypnotised out of me. I want that too. You can't hypnotise money out of me like that and stick to it, it ain't honest".

Handforth parted up another five bob. "What do you think of my hypnotism now?" said Handforth to Church and McClure. "Not bad - but Willy's better", said Church. "He hypnotised 10/- out of you."

Later K.K. Parkington thought up a wheeze. After letting Handforth hypnotise him he led Handforth into putting the fluence on Buster Boots, Boots was sent to Pycraft's study to put the latter thoroughly through it with such things as ink and glue. Pycraft was out and Baines, a schoolboy actor, dressed up as Pycraft and sat in the study. Unfortunately Pycraft himself returned early and collected the lot from Boots.

In an effort to undo the damage, Handforth goes to the Head's Study and attempts to hypnotise him into forgetting the whole thing. However, Nelson Lee, after letting him go on for a while, concentrates his own gaze and they stared into each others eyes. Handforth was startled, Nelson Lee's gaze was disturbing. It bored right into Handforth's being. It was a case of the hypnotist being hypnotised. Nelson Lee made no claims to having any such power, but his will was so much stronger than Handforth's that the latter was soon in difficulties. He felt himself growing hot and wanted to shift his gaze but couldn't.

"Well Handforth!" asked Lee suddenly. The Head's voice broke the spell and in that second Handforth ceased to be a hypnotist and became an awkward self-conscious schoolboy. Explanations were made and a few strokes of the cane brought the episode to a close.

And now to another school, Greyfriars this time. Magnet No.30 was entitled "Bunter the Hypnotist" and it was also reprinted in the back of two Gems Nos.1525-26. The story starts in the Form Room with Bunter reading a book, "Hypnotism made Easy". Levison pretends to be hypnotised and urges Bunter to try it on Mr.Quelch which he does with disastrous results. Bunter, short of cash as usual, tries his hypnotist powers out on Mrs.Mimble at the tuck shop to get 10/- worth of tuck on tick.

Mrs. Mimble thought Bunter had gone mad and with one eye on the ham knife and the other on Bunter she did as she was told and filled a basket with tuck. It was really quite a humourous episode, but she complained to Quelch later and Bunter was in trouble again. Later he tried his hypnotic powers out on the prefects Carberry and Wingate, which brought more trouble, so Bunter gave it up.

In Magnet 1583 we have another story, different altogether, but with the same title "Bunter the Hypnotist". In this story Bunter reads an advert in a newspaper. At the cost of one shilling, a booklet "Pathway to Power" could be obtained. The only trouble was where to get the shilling. Bunter obtained it by selling Wharton's dictionary to Fisher T. Fish.

A day or two later the Booklet arrives and Bunter takes it out under the old elms to study. According to the author hypnotic power was within the grasp of anyone fitted by nature to exercise it, if required qualifications were, Strong Will, Dominant Personality, Unyielding Determination and Strength of Character. This made Bunter feel rather hopeful as he knew he possessed all these. Fisher T. Fish, after his shilling (Wharton having taken his dictionary back) came across Bunter practising hypnotism and Bunter tried his powers out on Fish. Waving his hands he said "forget about the shilling". Fish thought he'd gone loco and wasted no time in going, leaving Bunter delighted at the success of his first trial. Later, he tried it on Mauleverer in the Rag where Mauly had gone for a quiet snooze and, as he dropped off into a natural sleep, Bunter's fat hands waved mystic patterns in the air. Bunter was sure he had put him into an hypnotic trance.

In the Rag that evening Bunter tries to put Skinner in a trance and Skinner very obligingly becomes a dog, then a donkey and, as a donkey, he kicked Bunter hard so Bunter "woke" him up smartly.

Horace Coker of the Fifth heard about Bunter being a hypnotist and thought it would be a good idea if he could get Bunter to put the "fluence" on Blundell and make him pick Coker for the Cricket Team. With this idea in mind he invites Bunter to come and have a cake in his study. Then he asks Bunter to give a demonstration of his hypnotic powers with the promise of a tuck hamper if the results are satisfactory.

Bunter asked various members of the Remove to help him by being subjects on which to demonstrate his hypnotic powers. He gets howled down by everyone except the Bounder who agrees for reasons of his own. He wants to get his own back on Coker who hit him with a cricket ball the day before.

The demonstration commenced - Bunter tells Vernon Smith that the inkpot on the table is a teapot and that a Latin Grammar is a teacup and asks him to pour out a cup of tea. The Bounder pours the ink over the Latin Grammar in spite of protests from Coker. Then Bunter said "The inkpot is a cricket ball and the firegrate is the wicket - bowl". Smithy bowled and smashed the inkpot, a present from Coker's Aunt Judy, into a thousand pieces. "Now you're a monkey" and Smithy tries to climb the curtains and brings them down - he pulls up the carpet and tips all the furniture over. "The clock is a balloon" says Bunter. The Bounder tosses

it in the air and down it comes with a crash and so it went on. Coker's study was a wreck when Bunter and Smithy departed very hurriedly at the end of Coker's boot.

Although annoyed Coker was convinced and got hold of Bunter that evening and told him the hamper was his if he would go and hypnotise Blundell and make him put Coker in the form match on Saturday. Bunter tried but got Blundell's boot. He went back to Coker's half open study door and tried ventriloquism instead on Coker. Imitating Blundell's voice he told Coker he was in the team. Coker was happy and Bunter got the hamper.

After the feast came the reckoning and when Coker found out he'd been fooled he took it out of Bunter and that was the finish of hypnotism as far as the latter was concerned.

Another story about a schoolboy hypnotist, is Gem No.413 (1916) entitled "Grundy the Hypnotist." Not a very good advertisement for the art of hypnotism I'm afraid because the alleged hypnotist is a fake. He is an American and Grundy attending a Patriotic Show sees him put a "set up" under the 'fluence' and sees a chance of getting into the footer team if not running the whole show (reminicent of Coker's similar idea mentioned earlier).

Grundy manages to "persuade" the American hypnotist to give him lessons at a half a guinea a time.

The Juniors think he is potty but have a lot of fun. Levison allows himself to be put "under" and gets a quid out of Grundy in so doing. Anyway, after failing to put Tom Merry under the influence, Railton gets on to it and forbids Grundy to see the American anymore. (In 1916 Americans weren't too popular) Levison admits that he was only pretending when Grundy put him under and Grundy, completely crushed to find his only success wasn't, proceeds to take it out on the American who taught him. Not a particularly outstanding yarn but easily read and amusing in parts.

Now we have stories about real hypnotism, the first in Gem No.1411 a reprint entitled "The Schoolboy Hypnotist". (Original No.208)

Horace Barber, a new boy, arrives at St.Jim's and is put in the same study as Tom Merry & Co. He has an argument with Lowther and when Monty is going to lick him, Barber hypnotises him and makes him stand on his head in a corner of the study. He then makes him attack Manners and Tom Merry after which he brings him 'out'.

It's discovered that Barber had been sacked from his last school, St.Kates, because he hypnotised a form master and made him do a cake walk in the form room.

D'Arcy calls into the study to borrow a dictionary and Barber put the influence on him and sent him back to his study on all fours with the book in his mouth.

Knox comes to put the dormitory lights out and hands out a few lines. Barber hypnotises him and makes him apologise and forget the lines and to go and write a thousand lines himself. Later Knox catches Barber unawares and thrashes him with a cane. Barber to get revenge, puts the influence on him while he is playing football and makes him do everything wrong and finally gets ordered off the field.

Barber falls out with Tom Merry & Co. and puts the influence on them one by one. Tom Merry is cheeky to Mr.Linton, Manners balances Mr.Linton's inkpot on his nose, drops and breaks it. Then he attacks his Form Master. Lowther is told to construe Latin and sings a little ditty instead. A A doctor is called in to the three who are suspected of being insane, but cannot make head or tail of it. The rest of the boys at St.Jims are not aware that Barber is a hypnotist and accidently find out when Figgins and Co. come across him trying to put D'Arcy into a trance.

"You are to go to the Head's study and do a cake walk" he tells him.

D'Arcy goes to the Head's study where the Head is talking to Mr. Railton and begins the cake walk. A noise from the quad interrupts the performance when Figgins & Co. bump Barber.

"Bump the rotten hypnotist", the two masters hear them saying. The Head tells Railton to bring Barber to his study. He finds out the truth and makes Barber take the influence off Tom Merry & Co. and D'Arcy and then says to Barber.

"A boy with such a dangerous gift cannot be allowed here when he has shown himself to be so wanting in self-control as to exercise his gift in this way."

"You have thrown the whole school into confusion by these absurd tricks." "You have acted recklessly, thoughtlessly and wickedly."

"You will leave the school at once, and I will write to your father explaining the matter". And so Barber went.

This story was rather improbable as a real hypnotist couldn't do the things Barber did. To be hypnotised a person must be willing and co-operate with the hypnotist. But Barber was hypnotising people right and left without their knowledge or co-operation. When he hypnotised Knox he was playing football and running around the field, Barber mentally giving him instructions - well, that was too much to swallow. A good co-operative subject could be hypnotised before a match and given verbal instructions which would be carried out during the match but not in any other way. So much for the St.Jim's hypnotist.

Now last, but not least, a series of three stories in the Magnets 1050 to 1052.

These stories were about a more likeable schoolboy hypnotist, Henry Christopher Crum late of Crum's Show and House of Magic. Young Crum drops his h's and uses all sorts of cockney expressions and had been enrolled at Greyfriars by the Head under the hypnotic influence of Old Crum. Old Crum wants young Crum to learn to be a gentleman. Bunter makes a lot of nasty remarks about Crum dropping his h's so Crum puts the influence on Bunter and makes him drop all his h's too.

Later, Sir Hilton Popper catches Harry Wharton & Co. and Crum on his property and they bowl him over when he tries to thrash young Crum. He rings the Head to say he will be over in the morning with a serious complaint and wishes the boys to be expelled.

Crum visits his house and hypnotises him and instructs him to forget his complaint and to praise the boys instead. Sir Hilton does this, much to the astonishment of the Head and Mr. Quelch.

There is rather a humourous episode where Mr. Quelch is attempting to get Bunter to repeat a sentence containing words mostly starting with h in an endeavour to see if Bunter is dropping his h's. Here's a short extract.

"Bunter" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Yes sir it wasn't me sir, I didn't do it, I wasn't even there".

"Where" demanded Mr. Quelch mystified.

"Anywhere" sir" gasped Bunter.

"I do not understand you Bunter. You will repeat this sentence after me Bunter, - Henry Herbert Higgins had a happy holiday." Bunter gazed at Mr. Quelch his little round eyes bulging in amazement behind his spectacles.

"You hear me" snapped the Form Master "You understand".

"Nunno sir - I don't know the chap".

"What"

"Never heard of him sir".

Finally, Bunter repeated the words, then Mr. Quelch said. "Say after me, Horace hung his hat on a hook in the high hall".

"D-d-did he gasped Bunter - do - do you mean Coker of the Fifth sir".

"What" shrieked Mr. Quelch.

"Horace Coker, sir - I don't know anything about his hat sir, it wasn't my fault if he hung it in the hall sir, I can't help what Coker does."

This was too much for Mr. Quelch with a glare like a basilisk he jumped up and grasped his cane.

"Bunter"

"Yaroooooooh"

Fully convinced that Mr. Quelch had gone mad. Billy Bunter tore open the door and fairly leaped into the passage running as fast as his fat little legs could carry him.

Lord Mauleverer is the only boy who knows of Crum's hypnotic powers and Crum adopts Mauly as his friend. They are going for a walk one day when Smithy asks Mauly to join Redwing and him in a boat ride. Mauly agrees if Crum can come too, but Smithy refuses to take Crum so Mauly ignores him and carries on walking with Crum. They sit down for a spell and Ponsonby & Co. come along and are about to attack them when Crum puts the influence on Ponsonby and makes him fight his own friends, much to their astonishment.

Smithy challenges Mauly to a fight and just before it comes off, Crum gets hold of Smithy and hypnotises him and he calls the fight off and apologises to Mauly.

A few days later Smithy forges a letter in Mauly's handwriting to his (Mauly's)pater and says some nasty things about Crum. He places the

unfinished letter in a Holiday Annual that Crum had borrowed from Mauly and when Crum finds it he thinks that Mauly, his only real friend, has turned against him. However, Mauly denies writing it and Crum hypnotises the Bounder and makes him confess to the forgery in front of all the chaps and so all ends well. The Remove is amazed to find Crum has these strange powers and it is a nine days wonder. However, Crum had done with hypnotism as far as Greyfriars is concerned and as the final words of the story says.

"The Schoolboy Hypnotist was a hypnotist no longer - until at least he should reappear as "Young Crum" in Crums Show and House of Magic."

End

SOME OF MY GOLDEN HOURS (Cont.)

In comparing the Boys Own Annual and the Chums, it has been said that the stories in the Chums were more virile. This could be true but the Boys Own Annual was the more attractive book. It was printed on better paper and its articles on how to make things, while lacking in detail and for the most part impractical, gave lots of boys a great deal of pleasure. It did us anyway.

About 1915 two mates and myself decided to build the B.O.P. canoe. After begging and borrowing sundry bits of wood and pieces of calico and spending most of our pocket money on other incidentals, a start was made on the great project. For about three months, every Saturday morning was occupied in this most absorbing task. At last it was finished, painted and ready to be launched. It was decided that the old swimming hole would not be suitable for a trial run. Apart from being too small, sabotage was feared from other swimmers. The only alternative was a water hole about 10 miles from town. We approached a local bottle dealer and, after a lot of persuasion, this genial character told us that we could borrow his light cart, but if we damaged it, he would knock our ruddy blocks off. So, early one Saturday morning, my pony, much against his will, was harnessed to the cart, the canoe loaded and carefully tied down, and off we went. On arrival at the water hole the canoe was unloaded, the pony unharnessed, and tied to a tree. Dressed in our canoeing costumes which, of course, consisted of nothing, the canoe was duly launched. After a few minor mishaps, three or four blissful hours were spent taking turn to paddle around the water hole. Then tragedy struck. One of the boys, paddling too close to the bank, hit a partly submerged log and the canoe sunk like a stone.

After all attempts at salvage had failed, the pony was harnessed and sadly we turned for home. However, our sadness did not last long for, before home was reached, we had decided to forget the canoe and to build a land yacht, another B.O.P. project, but that is another story.

End

Frank Richards, the Down to Earth Author

By JACK CORBETT

There are many reasons why Frank Richards attained the high place he enjoyed for so many years in the era of school stories. Many other stories have been written by good authors, but the plots have been perfectly created in a world of fantasy to create excitement, e.g. the appearance of supernatural beings; the uncanny growth of animals into monsters etc. Most plots have been centred round excitement as the chief attraction to the young reader. In the writings of Frank Richards, one never encounters this kind of sensationalism. This great master relied on the objects of ordinary every day life to form the turning point or the key action to many of his finest stories, and there was never any resort made to fantastic creations or impossible inventions as those mentioned above.

Let us look at some of the objects used by Frank Richards. A broken window catch; a pair of steps in the old wood shed; an old screen in a junior study; a letter; a tree in the woods. These, and many other simple, mundane objects gave us all the wealth of writing, the genuine excitement and the well conceived plots which worked out smoothly and convincingly in practically every story.

As an example, take the famous "Barring Out" series of 1928. The fact that Skinner dropped a letter for the Headmaster to pick up, was the whole cam which set in motion the well worked out ensuing plot. Everything hinged on this one action caused by the finding of a combination of ink and paper.

In the year 1936 there was the famous "Courtney" series where the rascally Ponsonby contrives to place the blame on Frank Courtney of High Cliffe for a very unpleasant theft which had taken place, but, Bunter who happens to be hiding as he so often did behind the old study screen, was there to act as an unseen witness and thus undo all the rascally Pon's scheming. Just the fact that a study screen happened to be there made a turning point in this wonderful series that brought the story to a satisfactory climax, and one read the last chapters with the feeling of intense satisfaction.

Going back to 1926, who would have thought that Harry Wharton's desire to play a good game of football would cost him dear. A whole period in his life was altered for the course of several months. Also, by the fact of a letter his uncle had written him which greatly upset the boy, was the prime factor in his losing self control and becoming a rebel and an outcast.

We have instances at some lordly mansion of an ancient historial article such as a suit of armour which formed the vital factor in enabling some black sheep of a relative to get inside this contraption and endeavour to strike terror into the present heir, so that he himself might benefit from a sudden family death.

This took place at Mauleverer Towers where the outcast Brian Mauleverer sought to get rid of the present heir, so that he himself might benefit.

Going back to 1927 in the only (and genuine) reformation of Billy Bunter that was used as a grand Christmas series, the whole story swings round just a book, a copy of Charles Dickens 'Christmas Carol'. Bunter reads this, and Frank Richards tells us convincingly and accurately how the magic of Dickens penetrates even the obtuse mind of the Fat Owl of the Remove. Harry Wharton and Co. almost died from shock when Bunter told them that Bunter Court was really only a myth, and that he is never expecting a postal order and is very sorry that he ever borrowed from them.

Again, Peter Todd thinks he is dreaming when Bunter says "I'm not going to sponge on you anymore, Toddy. I won't have tea with you because I can't stand my whack and I am not expecting a postal order". This genuine alteration of Bunter carries on into the next 'Magnet' but, towards the end, the magic of Dickens begins to wear thin, and afterwards we get the same old hard up, ever hopeful, ever hungry, Bunter again still expecting the be-whiskered postal order and still telling the Greyfriars fellows about the wonders of Bunter Court, with the liveried footmen, the magnificent butler and the five Rolls Royce cars.

The domestic ties, especially between two brothers, was another of the simple every day themes one can so often encounter in real life that was also used by the master hand. One can never forget the long Wingate series of 1925 where, once again, the whole of the story and a clever character study evolved round the simple fact of an elder brother's regard for his minor. There were no extraordinary circumstances forced into the story to heighten excitement and create interest. Human nature alone was the key point of this splendid story.

How many times would the whole course of a story have been altered if such a simple article as a window catch, which was either broken or had been left unfastened, had not been introduced. And those occasions when, if some night prowler had failed to gain admittance to the school, or if Smithy, or one of the 'Blades' of the Lower school, had not been able to get back to their dormitories after a night at the "Cross Keys", many an event could not have taken place. There again just a simple window catch has been a turning point as in many of the stories. Many another instance could be mentioned such as; a long tablecloth under which Billy Bunter was able to conceal himself and overhear some talk of a plot which he was later, in spite of disbelievers, able to bring to the notice of those in power.

A further point of interest, is that in some of Frank Richards stories, even the best, one knows previously the identity of the mysterious criminal but is compelled to go on reading just to see how Frank Richards arrives at the conclusion and how the wrong doer is brought to final justice.

Some of the most unusual happenings ever introduced into the Greyfriars stories would be the probable message from some relative abroad

concerning one of the boys, and even then quite a small matter, such as some internal family trouble, would be the means of a boy from overseas having to visit his parents or guardian. These gave wonderful opportunities for the introduction of many of the famous travel series whereby, over the years, the boys visited nearly every country in the world, and their adventures were varied and packed with moments of tense excitement. Even in these cases Frank Richards never sought the impossible or the improbable, and that is why one can truthfully say he was the "Down-to-earth" author.

It is interesting to know that the plots were never engineered on purpose for the sake of writing a story. Frank Richards himself has said that he had a hazy outline of the story in his mind, and then apparently once he had started typing on that famous old Remington of his the story and facts just filtered into place by sheer natural ability. In these plots mentioned, lies the secret of a great author's success by using the common objects of everyday life rather than seek the cheap and sensational from the use of the supernatural or the bizarre. Perhaps that is why so many older people can fully appreciate the quality of the characterisation, the family life and the general everyday life atmosphere that prevails throughout the stories of Greyfriars, Rockwood and St.Jim's. Many people have tried to pinpoint the nostalgic magic which surges in the mind when reading these school stories, and apart from the qualities mentioned here, magic is the only word to describe their delightful elusion.

In assessing the great qualities of Frank Richards as a hypothetical issue this will always be so.

End

SONNET

Frank Richards

The old man's dead and what will last
Of his flimsy passports to the past.
Will the laughter of the dying years
Still echo in our ancient ears?

The sun washed greens, the muddied ball,
The children shouting in the Hall.
Authority in cap and gown,
The schoolboy hero, cad and clown.

Frail battles fought till shadows bled
By timeless ghosts whence time has fled.
The dream upon the breaking page,
The song of youth, the cry of age,

For the old man's dead and what will last
of his flimsy passports to the past.

Arthur Moyse

ERNIE CARTER'S COLUMN

From Here, There, and Everywhere

- The Mystery of the Two Brothers -

In number 333 1st series of the Sexton Blake Library entitled "The Human Bloodhound", the author is given as E.S. Brooks stating he is also the author of the "Secret of Thurlston Towers". But according to the lists supplied in the Collectors Digest, the former title is by E.S.Brooks and the latter by L.H. Brooks. This matter has been discussed by Walter Webb and Bill Lofts before, but in view of this "give-away" by the editor it looks like still more evidence of the non-existence of L.H. Brooks. But it has been mentioned that he met his death under tragic circumstances many years ago. Where did this information originate? Again, if an author was going to write under an assumed name as many A.P. writers did, he would not use surely the same surname. A few did it like John Goodwin who wrote under "David Goodwin" but these were in the minority.

The style of the two Brooks is almost identical, whilst the Graydons and the Shaws are totally unlike - which now brings me to the - "Mystery of the Mandarin's Idol". In the collector digest the author is given as William Murray Graydon. This is obviously incorrect as the style is that of his son Robert Murray Graydon. The father always used Inspector Widgeon but Robert always kept to the well-known Coutts. It is also known that Robert Murray wrote so little for the Sexton Blake Library that he is credited with only two stories No.41 "The Mysterious Mr.Reece" and No.85 "The Masquerader". Two more should now be added: No.235 2nd series "The Masked Marauder" and No.162 2nd series "The Mystery of the Mandarin's Idol" which features his famous character of the "Union Jack", Dr.Satira. It seems odd that this was not mentioned in the 1957 Collectors Digest Annual.

F. Addington Symonds.

This author is remembered more as Editor of the famous "Champion", but he wrote also for the Sexton Blake Library, seven in the first series and three in the second. His plots and themes were most unusual with a gripping style. He took us to Russia in his story - 1st series No.372 - entitled "By Order of the Soviet". Then in No.164 1st series entitled "The Golden Casket" we visit the East and Africa. Murray Graydon has been criticised by his use of a prologue and long chapter headings. But in No.378 Sexton Blake Library 1st series, Addington Symonds has the effrontery to use a first and second prologue! - The story is "The Case of the Golden Stool".

"The Adventure of the Speed Mad Camden" by Andrew Murray

It is known that Andrew Murray passed away in 1924 shortly after his last story for the "Union Jack" was published entitled "The Sign of the Yellow Dragon". But, No.142 of the Sexton Blake Library 2nd series dated

3rd May, 1928 entitled "The Adventure of the Speed Mad Camden" was published four years later. It seems that the A.P. held stories in reserve for many years. They also held a few stories by Arthur Patterson for the "Union Jack" which were published a few years after his death.

Eric Fayne and the Sexton Blake Library.

It is known that our well-known editor of the Collectors Digest is a strong Hamilton collector possessing probably the biggest collection of this author in the world. But I do know he has one weakness in the Blake field for the writing of Wal Soyer, better known as 'Pierre Quiroule'. In fact, Eric has the complete set of his work, the majority featuring those famous characters, Grant and Mlle. Julie.

Now, in number 442 2nd series of the Sexton Blake Library dated 2nd August, 1934 the story is entitled "Murder by Mistake" by Paul Urquhart. On page 414 of the Consulting Room Chat, the following letter is recorded merely with the initials, E.F. (Surbiton) - "I think that your new feature is a tip top idea. I think that "The Mystery Box" by Pierre Quiroule is the best Blake story I have ever read. Grant and Mlle. Julie are great characters. It is good to find one story, at least, where Tinker does not use the Americanism "Chief". "

In view of Eric's keenness and the locality, we can assume that the writer is our Eric Fayne.

Perhaps Eric could confirm this and would be interested to read of his remarks twenty-eight years ago that remain unchanged today.

End

"FORTY YEARS ON"

I feel sure that Australian readers would not have easy access to the words of this wonderful song, so appropriate to the admirers of Charles Hamilton's school stories. So, for their benefit here they are.

As Mr.Samways wrote in the letter in which he supplied the words "A magnificent song! I have taken it from my treasured copy of "Harrow School Songs", autographed by John Farmer, who composed the music. The words are by E.E.Bowen, a much-loved master of Harrow."

Bill Lofts very kindly sent me a copy of "Harrow School Songs" and I found many other fine school songs with excellent words. It is a book well worth possessing.

The first verses were written in 1872. The last stanza was added in 1954 in honour of Winston Churchill's visit of that year.

1. "Forty years on, when afar and asunder
Parted are those who are singing today;
When you look back, and forgetfully wonder
What you were like in your work and your play:
Then, it may be, there will often come O'er you,
Glimpses of notes like the catch of a song ---

Visions of boyhood shall float them before you,
Echoes of dreamland shall bear them along.

Full Chorus, in
marching time:- Follow up! Follow up! Follow up! Till the field ring
again, and again, with the tramp of the twenty-two men. Follow up!
Follow up!

2. Routs and discomfitures, rushes and rallies,
Bases attempted, and rescued, and won,
Strife without anger, and art without malice --
How will it seem to you, forty years on?
Then, you will say, not a feverish minute
Strained the weak heart and the wavering knee:
Never the battle raged hottest, but in it,
Neither the last nor the faintest, were we!
Follow up! &c.

3. O the great days, in the distance enchanted,
Days of fresh air, in the rain and the sun,
How we rejoiced as we struggled and panted --
Hardly believable, forty years on!
How we discoursed of them, one with another,
Auguring triumph, or balancing fate,
Loved the ally with the heart of a brother,
Hated the foe with a playing at hate!
Follow up! &c.

4. Forty years on, growing older and older,
Shorter in wind, as in memory long;
Feeble of foot, and rheumatic of shoulder,
What will it help you that once you were strong?
God give us bases to guard or beleaguer,
Games to play out, whether earnest or fun;
Fights for the fearless, and goals for the eager,
Twenty, and thirty, and forty years on!
Follow up! &c.

5. Sixty years on - though in time growing older,
Younger at heart you return to the Hill:
You, who in days of defeat ever bolder.
Led us to victory, serve Britain still.
Still there are bases to guard or beleaguer,
Still must the battle for freedom be won:
Long may you fight, Sir, who fearless and eager
Look back today more than sixty years on.

End

VIC. COLBY'S COMMENTS

S.B.L. 487 "Danger's Child" by Jack Trevor Story.

It's a devil of a man, that ye are, Mr.Jack Trevor Story. Did Sexton Blake give you leave to tell to the world of the daughter that could be his, but who might also be the daughter of seven other men? So? Then he is not the reticent man I thought him to be.

What remarkable ingenuity is displayed by the girl's mother. She needed a surname for her daughter. She could have chosen Smith or Jones. She didn't. She chose Robinson, this word being made up of the first letters of the surname of each of the eight men who could have been the father.

"I often wondered who the 'B' was", said the mother's present husband, looking Blake in the face. But Blake had nothing to say. It's a pity that Jack Trevor Story had.

S.B.L. 489 "Keep it Secret!" by Philip Chambers.

Unfortunately he didn't. Much ado about nothing.

S.B.L. 491 "Terror Loch" by Wilfred McNeilly.

"The great galleon came staggering down the westerly gale towards her death. It was the 28th August in the Year of Our Lord 1588, and to leeward lay the cliffs and rocks and hills of Donegal."

A splendid opening to a gripping story set in Ireland, and enriched with stirring incident:-

1. Murder at sea, shipwreck at the shallow entrance to the deep, sinister, mysterious loch.
2. Underwater adventure in the cold brooding depths of the loch in the ancient wreck, with an intangible inexpressibly evil something lurking in the shadows, guarding a sunken treasure.
3. Colourful Irish characters, wonderfully alive.
4. Riot in the Morignian Embassy as Sexton Blake and his Irish stalwarts engaged in a wild melee with Morignian nationals and secret police.
5. Bobbing bodies in the hold of the ancient wreck, and a mortal struggle to determine which of the live contestants, Sexton Blake or the vicious murderer would join in forever, the bobbing, circling, macabre dance.
6. The secret of the loch, which you may think you perceive as the story progresses. But don't be too sure, the author may have outwitted you!

S.B.L. 494 "Bargain in Blood" by Arthur Maclean.

I revelled in this yarn, which I thought ranked very high in gripping suspense, drama, and profound interest. It would be easy to go on lavishing superlatives on this yarn in complete sincerity, for I enjoyed it very much indeed.

However, instead, I will deal with what appeared to me to be the most improbable behaviour of John Frederick Traille.

Here was a savagely intimidated, and long-suffering office employee, held up to constant ridicule by his boss, Charles H. Stamford, braggart and bully.

There is no reason to suppose that Traille's background was other than colourless, weak and inoffensive. He had been "clean of blood, and almost clean of evil."

He had married honourably the woman of his choice only to be practically ploughed into the ground with her extravagance.

He habitually visited his mother, whom he obviously loved, and whom it distressed him to see disappointed.

He was a man who looked to drink to give him respite from his thoughts of despair.

Traille was angry with his sadistic employer and had good reason to be. But is it believable that such a man could:-

1. Arrange a gigantic and extremely complex frame against his employer?
2. Have the expert knowledge and determination to feloniously enter the room of the sleeping secretary, who he regarded as a nice girl, in order to rough her up in cold blood so as to keep her away from work, and prevent her unwittingly exposing his chicanery?
3. Make love to his employer's wife in the Mickey Spillane tradition?
4. Have the split second judgment to escape from between two C.I.D. men in the back of a car when the driver braked sharply at the lights, by sinking his fist wrist deep in the stomach of one of them, wrenching open the door, and dodging through the thick of the traffic belting around the corner?
5. Have the courage to rush at the man trying to gun him down, and knock him unconscious with his bare hands?

(Incidentally <u>does</u> a man offer a smaller target in running towards the gunman instead of away from him, assuming that in each case, the intended victim leaps from side to side as he runs? can't see it myself.)

6. Have the knowledge and brutality to revive the knocked-out man by kicking him back to consciousness, sinking the toe of his shoe deep into the "right" places, and be able to baldly state that his victim would have screamed his pain aloud by the time he had finished - if he hadn't been sick on the ground?
7. Have the resourcefulness to select a man in the airport toilet for size and personal details, extract from the victim-to-be information that his ticket was for a suitable destination, then bash him across the back of the head with a gun, bundle him into a closet, relieve him of hat, raincoat, glasses, passport and flight tickets, and adopt the other's identity?
8. Have the foresight to guard against the plane's radio being used against him in a crafty and unscrupulous manner?
9. Be within ten feet of ardent athletes Blake and Tinker, who were tense and waiting for him, and yet beat them hands down in a foot race while carrying a heavy unwieldy leather briefcase?

For an ordinary citizen, and not too bright a specimen at that, to meet so well such challenging events speaks well for his adaptability, but places a great strain on the reader's credulity.

But I really did enjoy this yarn, Mr. Maclean, please let's have more like it.

S.B.L. 495 "Dead on Cue" by Desmond Reid.

I don't know how he does it, seeing that he suffers from a split personality, but that prolific writer "Desmond Reid" invariably comes up with a good yarn.

This one was no exception. I liked the theatre flavour, the really engaging characters, and the strong sense of humour pervading the story.

Detective Superintendent Theodore Dukelow (pale shadow of Anthony Parson's Supt. Venner), spent most of the story desperately avoiding the clutches of man-mad Barbara Jeffers, the more-than-amply curved redhead, who had set out so openly to engulf him.

The character who afforded me quite a bit of amusement was Caleb Jackson, the lean-hipped, cadaverous-looking dancer from the Palladium.

Caleb didn't speak much, but when he did it was in a high-pitched tenor voice with a defective "r", an attempt at a cinema-Brooklyn accent, and a strong Cockney twang. He decided he didn't like Supt. Dukelow. Asked about going into the murder room he snapped "You wanna make a Fedewal case out of it?"

"Give him the gwilling!" he demanded, referring to Splash Kirby who had been discovered in the murder room in suspicious circumstances. "Pin the wap on that bloke!" he advised.

Later, in the flat, he referred to Sexton Blake as a "pwivate dick", and met Blake's "nice place you have here" with a caustic "you an expert on intewior decowation?"

On the subject of Dukelow, Caleb was bitter "Don't mention that gweasy cop in my pwesence!" he demanded.

Another character who made me chuckle was sergeant Jim Hammett, Dukelow's subordinate. Having listened in at the theatre's voice production class, he decided that promotion came to those possessed of a powerful personality, a prerequisite of which was the possession of a strong, confident voice. Thereafter at the oddest times, sergeant Hammett could be heard declaiming phrases he had picked up from the class. "Ah, that's bet-ter ----", "Margarine is marvellous, but marmalade is more magnificent."

Dukelow was thunderstruck when he happened upon this extraordinary spectacle.

Yes, indeed, a delightful yarn and one that gave me infinite pleasure.

End