

GOLDEN HOURS

PRODUCED IN AUSTRALIA
EVERY NOW AND THEN



HURRAH, CHAPS! MY POSTAL ORDERS COME

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ILLINGWORTH

EDITORIAL

I think it's fairly well accepted (even if in some cases reluctantly) that our hobby centres around the writings of Charles Hamilton. No Charles Hamilton and we'd be left with a tree without the trunk. At least it seems that way to me and without that trunk maybe the lesser branches wouldn't have had the strength to have taken root and flourished. All conjecture surely, so we must be pleased that the rallying point was there, though pursuing the matter has a fascination of its own. In the case of the Sexton Blake stories where discussion and analyses have to be divided between many authors, criticism of writers is thus weakened. The canvas is so vast that a detailed dissection of a particular author is seldom or never carried out. Not so with Charles Hamilton. Articles on him have been very many and varied and criticism has borne heavily upon him. Several angles are now being discussed among collectors both verbally and by the pen. Did Charles Hamilton need help in writing his stories, especially apart from the school ones? When some particular human fault was made the basis of one of his stories, was he revealing that he himself felt that way, sub-consciously, if need be? Does perfect writing make a perfect man? There's hardly space here to more than touch on each.

There's many an experience an ordinary person couldn't write about even having experienced it, an unfamiliar place would have to be visited before having a hope of writing about it and conveying authentic atmosphere to convince the reader. But Charles Hamilton wasn't an ordinary author, let alone person. What he didn't know personally he created from the same genius that compelled him to write as he did, outside of his experience. So perhaps he did not need outside help at all.

The question of revealing oneself in his writings is very well known and accepted. But surely this can be strained? Was not Shakespeare a Jew because, unless he was, how can he have written the character Shylock as he did? Perhaps Shakespeare was a Jew-but we know for sure he was a genius.

There remains a real story of Charles Hamilton's life to be written. He lived a long time, we know little about it especially the important first half when his knowledge of human nature would be absorbed. He was a very human person with plenty of frailties, thank goodness. This was impressed upon me way back after the war when I received a few letters from him and read the controversy in our local papers with Hamilton's 'hot' replies printed. Also the virile lying about him in 'Horizon' and the Orwell business. These things made me like him then and all that casino business and rattling around Europe for years increased his warmth for me. We can't be dewy-eyed about it. He was all too human - he would have been dull otherwise and he wouldn't have had the drive to create as he did. Another thing I like is that he was good and he was aware of it. When a man can type out a story with a typewriter on his knees without a mistake he knows his technique is perfect and he doesn't have to be told. But let us hope we will always want to criticise strongly, and defend fairly Charles Hamilton. None of that and life would be duller.

I'd hoped to have this issue for Christmas but permission to use the cartoons delayed me so we'll turn Vic Colby's greeting into a New Year one and hope you had a Merry Xmas one and all. SYD. SMYTH, CLOVELLI, N.S.W.

PEEPS into 'THE MAGNET' POST BAG

By G. R. SAMWAYS

HOW much influence does a "Letters to the Editor" feature have upon the popularity of a periodical? A very great influence indeed. Alfred Harmsworth realized this when he launched his "ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS". And Herbert Alan Hinton, Editor of THE MAGNET in the first decade of its glorious history, also realized the great value of opening his columns to readers, and maintaining a friendly and intimate contact with them.

In more recent times, the popularity of a "Post-bag" feature has been strikingly demonstrated to the Editor of a weekly periodical. This Editor, in order to discover his readers' likes and dislikes, set out a list of the paper's regular features — twenty-six in all — and asked his readers to place them in order of popularity. Some of these contributions were of great topical importance, written by first-class journalists, and commissioned at great expense; yet when the result of the poll was revealed, the "Post-bag" feature (which the Editor had hitherto regarded as of minor significance) was at the top!

THE Editor of THE MAGNET, as I have shown, set much store by readers' letters. He regarded them as a valuable pointer to the popularity — or otherwise — of the stories and the characters. The contents of THE MAGNET post-bag were thoroughly examined by Hinton, before being passed to his sub-editor for appropriate action.

Letters from all parts of the world flowed into THE MAGNET office — in a steady stream normally, but in a veritable tidal-wave when a particularly outstanding story appeared, or when a big controversial issue was raised. In my role of sub-editor, I have often had to cope with this tidal-wave, and have been almost overwhelmed by it!

There is no doubt that the Correspondence Column, expanding later into the Readers' Page was extremely popular. Schoolboy correspondents enjoyed the thrill of seeing their names in print; and they enjoyed reading the queries, tributes and criticisms of their fellow-readers, also the editorial replies, which were invariably of a friendly and genial nature — though there were occasions when a too-captious critic was put sharply in his place!

The mushroom growth of THE MAGNET correspondence soon made it impossible for every letter to be answered in the columns of the paper. A great many of the letters were therefore replied to by post. This task devolved chiefly upon Clive R. Fenn (son of the famous boys' writer, George Manville Fenn) and I can see Clive now, tapping away at his typewriter, and surrounded by reference books — for one would have needed the wisdom of Solomon to answer some of the curious and complicated questions propounded by MAGNET readers!

MOST of the letters we received were happy ones. The writers expressed appreciation of the current week's story, and asked for more of the same kind. Although nearly all these letters said the same sort of thing in the same sort of way, we were never weary of receiving them, for they showed that the stories were giving satisfaction — a satisfaction which was reflected in the circulation figures.

Many letters, of course, dealt with the characters in the stories. And here let me say that to a great many readers these characters were not mere puppets of the author's creation, but living, vital beings, leading a real existence in a real school. A wonderful tribute, this, to the genius of Charles Hamilton and his great gift of characterisation.

EVERY MAGNET reader had his own particular hero, of course, but certainly the prime favourite was Bob Cherry. Bob had all the qualities which endeared him to youthful hearts — his sunny disposition, his gay courage, his sportsmanship, his irrepressible high spirits, and his ready championship of the underdog, all combined to make him not merely well liked, but universally beloved.

Nor was Bob Cherry's popularity just a passing phase. It has persisted through the years, and Bob is as highly esteemed today by Greyfriars lovers as he was in the old red-cover days of THE MAGNET.

WHICH Greyfriars character came next to Bob Cherry in popularity? There are several contenders for the honour. Mark Linley, the Lancashire lad who came to Greyfriars on a scholarship, was a great favourite with many readers who preferred a quiet, studious type of fellow.

Charles Hamilton certainly excelled himself when he created the character of Mark Linley — "a triumph of portraiture," is one writer's comment, and I heartily agree. Those stories of the scholarship boy's long fight against snobbishness and prejudice — a fight from which he eventually emerged victorious — are among the finest Charles Hamilton has penned; and that is saying a great deal.

Mark Linley was on excellent terms with the Famous Five, and was the special chum of Bob Cherry. He lives for us in THE MAGNET pages as a really fine type of English Schoolboy — valiant in adversity, modest in success, good at games, and steadfast in friendship. Mark Linley amply merits his high place on the Greyfriars roll of honour.

NOT all of the popular Greyfriars characters, as revealed by readers' letters, were boys of unimpeachable integrity and lofty ideals. It takes all sorts to make a school, and many readers preferred a colourful "villain" to a colourless hero.

Herbert Vernon-Smith, the one-time Bounder of the Remove, was always a popular character. For even in his early days, the millionaire's son was never an "out-and-out" rotter like Skinner. He perpetrated many caddish actions, it is true, yet we felt all the time that there was a better side to Smithy's nature, and that the good in him might one day gain ascendancy over the evil; which indeed it did.

As a reformed character, Vernon-Smith did not become a lifeless, uninteresting figure. It was always excitingly uncertain what he would do next. He was liable to sudden lapses from the state of grace to which he had attained; and the stories describing those lapses, and Smithy's recovery from them, are among the finest in the Greyfriars saga.

"More yarns about Vernon-Smith, please!" was a constant plea from the Post-bag: a proof, if proof were needed, of the continuous popularity of the one-time rebel of the Remove.

BUT what of Harry Wharton, captain of the Remove and leader of the Famous Five? Where does he stand, in this assessment of the relative popularity of the Greyfriars characters?

Well, Harry Wharton had his admirers, and they were many; but, born leader though he was, there were certain unpleasing traits in his character which were prejudicial to his popularity. Wharton was inclined to be too high-handed at times, and there was a touch of arrogance about him which caused him to be less well-liked than the characters already mentioned.

In any poll of popularity, Harry Wharton would be sure to gain a high place, but not the highest.

"I say, you fellows -- where do I come in? Fancy putting a booby like Bob Cherry at the top of a popularity poll! Fancy giving the limelight to ordinary chaps like Wharton and Linley and Smithy, and not saying a word about me! You know jolly well that I'm easily the most popular fellow in the Remove -- in all Greyfriars, in fact. Why, the MAGNET readers simply adore me! And yet I'm left right out of the picture. Sheer personal jealousy, that's what it is!"

Can't you imagine the plaintive voice of William George Bunter, raised in shrill protest?

Well, if the fat and fatuous junior is an "also ran" in the popularity stakes, he is by no means the most inconspicuous person at Greyfriars! Billy Bunter is, in fact, immortal. Fifty years ago, his antics were delighting a host of MAGNET readers; and today, thanks to television, he is known to millions. Many youngsters of the present generation have never heard of THE MAGNET; but everybody has heard of Billy Bunter. Perhaps no character in all the range of English fiction has become such a household word.

The MAGNET post-bag used to bulge like Billy Bunter himself with letters about him. Not many readers liked him; a good many positively loathed him; yet he was a never-failing source of mirth and merriment to all. Although he figured in almost every story, readers simply could not have enough of him. So Billy Bunter has gone rolling down the corridors of time, gathering more and more notoriety in his progress. But I very much fear that the plump and ungainly Bunter could never climb to the top of a popularity poll!

POPULARITY was not, of course, confined to members of the Remove Form at Greyfriars.

George Wingate, the handsome and athletic captain of the school, stood very high in the esteem of MAGNET readers, and stories in which he played the principal role were always welcomed. George Wingate was as cordially liked as Gerald Loder, the bullying prefect, was cordially detested. The former stood for all that was honourable, manly, and decent; the latter, for all that was mean and base. These two seniors absorbed most of the limelight, so far as the Sixth was concerned; for Fulkner and Gwynne seemed merely the shadows of Wingate, with little personality of their own; just as Carne and Walker were the colourless lackeys of Loder.

MOST MAGNET readers had a warm place in their hearts for Horace Coker of the Fifth. Despite his heavy-handed way with "those cheeky Remove fags," as he chose to call them, and despite his absurd self-importance and pomposity, Coker was a good-hearted fellow, and generous to a fault.

In the realms of cricket and football, Horace Coker was a bad player but a good sportsman; which most of us will agree is decidedly better than being a good player but a bad sportsman!

THERE were plenty of "bad hats" at Greyfriars, for, as I have said, it takes all sorts to make a school; and had all the characters been paragons of virtue, what dreadfully dull stories we should have had!

One of the most disliked persons at Greyfriars was Harold Skinner, the cad of the Remove. He and his precious cronies, Snoop and Stott, made a very unsavoury trio, and the majority of MAGNET readers held them in scornful contempt.

Even the detestable Skinner had a better side to his nature, however, and he made an occasional attempt to mend his ways; but in Skinner's case his reformation was merely a flash in the pan. He had not the resolution and strength of character to rise above evil influences, and quickly relapsed into his former way of life.

And yet, greatly disliked though he was, it is doubtful if Harold Skinner would have been at the very bottom of a popularity poll. This dubious honour would probably have fallen to Fisher Tarleton Fish, the American junior.

Although Fishy was not a dyed-in-the-wool villain like Skinner, I have no hesitation in saying that of all the Greyfriars fellows he made the least appeal to MAGNET readers. His dubious business deals, involving plenty of sharp practice; his queer Yankee idioms; his superior arrogance towards the natives of this "sleepy old island", as he contemptuously termed it: all these things combined to make him odious to the schoolboy public.

Whilst there were many clever stories featuring Fisher T. Fish, I cannot regard this character as one of the happiest creations of Charles Hamilton.

There may be American boys resembling Fish, but I am quite sure he is not a typical product of the United States, anymore than Harold Skinner is a typical English schoolboy. One could wish that Charles Hamilton had given us a better and worthier type of fellow to represent America in the stories.

SOME of the Greyfriars juniors who remained more or less in the background -- shadowy figures on the crowded canvas of Hamilton characters -- nevertheless had their admirers.

Donald Ogilvy, Dick Penfold, Micky Desmond, and Dick Russell, all of the Remove, were among these lesser lights.

As a substitute writer of MAGNET stories, I used to like to rescue one of these less famous characters from obscurity, bringing him into the limelight for some special occasion. I remember doing this in the case of Dick Russell, in a story where Dick developed his latent talents as a boxer, and represented Greyfriars in the junior section of the Public Schools Boxing Competition at Aldershot. Needless to say, Dick Russell covered himself and his school with glory, before relapsing into his former obscurity.

It is not possible, within the circumscribed scope of a single article, to make anything like a comprehensive survey of all the characters, popular and unpopular, at Greyfriars. This has been done once and for all -- and admirably well done -- by John Nix Pentelov in his "Greyfriars Gallery". My object has been, not to produce a shorter feature of the same kind, but to give some indication of the likes and dislikes of MAGNET readers, as revealed in their letters to the Editor.

Even the most capable and conscientious Editor could not please all his readers all of the time. To please some of them all of the time, or all of them some of the time, was all he could hope to do, striving to meet the wishes of the majority as far as possible, rather than pander to the desires of small minorities.

Scottish readers often clamoured for Donald Ogilvy to be given a bigger show; Irish readers wanted Micky Desmond to be brought to the fore; and Welsh readers insisted that David Morgan must have more of the limelight, look you! But since English readers formed an overwhelming majority, their compatriots at Greyfriars were naturally given the greater prominence.

On the whole, MAGNET readers of the 1920's -- the period covered by this article -- were a very satisfied and appreciative throng; as indeed they had every reason to be. For although I have seen it stated that THE MAGNET was at its peak of perfection in the 1930's, I have always considered that Charles Hamilton was at his brilliant best in the earlier decade; and what MAGNET enthusiast could wish for anything better than Charles Hamilton's best?

Floreat, Greyfriars!

End.

ROVING THOUGHTS on the 'B.O.P.'

By STANLEY NICHOLLS

Each of us has a favourite among the long-lived names in boys' periodicals, and, inevitably, some one period in the life of this favourite is regarded as the best. Usually, when looking back over a distance of thirty years or more, memory seizes on the time when the favoured paper was first come upon, then read, week by week and issue by issue, until, in the normal course of time, the reader passed on to other things.

This was my own case with the B.O.P. I read it and knew it from 1911 to 1923. The volumes of earlier times were unknown to me except as massive books in other peoples bookcases, that seemed very old indeed. On the other hand, I have no reading experience of issues later than 1923. I have seen some of them, and the evidence of quality is there. But these later numbers lack the bulk of content of their older brothers. In the early life of the paper the publishers set a standard of overflowing good measure that must have been hard to sustain in days of greater production costs. In later times there were not nearly so many stories. In place of the seven or eight serials of earlier days, the annual volumes of the nineteen-thirties could produce three or four only. There were fewer short stories and fewer articles. There was another notable point of difference between the old and the new. Any one of the later annuals gives me the impression of a large book, planned as such, and made in its entirety at one sitting; whereas the older volumes showed they were progressive collections of weekly or monthly numbers, happily and triumphantly bound at the end of the year. Of course, in all times most Australians read their "Boys Own" in annual form. Monthly parts were on sale, but, I believe, only a minority bought them. Most of us waited until Christmas-time when the sumptuous, gilt-spined volume, with a picture embossed cover would be a "star turn" among our gifts. Even so, as we read our "Annuals", we were conscious of the week-by-week continuity, the personal contact of editor with reader, as furnished by the correspondence columns and other regular weekly features. I believe the B.O.P. lost some of this quality in later years.

However, pre-1st-war readers, who had to wait for annual volumes, missed one interesting feature. It was the management's policy in those days to issue extra numbers during a year. There was a Special Summer Number and a Special Christmas Number, each about the size of an ordinary monthly part. But these "extras" were never included in the annual volume. Hence, you had to buy your Summer Number and your Christmas Number, as they were published, if you were to get them at all. It is doubtful if they were on sale in the Dominions. Perhaps a reader could determine this point.

So, until recently my own preference lay with the period of the paper that I knew best; from 1911 to 1923. One night our editor, hearing me state these opinions, said, "You have material for an article there. Please write one for "Golden Hours"."

So I set to work. Annual volumes, from number seven onwards, were brought out, and I proceeded to spend some happy and informative hours with these massive books. Now I am compelled to say they are not nearly so formidable as they seemed. I believe it was the presentation of the early paper that repelled me when I first saw it. Then there is the fine print. They used a small type-face in those days, particularly in "Open Column" and "Correspondence Column". It was the fashion. Examine the adult papers of the day, such as "The Illustrated London News" and "The Graphic". Nights of gaslight notwithstanding, the sight of the nineteenth century reader was set a task when he opened his paper for an hour's pleasurable reading. The pictures in the earliest B.O.P added to the effect of dreariness. They were dim. The woodcuts had that far-a-way look of their era, when, whatever the scene, whatever the action, the time always seemed half-an-hour before nightfall. Some of the pictures were wash-drawings, and, to me, these never seem so lively as good line-drawings. For this reason, the pictures in "Chums", despite inferior paper, gave brighter impressions, in that publications early days, than those of its rival from Beaverie Street. Almost from its first volume "Chums" featured line-drawings, particularly in comic-strip form, and they lifted the paper into a dimension of vim and good fellowship, which the "grey" illustrations of the B.O.P failed to achieve.

Of course, there were exceptions. In the Eighteen-nineties the Boys' Own offered some very impish pictures by Sydney Syme, to adorn Harold Avery's "Mobsley's Momicans". Lucian Sorrell's stories were similarly illustrated. Tom Brown (famed creator of "Weary Willie" and "Tired Tin") was represented early in the century, and no artist more ably set forth the bright doings of bright boys; witness a long and honorable series of pictures in "Chums", from about eighteen-ninety-eight onwards. With time, the Boys' Own featured more line drawings and more comic series. By nineteen-ten such giants as Will Owen (illustrator of W.W. Jacobs' stories) and George Belcher were featured. Funny pictures, full of real character, came from the skilful pens of Ernest Blaikley, Harold Earnshaw and Arthur Sill. A. Burton was there and Percy V. Bradshaw, who illustrated his own effervescent written features, "Pages from a Prefect's Diary" and "Who's Who at School". They were very lively pictures indeed, that illustrated a series of humorous tales, which appeared in 1911 called "My Fellow Clerks". They were written by "The Junior", a cognomen that hid a writer with a sparkling humour and a glorious flow of style. Harold C. Earnshaw and the other assigned artists caught the mood, and pictures and stories gave us a prime example of the B.O.P at its best.

No publication for boys ever gave better coloured plates than the Boys Own Paper. From the outset these were supreme. Well-drawn and beautifully reproduced, they overshadowed all rivals. Besides imaginative subjects, such as Charles Paddy's Sea Studies, and work by Crabtree, Proctor and Adam, there was an imposing array of informative plates in colour, of these subjects: British Army (by R. Simkin) Birds, Badges and Crests of various institutions, Football Colours, Coats of Arms, Fruit and Berries, Flags and Funnels, Cricket Teams, and Butterflies. Usually the artist was an authority on his subject. From any viewpoint the colour plates of the B.O.P. throughout its long life, must be rated as one of the paper's best features.

When we turn to the black and white drawings in the volumes of the eighteen nineties we find some eminent names. Gordon Browne, Son of "Phil", a foremost illustrator of Dickens' work, is represented. He was one of the most prolific artists of his time. His work appeared in many periodicals and books, including "The Strand Magazine", and his illustration to D.H. Parry's "For Glory and Renown", on the very first page of the first number of "Clubs", was adopted by the publishers as the cover imprint, in gold, of the first fifteen volumes.

No periodical of the day seemed complete without cat pictures by Louis Wain. You will find some of his cats in the first few B.O.P. volumes.

Benton Riviere, and Sir L. Alma-Tadema, each an eminent R.A., contributed to the early numbers, and likewise John Hassall one of the greatest artists of humorous subjects. Other names include Caton Woodville (Military Specialist) and Maude Earl, whose paintings of dogs were famous. I found, also some of the work of W. Ramey, he was regularly represented in "Chatterbox" for many years. In early as well as later volumes of the Boys Own, Alfred Pearse's work appeared. He seemed a solid "stand-by" and though his figures, even those drawn in later years, always looked Victorian, there was power and vigour in the work.

So, despite the dinginess of the earliest pictures, due, perhaps to the processes employed, the B.O.P. could claim some eminent names among its artists. But whatever faults of presentation we charge to the early volumes, fine type, dim pictures, small and austere story-headings, there can be no doubt of the quality of the writing. Many eminent authors contributed. I found in Volume 9 an article by Wilkie Collins, "The Victim of Circumstances", "Discovered in Records of Old Trials".

In numerous volumes were serial stories by Jules Verne, some of them, I believe, presented there for the first and only time in English.

Volume 9 offered a short four-part serial by A. Conan Doyle, "Uncle Jeremy's Household". I have never seen it elsewhere in print. Edwin Lester Arnold, famous for his mystic romance, "Phra, the Phoenician", was also represented in the Boys' Own. He was the son of Sir Edward Arnold, an Englishman who embraced the Buddhist faith. Arnold Senior wrote "The Light of Asia", which has survived as a classic to the present day. We have encountered a minor classic, in book form, "The Adventures of Mr. Vordant Green" and Cuthbert Beede, who wrote it, contributed to an early volume of The Boys' Own Paper.

Formidable names these who added lustre to any publication wherein their work appeared. Many of the stories that first appeared in the B.O.P have survived to attain classic eminence in their own dimension. In our own day we are finding re-prints of "The Fifth Form at St.Dominics". Talbot Baines Reed wrote it for The Boys' Own Paper in the early eighties. Other stories of his have stood the test of time, "The Cock House at Fellsgarth" and "The Adventures of a Three-Guinea Watch", among them. When Reed penned these racy, natural tales he established something that was not only for his own time but a mine of enjoyment that served several generations of boys. There was colour and credibility in them, a magnetic quality in the writing that gave stature to the characters and excitement to the narratives. Reed stood in the same relationship to the B.O.P that Doyle maintained with the old "Strand Magazine", a condition wherein the author grew with the magazine and the magazine acquired stature from the excellent work of the author. Each seemed an integral part of the other. If ever there was a Dickens among writers of boys' stories, surely we may bestow the honour on Talbot Baines Reed, distinguished contributor to a distinguished paper.

R.M. Ballantyne's name appeared early in B.O.P. history. One of the greatest authors of adventure tales, he wrote some of these as serials in issues of the 'eighties and onward.

Other well-known names that appeared in early numbers were G.A.Henty and Dr. Gordon Stables. Mr. Henty's stories have maintained a steady sale over the years, which is a guarantee of quality. Poor work does not survive. On personal taste I have always rejected this author's books because solid slabs of descriptive writing, unrelieved by conversation or action, did not appeal to me. But if the tales were not always exciting, they never failed to inform. G.A.H's bases of history and geography were unimpeachable, and no doubt, this dependability has done a great deal to preserve the writer's name in the gallery of great practitioners of narrative fiction.

Dr. Stables' work does not live today. His tales, in book form, commanded sales for some years after his death, but, perhaps, it was a rather "sprawling" quality in the narrative form that denied a long life to his work.

G. Manville Jenn, bearded and genial writer of many a good tale in the early days of the Boys' Own, likewise failed to hold a public for long after his death. I thought this a pity. His stories had humour, brightness, good characterisation and they raced along on the oiled wheels of a good prose style. But, while booksellers today are often asked for Henty titles, no-one breathes the name of G. Manville Jenn.

A school-story writer, whose approach was not unlike T.B.Reed's has likewise fallen into oblivion. He was Paul Blake, who wrote in pre-1900 numbers of the Boys' Own.

Moving on to later days, we find many names that recall happy memories to readers still alive. E.Harcourt Burrage who, in addition to his work for the B.O.P wrote happy tales for the Amalgamated Press;

Charles Edwardes, a name also found in Chums; J.H. Bolton, a kind of science-fiction pioneer whose "Under the Edge of the Earth" first came to print in The Boys' Own around 1909; Walter Dexter, a prominent Dickensian; M.P. Dunlop, specialist in tales of the Australian bush; Gunby Hadath, one of the foremost half-dozen writers of school stories in this century; Stanley Portal Hyatt, an author of adventure stories with real quality. Does anybody remember "The Black Pearl of Peihoo"? (B.O.P. Volume 36).

When we consider serial stories of that era in the paper's history that began just prior to the 1st world war, two names come uppermost to memory; Percy J. Westerman and Charles Gilson. The first-named wrote a serial for Volume 33 and called it "The Treasure of the San Phillippo". This was a good piece of work from every standpoint. Though not initiative in style, it recalled, for strength and enduring interest, the work of Stevenson and Quillen-Ceuch. Westerman wrote on in a long association with the B.O.P. to the days when serial stories were fewer per volume and the task of maintaining the status of the paper had become harder and more exacting.

Perhaps no name among Boys Own writers connotes more memories of solid enjoyment than Charles Gilson. So far as I can find his earliest work was in The Captain, a tale called "The Lost Island". Gilson was a conscientious writer. To him background was of great importance, and the places where his exciting stories were enacted were described with a power that could only mean personal knowledge on the part of the author. Much of this background was the same as that used by G.H. Teed an esteemed writer of Sexton Blake stories for the Amalgamated Press. The China Coast and the islands of the Pacific were favourite locales with both men and many a Chinese character was featured in their stories. Volume 37 for 1914-1915 published one of the best Gilson tales "In the Power of the Pygmies". "The Land of Shame" followed soon after and "The Mystery of Ah Jim" (a personal favourite) came to print in volume 39. Major Gilson wrote on for several years for The Boys' Own but the old paper had not a monopoly of his services. He wrote extensively for "Chums". It is a safe assumption that boy readers did not care much where they found him so long as they did find him with a new tale to add more hours of prime enjoyment to the large aggregate already given.

Aside from fiction, what a staggering range of subjects was covered in The Boys' Own. If variety was asked for there was a choice of "Pioneer Days in Queensland", H.J. Holden's "Model Aeroplanes" and "The Banjo, and how to play it". Such distinctly different luminaries as Sir Ernest Shackleton and Mr. J.B. Hobbs contributed. You could learn to play draughts and, if conjuring was your line, there was W. Obree Smith's fine coverage in Volume 21. There were articles on careers such as the one on the Merchant Navy. The indoor man was catered for by Morley Adams' numerous inventions of parlour games. But, if you scorned such prissy pursuits, George Pontin's graphic items on sailing were there for you.

Coins, stamps, gardening, aviaries, aquariums, photography; every hobby had its presentation. History was featured directly and indirectly. Volume 7 had a well-informed paper on armour. Even a fiction writer departed at least once from his own line, to add to the interest of the factual articles, when Dr. Gordon Stables wrote on "Incubators and Chicken Rearing".

Some authors wrote for the B.O.P for many years. W.E. Cule's stories appeared throughout early numbers and his "In the Secret Sea" in Volume 41, more than twenty-five years after his first appearance in the B.O.P, was an outstanding effort.

"The Triple Alliance" in 1896 and "Mobsley's Mobicans" in the following year established Harold Avery as a Boys' Own identity and he continued with a long meritorious connection into the nineteen-twenties.

Other names that continuously recurred over long periods were Tom Bevan, Alfred Colbeck, Sercombe Griffin, Victor Mendick, J.Claverdon Wood and John Lea.

One point of interest between the earliest and the late volumes of the Boys' Own relates to serial stories. The first editor pursued a policy of short instalments. Upwards of six serials would run concurrently, but each of them had no more than one page of text to an instalment. The object, doubtless, was diffusion of reader interest. But later volumes offered fewer serials, sometimes only three to a year with long instalments of each. In 1935 a Sercombe Griffin story appeared with instalments as long as eight pages to a monthly part.

It is interesting to note minor changes of this kind. But whatever time brought in the way of re-arrangement, the paper stood firm to its basic principles. At the end of my happy search among many volumes I still cannot answer the question "Did the Boys' Own have a 'best' period?" Look where we will, in early issues or late, we find the same strength and vitality. Even when bulk of content per issue was less, quality remained.

The paper had a long life and a curiously rich one and, personal prejudice aside, (that inescapable factor in all things human) we must recognise that every period of The Boys' Own Paper poured forth reading joy in wondrous good measure.

End.

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52 Oakleigh Gardens,
Whetstone, LONDON. N.20.

Facts AND *Figures* by **W. O. G. LOFTS**

Your editorial in Golden Hours No.5 suggests that, like the majority of other collectors, you are very interested to glean more biographical details about the greatest school story writer of all time - CHARLES HAMILTON.

You couldn't be more correct to state that perhaps a lot of his writings were based on personal experiences and that one day a fuller story will be written to satisfy the collectors of his writings.

It has been my great pleasure to meet several times the sister of the late Charles Hamilton - Mrs. Una Harrison - a lady of great charm and culture and also his niece Mrs. Una Simpson Hamilton-Wright whilst in the Midland area of England.

Hedley Percival Angelo O'Mant.

I enjoyed my old friend Mr. H.W. Twyman's article on Hedley O'Mant very much indeed. Hedley was a great favourite of nearly all the editors and authors. I can well remember searching with Derek Adley nearly six months to trace his whereabouts by methods of which even Sexton Blake would have approved, only to our sorrow to learn at long last from his third wife that he had passed away. Hedley had, incidently, been working on scripts for the A.P. comics right up to a year before his early death.

Come Twy! you are being rather modest in your news that you supplied, like many others on the editorial staff, plots for stories. MAGNET 242 in 1912 "The Greyfriars Insurance Company" was your idea, based on some new Insurance Act that had just come into force. Hedley, also, supplied many plots. Apart from the famous Bunter Court series mentioned he suggested the Angelo Lee, Schoolboy Airman series in the GEM in 1926. This was based on (a) his own flying days. (b) his own Christian name. Hedley, also, wrote as CAPTAIN ROBERT HAWKE, flying stories in numerous A.Press boys papers.

Recently I met Miss Pat O'Mant 19 years old daughter of Hedley and she was, of course, delighted to read in the "Golden Hours" about her father of whom she knew so very little. She is a most attractive girl, fair-haired and with an infectious laugh and great personality. It is easy to see why her dad was so popular.

She works at Fleetway House in one of the Art Departments and promised to see if Hedley left any data in his papers at home which could throw some light on his work.

Frank Richards. By Jack Corbett.

I'm afraid that Jack's main points about Charles Hamilton's plots are sadly out of focus. I am only quoting now a former editor of the MAGNET who told me that one of the weaknesses of Frank Richards was his plots. In view of his tremendous output he had to be fed with ideas editorially suggested. (See Hedley O'Mant above) or else there would have been a great deal of repetition. This is in no way I hope, any reflection on him, as he was such a brilliant writer that many of his tales required little plot at all. Mr. Hamilton himself, I believe, once stated that he made up the story as he went typing along.

Bessie Bunter.

I cannot help thinking that Twy has conveyed the wrong impression regarding Bessie Bunter, and the SCHOOL FRIEND in general. It is perfectly true that Bessie never became as famous in the Cliff House stories as Billy did in his, but it is a fact that the SCHOOL FRIEND enjoyed a tremendous circulation (I might add of almost double that of the 'Magnet') and Reg. Eves had no worries after he had got going with other writers.

The true facts regarding the SCHOOL FRIEND stories are as follows. They may enlighten readers who were mystified at the lack of detail published in the Autobiography of FRANK RICHARDS.

In 1918 Reg. Eves had a plan to produce a new paper for girls. This was to feature Bessie Bunter, the sister of Billy, and the girls at Cliff House School. Charles Hamilton, of course, was to write the stories as his work was probably the greatest money spinner the Amalgamated Press had. He duly wrote the first six which were published. Despite his tremendous ability and output of writings, the directors who had sanctioned the idea of his writing these stories had forgotten one main thing. He was already commissioned to write, every week, stories of Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood. With the addition of the SCHOOL FRIEND this made a total of 85,000 words a week. Fantastic! No writer, however prolific, could possibly keep this up for long. C.M. Down, editor of the Companion papers, found his star author getting behind with schedule and protested to the powers that be. The outcome was that the SCHOOL FRIEND was to be written by other authors. Probably Charles Hamilton, quite rightly, felt most strongly that a paper he had created, was cut off from him completely income-wise. But he should have faced facts, and perhaps trained a ghost writer, as he could not possibly have supplied to all the papers the copy required as per agreement and schedule.

ERNIE CARTER'S COLUMN.

Regarding the mystery of Leonard H. Brooks and Edwy Searles Brooks they were brothers and both contributed stories to the Amalgamated Press from about 1910 onwards. I have personally met at least four editors who knew them individually. Leonard H. committed suicide some years ago. It was reported in the National Press and to be more precise, he gassed himself. I agree most wholeheartedly with Ernie that there is some confusion in the stories. An editor once told me that E.S. used to come in with a story, and say that it was his brother's. So it was recorded as being by L.H. although the editor in question strongly suspected that E.S. had actually written it! The official list that Ernie also quotes, must be accepted as binding. One must accept a list as fact, when coming from official records, or one would never get anywhere. The same thing applies to the Murray Graydon item. The main point to remember is that no author (or editor for that matter) could possibly dream that some 40 years later - adults would be dissecting and discussing stories intended for the then juvenile market. Mistakes are also bound to happen in official records, but personally I would sooner base my information on official records than pure assumption or theory. As proved in the past by certain collectors - they can be so wrong!

VIC. COLEY'S COMMENTS.

Jack Trevor Story.

Mr. Story is a very well known script writer - and his latest book 'Mix Me a Person' which is based on his Sexton Blake story 'Nine O'Clock Shadow', has been made into a film. It features as its main star that well known pop singer Adam Faith.

Philip Chambers.

Have met him quite a few times - very young, friendly type of author who lives at the back of the famous Lords Cricket Ground at St. John's Wood where so many Aussie teams have played in Tests.

Wilfred McNeilly.

A bearded Ulsterman, and a most highly educated and delightful person to meet. Has written for many highbrow papers, including Punch. Served in the Indian Royal Navy in the last war as an officer.

End

BILL MARTIN.

It was with real regret that I read of Bill Martin's death in the C.D. I had obtained books from Bill from my first awareness of an existing collectors circle in England and my own bookshelf would be much poorer but for Bill. From this distance a real character from his letters, and never a dull moment in over ten years. He held a unique place for consistency and supply, but sickness did impede him a lot in the last few years. I must have received one of his last familiar purple written letters and they will be missed.

Members of the Australian O.B.B.C. send their sympathy to his friends in England. ED.

The Australian readers of the "Golden Hours" derived great pleasure from the words of that famous song 'Forty Years On'. I hope our English friends bear with me as these songs are perhaps very familiar to them, but as I've received requests to print another, I feel I must oblige even though there's only one 'Forty Years On'. A couple of contributors want it as a regular feature so perhaps you could let me know.

Here's hoping this one recalls our own schoolboy day dreamings one way or another.

BOY!

1. When my evening fire is gilding
Picture, table, wall and chair;
Dreamily I fall a building
Fairy castles in the air.
Boy! (Sixth Form)
Haste the swelling note is knelling!
Who can disobey the call? Boy!
All my cherished hopes have perished,
All the fairy castles fall!
Troubles that beset and bore me
Melt away to left and right
And the future crowds before me
Thick with visions of delight.
Boy! Haste, etc.

2. And as fancy grows prophetic
I anticipate the hour,
When I soar by feats athletic
To the shining ranks of power
Boy! Haste, etc.
Read my name upon the panels,
Carved in gold along the boards.
See myself arrayed in flannels
Batting for the school at Lord's!
Boy! Haste, etc.

3. On and on I stray delighted
Through the fields of reverie,
Till the day that I am knighted
With the monitorial key.
Boy! Haste, etc.
Then the joyous dream retreating
Fades again to empty air —
Golden visions, false and fleeting,
Oh that ye were true as fair!
Boy! Haste, etc.

SNOBBERY in the HAMILTON STORIES

By J. F. BELLFIELD

Was Charles Hamilton fascinated by the subject of snobbery? I mused on this question recently when perusing the Rookwood story in Schoolboys' Own Library, No. 174 "Living a Lie", the story of Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency, the one-time page boy at Goby Hall who came to Rookwood as the titled heir to the Montmorency estates, elegant, haughty and superior. His real name was George Higgins and he had been the dandy of the Servants' Hall where he was known as, "Gentleman George". The story is surely a classic example of snobbery at work in the public school as depicted by Charles Hamilton.

Asking a question such as this will surely imply that there was an element of snobbery in the author's make-up and this may seem absurd on the face of it, for the Hamilton stories rarely touch on the subject of snobbery without condemning it. Many of Charles Hamilton's most enthralling stories are concerned with the uphill struggle of characters such as Tom Redwing, Mark Linley, Dick Penfold and Tom Rawson, to win the friendship of boys of a higher social class, boys who have wealth and social advantages far above themselves.

In every case they have won through and merit and moral integrity have been shown to be worth more than social pretensions based on nothing but family connections. And the author carries the point even farther than this. He spares no pains to ensure that the reader feels a kindred sympathy for the boy of low origins and a working class background, living and working and making friends with boys of a higher social class.

Why then even consider that the author himself had anything of the snob in him? But it is necessary, perhaps, to probe more deeply than the mere surface content of the stories. It has been said by a well-known literary critic, "What people say is not so important as why they say it".

The element of snobbery enters the stories at so many points that there is an underlying feeling that it has a peculiar fascination for the author. All the time there is always the implicit assumption that to be of a good family is a peculiar merit of itself. There is no doubt that, fine characters though Redwing, Penfold, Linley and Rawson and the like undoubtedly are, they are not the real heroes of the piece. That role is reserved for Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Jimmy Silver and Tom Merry, who are upper middle class and Cussy and Maulverer, who are aristocrats. It is not without significance that Courtenay is the exception and he turns out to be a boy from an old established family after all.

One comes away from many stories with the feeling that though the boys from humble circumstances are undoubtedly fine fellows, their peculiar merit is to be able to rub shoulders with the sons of gentlemen on equal terms.

I am not suggesting that Charles Hamilton had a conscious aim to bring out these traits in his stories, but, I am suggesting that they were there in spite of himself. Aldous Huxley has remarked that we all have our little snobberies of some kind and though we kick them out at the front door they come in at the back. Even the reader himself when he rejoices to see the poor boy welcomed into the circle of his social superiors implies by that very feeling that the wealthy and aristocratic are worth imitating and entry into their circle is a fine thing for the poor boy.

But to return to "Living a Lie", which caused such a train of thought as I have been expounding. This story is concerned with the single theme of snobbery far more than any other story by Charles Hamilton I have ever read, for it must be confessed that to many fins Hamilton yarns snobbery only enters incidentally, as it were. Roger Jenkins has made this point in an article in the June number of the "Collectors' Digest" and I quite agree with him. But "Living a Lie" is very relevant to the theme of this article. Far more than any other story it throws into relief the points on snobbery I have been making.

To many of us living in 1962, when many of the landed gentry can only keep up their establishments by turning them into amusement parks for "Bank Holiday crowds", to use Bunter's famous term of contempt for the lower orders, the pretence of Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency seems pointless and ridiculous. Ironically, there is no pretence about the wealth, only about his aristocratic connections. In 1962 wealth is enough to be snobbish about. A modern youth, brought up since the last war, would scarcely be able to understand the aims of Montmorency at all. He would not see the point of it.

Those of us, however, who are older and whose addiction to reading the Hamilton stories covers a space of forty years, have longer memories and can remember the time when such pretence had some point. It is obvious, too, that Charles Hamilton is not altogether out of sympathy with the pretender. He has characteristics of nerve and courage which keep the reader from despising him.

On the other hand, as is all too common, the lower orders are figures of ridicule and contempt. The truth seems to me to be that Charles Hamilton does not understand working class people. He either sentimentalizes over them or sneers at them for their lack of breeding. Characters such as Tom Rawson, who figures prominently in this story, are too good in the Sunday School sense of being good. This is unreal, for people who have had a hard life are too familiar with the brute facts of life to be "good" in this sense. Characters such as Horace Larchey, who discovers Montmorency's pretence, and, as a former associate at Goby Hall, threatens to expose him unless he makes it worth his while to keep silent, are too bad. There is nothing they would not do for money.

This, too, is unreal for working class people are as likely to have a sense of honour as the so-called higher classes.

The knavery of such characters as Horace Lurchey is made to appear ludicrous by their ungainly manner of speech. This is illustrated by a scene by the school gates at Rookwood where on espying Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency he bawls out, George! Hi, George! Don't you know your old pal 'Orace what used to clean the boots at the 'All where you was in buttons? Mack the porter, and therefore, another figure of fun, says, "Who's he torkin' to? There aint nobody 'era named 'Uggins. You silly owl, that's Master Montmorency!" "Wot!" said Horace Lurchey, "Montmorency!" said Mack crushingly, "now clear hoff".

This is typical of the way Charles Hamilton depicts the lower classes, and, to my mind, there is an implied snobbery in it, though perhaps the author scarcely realises it. As Roger Jenkins remarks there is something distasteful about the story of "Living a Lie", and the end of it, which finds Montmorency (having lost his uncle's newly acquired fortune) as a waiter in a London hotel, is surely the last straw.

I cannot leave this subject without one more observation. The theme was discussed at a recent meeting of the Midland Branch of the O.B.B.C. and the question was raised as to whether Charles Hamilton had any personal reasons for throwing the veil of secrecy over his own school-days.

All Hamilton devotees must recognise him as a man of considerable erudition. His knowledge of the classics and his aptitude for languages are quite obvious. But the intriguing question is, where did he go to school?

The privacy of a person's private life is bound to be respected. Frying of any kind is obnoxious, but few people make a secret of where they went to school. It would be little use in most cases as attendance at school is not a private matter, but a public duty. It is a good thing for Charles Hamilton that he went to school in the days before form-filling was so much a part of one's life.

Since that discussion we have been told by one, who knew him more intimately than anyone else, that his reason for keeping his own school a secret was to avoid giving offence to people, who, recognised themselves in his stories, most certainly they would not have been pleased by what they read.

This is fair enough and I leave it at that, though I venture to suggest that it is doubtful whether his fears in this respect have much ground for truth. People are not so quick to see themselves in an unfavourable light as all that, even if they read the stories, and many of them, being grown up by the time he started to write, certainly would not.

Much as I admire Charles Hamilton and, grateful as I am for the many hours of delight reading his stories, over a space of almost forty years, has given me I am not an idolater. Like so many of us he had his little weaknesses and I have formed the opinion that he had a sneaking sympathy with snobbery. There's no doubt he condemned it in his stories, but then he condemned gambling, whilst it is well-known he was an addict. Like so many perhaps it is a case of - "Viduo meliora proboque deteriora sequor".

End.

THOSE OLD JESTERS OF MINE.

By Arthur V. Holland.

It was my custom every Thursday afternoon, on my way home from school, to call at the local newsagent and collect for my mother her weekly papers, "The Sunday Companion", and "Horners Stories".

On this particular day, I saw displayed on the counter the "Double Christmas Number of The Jester" (1910). Twenty-eight pages of seasonal stories and pictures for all. It had an attractive cover featuring most of the main characters within. The snow, the sprigs of holly, the large boiled pudding gave the cover a really Christmas touch.

It was priced 2d., but in my area it cost 3½d. Whilst waiting to be attended to, I turned over the pages and was so enthralled with the contents, that I just had to have it. This same "Jester" became the first item in my collection of Old Boys Books and papers of yesterday.

"The Jester" was my favorite comic paper. Although, really, it was a family paper in its early years. The comic strips and one or two short stories were for children, but most of the reading matter was suitable for adults. The ordinary issues had 16 pages, and at the English price of 1d. (2d. in my area) it was wonderful value for the money.

Let us look at some of the regular comic strips. We have the main attraction in the person of Constable Cuddlecook, the pride of the police force. He often got into hot water, but usually came out on top. He was very popular with the ladies and in doing his beat, he would receive friendly smiles from the house-maids, and pies and cakes from the cooks.

In the good old days of my youth he was always on the front page, but in the several "Jesters", which I have for the year 1939 he is featured in the middle pages whilst the pages had been reduced to eight.

Other interesting comic characters of this period were "The Racketty Rowites". In the Row, which was really a business section of one side of a short block, we have Mr. A. Mite, the cheesemonger; Mr. Brisket the butcher and Miss Twolips the florist (who later sold out to Mr. Puff the baker). And on one corner was a narrow jail harbouring one inmate, Convict 99. Their adventures were delightfully humorous.

Other comic characters were; "Nippy Nugget the Newsboy", and "Pimple" his pup; "The Adventures of Lottie Looksharp The Merry Message Girl"; Peter Parsnip The Park Gardener"; "Spencer Sparrowgrass The Sport"; "Moonlight Mollie The Mouser"; "The Experience of Milly and The Merry Maid of the Mill". Also there were a number of illustrated jokes in each issue.

The principle serial writer was Edmund Fordwych. My first Christmas number contained the first chapters of his great serial - "Daddy, Or The Convict Earl". It was so popular that it was kept going for over two years, and a shortened version was printed in "The Jolly Comic" in 1936 and 1937. This author also wrote "Captain Pauline, Or The Place Beneath The Sea", "The Iron Conqueror", a wonderful romance of Napoleon and Josephine and "Springheel Jack".

The most popular complete stories were series featuring "Hawkshaw" the Scotland Yard detective. This series lasted for years. We have "Captain Eagle the Bird-Man", who spent his life helping the poor and the distressed. "Frank English", the sporting curate; "The Red Domino" was a wealthy young man of society whose watchword was justice. He spared no effort to right a wrong or crush an oppressor. Another popular character was "Hoppy Chivvers", a pathetic ticket-of-leave man with a heart of gold who, although mostly poor and out of work, managed to help and brighten other lives. There was humour and pathos in his stories. One moment I would be smiling, and in the next, wiping a tear from my youthful eyes.

I feel greatly in debt to this favourite comic of my boyhood days. It brought much pleasure into my young life. It was the forerunner to the new world of wonder which was to follow, with the weekly adventures of the boys of Greyfriars and St. Jims schools.

In a very interesting article written by Leonard Packman, called "Comic Papers of The Past", printed in "The Story Paper Collector" No.68, one gets the impression that the final date of "The Jester" was Dec. 18th 1920. I think there is a misunderstanding here somewhere, as I have a dozen numbers which were published in the thirties. The latest date is March 4th. 1939, and numbered 1,947 and still featuring the old favourite P.C. Cuddlecock, fat and bald as ever, giving an outside smile to every pretty girl in sight, and receiving pies and cakes from the cooks on his beat, who, are under the impression that a way to a man's heart is through his stomach.

During the last few years of its life "The Jester" underwent several colour changes. I have numbers in blue and in pink, quite a drastic change from the old familiar white. The date of the final issue is not known to me.

Perhaps someone will oblige.

End.

READERS COMMENTS ON PREVIOUS ISSUES

ERIC FAYNE: I thought the Golden Hours first-class. Particularly I liked Vic Colby's work on the Penny Popular reprints. What a wealth it must have entailed in work, and something never done before. I always wondered where those old stories came from, and was amazed to see how very old some of them were.

H.J. SOUTHWAY: Many thanks for the Golden Hours. I think it is excellent. The reminiscences of the old authors and Editors made very interesting reading, and takes one back to the days of youth, now so far behind!

(comments continued on Page:99)

by H.W.TWYMAN.

The impact of certain events on impressionable young minds has a quality of depth and permanence that sometimes seems remarkable to us in later life.

These events can be commonplace or even trivial, but, graved deep on the fresh and plastic material of memory, the recollection of them can persist through the decades of youth and maturity and remain unforgettable till the end.

Perhaps that is why I can still recall today, so many years afterwards, the mental picture of a group of twenty or so of my schoolfellows standing pressed closely in a compact mass, quiet and listening attentively very differently from their usual, boisterous, mercurial selves.

They were listening to another of my schoolmates, a special chum of mine, who was sitting perched on a windowsill facing them, reading aloud. On the fringes of the group and listening like the others were several whose gaze rested not on the reader, but on the middle distance. They were on the lookout lest a particular master should appear in sight.

The reader on the windowsill was named George Samways, and the book he was reading was the current copy of one of the old red MAGNETS.

Like all adherents of Frank Richards, he was what we should call nowadays a thorough-going fan. In a way it was for him a significant, historical moment, for in years to come he was destined himself to write MAGNET stories, albeit as a deputy or disciple of the great Charles Hamilton, creator of the Greyfriars saga and so much besides - though at that time MAGNET readers had of course never heard anything but his pen-name.

At our school the MAGNET was an evil thing, and forbidden. This prohibition was at the instigation of the master for whom the cautioned sentinels were even now keeping watch. Had this master chanced to catch Samways red-handed, not only with the evil contraband in his possession but actually reading it aloud to an unsullied audience, the devotee of Harry Wharton & Co. would have been awarded a public, cold-blooded punishment of a severity quite unthinkable in these more tender times.

But he was not caught. He continued enthusiastically to declaim that day's ration of the Greyfriars epic till he and his bunch of MAGNET converts had to disperse for dinner, pending another illicit reading on the morrow. There is no sequel to the incident. It is merely a recollected fragment of the past - a past when all cheap literature appealing to the young was lumped together by their elders as trash.

The master who so fanatically crusaded against it in our case acted from what is generously called the best intentions, but what was in reality a carry-over from his own past, when the only equivalent reading matter for boys did in fact consist only of 'bloods'. These yarns - even school stories - were justly named as such, and in themselves were an appropriate reflection of a brutalised age ... as any student of the oldtime, Victorian ora tales will tell you.

Extras apart, these are the fees parents are called upon to pay for the education of their boys and girls at the leading Public Schools:

ETON
WINCHESTER
HARROW
MARLBOROUGH
RUGBY
ROEDAN
MILLFIELD
GORDONSTOUN
LORETO

£490
£453
£462
£372
£459
£307
£503
£453
£430



Courtesy of Australian Consolidated Press Ltd.

Illingworth's Bunter No 2 This is not a political cartoon, but illustrates an article on the respective costs of education at various English public schools. Bunter seems a trifle miscast in the part of paying parent, however.

But now, behold! Fifty years or more have rolled over our heads; an enlightened public more than halfway through this 20th Century now gets an inkling that its pastors and masters were ~~maybe~~ mistaken. The trash of our schooldays is elevated to a new stature; authorities now recognise it contains the stuff of LITERATURE!

Charles Hamilton, our Frank Richards of the ha'penny and penny MAGNET, has created a figure that will remain immortal as long as English literature survives, say the critics. That figure is of course Billy Bunter. But, we MAGNET specialists can tell them, he created swarms of only lesser real and rounded personalities as well. But the egregious Bunter overtops them all; already, even in the lifetime of the man who conjured him up from the magic of his imagination, his name had become a household word throughout the English-speaking world. Everyone knows who Bunter was, and what he signifies.

So it will always be. His fame with posterity will rank with the Fat Boy of Charles Dickens' Pickwick Papers; convey as recognisable an idea as does even Shakespeare's Falstaff.

Like Dickens himself, our beloved Charles Hamilton is now part of history. It is just a year since the world became the poorer for his passing, and, as with that of Charles Dickens, the death of Charles Hamilton eclipsed the gaiety of nations, and particularly the gaiety of boyhood. Adulthood even, for grownups were once young, and, once known, Bunter is never forgotten.

It so happens that there is an incidental but convincing proof of this that aptly demonstrates the point. On the 21st December, 1960 there appeared in London's DAILY MAIL a drawing by Leslie Illingworth, the paper's chief cartoonist, which featured Billy Bunter as its main figure. It is reproduced in this issue, with due acknowledgments to the newspaper concerned, in order that its implications may be appreciated.

There are journalists on that newspaper, by the way, who, if not collectors themselves, surely must have been readers of the MAGNET in their younger days, and no more forget the antics of William George Bunter than the rest of us. Whenever a news story breaks which has some Bunterish slant - voracity or fatuousness or self-contradictory fibbing, for example - sure enough the writer, reporter or rewrite man makes the most of it with the appropriate parallel or comparison. These lighter-vein items certainly brighten the paper with a touch of comedy among the sombre stories of a troubled world.

Within the three days following the completion of these notes there were two mentions of our rotund Removite in the MAIL, in separate, unconnected news stories. The first concerned the Greyfriars Christmas play, Billy Bunter's Christmas Circus, at the Victoria Palace Music Hall in London, and the first-ever inclusion of a girl in the show. The fat freak seems now happily to be an uproarious annual event in the West End's theatredom. The other recorded the opening of a special schools slimming clinic in the town of Burton on Trent, where the beer comes from. The boys and girls of that town, it seems, tip the scale at more than three pounds above the national average at a given age - but not because of beer.

"Why should Burton's babies stand a better chance than most", asked the MAIL, "of becoming Billy and Bessie Bunters?"

A local doctor supplied the answer.

"It's their parents' fault," he said. "For one thing, they allow them far too many sweets."

With Billy Bunter himself, of course, it was usually jam-tarts; but, like him, they were as broad as long.

So, whether they work with a typewriter or a drawing-pen, Greyfriars-wise MAIL-men are always ready to remind us with quip or query of the overweight Owl. It was two years ago that artist Illingworth first seized his chance of Bunter banter, as shown on our cover, and he has done so on at least one occasion since. His illustration, published last September, depicts William George in the act of achieving the most strenuous bit of weight-lifting of his career, including his own.

Incidentally, it is fitting that the DAILY MAIL's literary and artistic talent should serve to keep green the fame of the Greyfriars Fat Freak, for the paper was of course founded by the late Viscount Northcliffe, who founded also the firm which gave birth to William George Bunter in the first place, the Amalgamated Press. His lordship indeed had a huge room in the Fleetway House in the days when the MAGNET was new, and it is not improbable that he and Charles Hamilton may have met and conferred there when plans for the new school story weekly were under discussion.

But as to the Illingworth cartoon and its origin- the news event that prompted it was the distressful financial condition of British Railways, for many years nationalised but nonetheless unprofitable. In fact, they have for years been running at an increasing loss until at last the deficit in 1962 amounted to 150 million pounds for that one year alone.

The problem of turning a regular loss into a steady profit is naturally complex, perhaps even insoluble, so we will not bother to sketch out a solution within the limits of this short article. Anyway, the privilege of finding the best answer is rightfully the concern of Dr. Richard Beaching, financial-wizard director of Imperial Chemical Industries until he was hired away by the British Government in the hope that he could cure the national headache, in consideration of an annual pay-envelope of £20,000. If he succeeds he will be cheap at the price.

Back in 1960 (before Dr. Beaching's removal to the railways) the Government recommended to Parliament that £400,000,000 of previous deficits should be written off and transferred to the National Debt - which meant in effect that the liability would become the taxpayers' and that it would never be paid. In short, the likelihood of its payment was about as probable as the notorious postal order being paid to Billy Bunter.

That, at all events seems to have been the idea which triggered off the Illingworth cartoon. "Hurrah, chaps! exclaims the Owl, leaping about gleefully, "My postal order's come ..." (The artist's version of Bunter seems to be a trifle ahead of the caption-writer's dialogue, for was not W.C.B.'s preferred mode of address 'I say, you fellows'?).

The postal order is made payable to B.R. Bunter - no error, of course, the B.R. indicating 'British Railways' - and Bunter himself is labelled in the same words on his jacket pocket, cartoon fashion. In his fellow-Removites in the background, wistfully envying the Owl his fat windfall, you will not be able to recognise Snoop or Skinner, or Fisher T. Fish or Bob Cherry. This is just an Illingworth cartoon, and not a MAGNET illustration by Chapman. They are merely figures representing other British institutions which could equally rejoice in receiving such a handy gift as 400 millions- 'Roads', 'Schools', 'Universities' and 'Pensions' they are labelled.

So much for the cartoon itself. It was doubtless readily understood, even by the DAILY MAIL's foreign readers in England, but of course for Frank Richards fans it had a more subtle significance and a cheery chuckle besides.

And the significance was in the knowledge that William George Bunter had indubitably 'arrived'. The DAILY MAIL has a readership of about four millions- all sorts and conditions of people all over Britain. It was the confident belief by the editorial that they would not fail to catch the point.

These erstwhile MAGNET readers on the MAIL didn't find any need to add an explanation about a fat, fictional schoolboy and a postal order that never arrived; There was no need to depict him with his name writ large across his paunchy circumference. They know there is hardly a person in the country over school-leaving age- and more's the pity that that is no longer true of the youngsters too- who would not immediately grasp the allusion to William George Bunter of Greyfriars. Aye, and to likewise recognise him from his picture.

It is doubtful whether they would have felt the same confidence even in the case of Charles Dickens' Fat Boy of Pickwick Papers, who has had over a century to achieve fame.

So the Fat Boy of Greyfriars is well on his way to his own, separate fame. He is now in the same class as world statesmen, heads of state and great figures of achievement and eminence in the realm of reality, people of flesh and blood. The critics were right. William George Bunter has in him the stuff of genuine literature and will survive to delight generations yet to be.

.... And to think that he was imagined and created by an unassuming, unknown man, sitting alone in his obscure room in a seaside suburban dwelling house, patiently picking out from the keys of his rattling old Remington typewriter the quirks of a character destined to rank with the immortals!

End.

VIC. COLBY'S COMMENTS

S.B.L. 499 "Spotlight on Murder" by Martin Thomas.

What a thrill the carnival atmosphere of a circus brings to young and old!

When that pleasant young couple, Tinker and Marion Lang, walked towards the bright scarlet and white stripes of the entrance canopy, they could hear the loud, rousing music thumped clear and gay from the brass band inside, and could see the milling crowd around the entrance, happily buzzing with anticipated excitement. The cries of toffee-apple sellers and hot dog vendors supplied the brisk promise of an evening's full-hearted enjoyment.

Once inside, Tinker and Marion sat back and took in the sounds, sights and smells which combine to give the circus its traditional character- the band, the lights, the circular tier of seats, the trapeze apparatus high up beneath the dome, the subtly blended aroma of sawdust, leather and resin. A spangled world of glamour, grace, daring and skill.

Against this backdrop was enacted a story of brooding resentment, blackmail, hate and murder which was of absorbing interest.

There are few authors as competent as Martin Thomas to amuse, and his recounting of Coutt's discomfiture at the hands of the little French equestrian ballerina, Toinette, was a gem. When Coutts and Sexton Blake interviewed Toinette in her caravan, her briefness of dress caused Coutts' serious discomfiture, which her mocking manner did nothing to dispel. As the author put it "Toinette was in a high dudgeon - and not much else". Coutts really suffered. At one time his ears looked as though on the point of spontaneous combustion.

His search of the caravan proving fruitless, Coutts said to Blake: "Nothing of interest here."

Toinette glanced down at herself, then gave a pout of hurt surprise. Coutt's always-florid face became a rich puce.

On page 37, tremendous suspense is evoked by the spectacle of an unarmed Sexton Blake facing a lithe, crouched, tensely poised lion that had somehow become free. With massive head and giant mane, with plate-sized paws armed with lethal claws, with bared fangs, snarling, the great carnivore tensed for its predatory leap. Great stuff to alternately chill the blood, and send it surging through the veins.

Full marks for the following piece of ingenuity too, Mr.Thomas. If you, the reader, wants to commit suicide and make the police think it's murder, here's what you do.

You take a celluloid paper knife, stab yourself with it, wipe the blood off the blade so that it's burning properties are not impaired, then hold it against glowing radiator bars, and when the knife has flared up and disappeared, switch off the radiator. It is then only necessary to lay down and die, secure in the knowledge that the absence of a weapon will convince the police that murder has been done.

The denouement to this story was superlative.

Martin Thomas has given us a story that will be long remembered for its all-round excellence.

S.B.L. 500 "Somebody Wants Me Dead" by Richard Williams.

A gentle satire which should be appreciated by the lovers of Old Boys' Books.

Harry Snogg wrote action-packed adventure stories for a popular juvenile magazine, Boys' Realm, his latest offering being a serial called "Death lurks in the Shadows" featuring Ryley Steele, heroic detective.

Harry Snogg, fresh from triumphs with "Gore at Gorrington Grange", and "Death Came at Doomsday", was preoccupied with Ryley Steele and his dilemma in the current story.

Happening to observe a real life robbery, Harry Snogg, through constant association with the ice cool, defiant detective, became transformed into Ryley Steele himself. Thus it was Ryley Steele's muscles that tensed like powerful springs inside tinny Harry Snogg's coat, and Ryley Steele who launched himself without thought of danger onto the three escaping bandits, his powerful, iron-hard fingers ready to wreak havoc upon them.

He grasped a bandit's foot in the ankle-lock described in the ju-jitsu instructions published in the latest edition of the Boy's Realm, and applied pressure.

"One down and two to go" said Harry Snogg to Sexton Blake a little later.

Blake and Coutts warned Snogg of his great danger in being the only person who could identify the two remaining bandits.

Ryley Steele reared up inside him once more. "Do you think I'm scared of a bunch of half-witted heisters?" he demanded. "Give me a couple of weeks and I'll have 'em both in the bag" continued Ryley Steele tautly through the normally meek and mild Snogg's lips. "Those bums don't terrify me," he went on contemptuously "I've been threatened plenty of times."

"I have a feeling he probably reads too many adventure stories." Blake said, dryly.

"He doesn't read fiction, he writes it." said Coutts. "Ever heard of Ryley Steele, the gangbuster? well, Snogg is the author. Wouldn't think it to look at him. A quiet and studious type. But Ryley Steele is a real tough egg. Why there was a case where Steele had a dozen crooks all coming at him at once....."

Coutts broke off, suddenly aware of the flicker of amusement in Sexton Blake's eyes.

"Not that I read the stories myself, mind" Coutts qualified quickly, flushing furiously, "I just happened to see my sister's boy reeding one of the things, and I"

"And you just happened to glance at it," Blake said gently, "Of course."

Later, despite Blake's warnings, Snogg went off in pursuit of a suspect. It was Ryley Steele, however, his jaw jutting grimly, his voice the voice of authority, who snapped "I'm commandeering this taxi, driver. I'm Steele of the Yard!"

Catching up with the suspect, Steele became threatening. "Keep your trap shut, or I'll tear off your arms and beat you to death with 'em." he promised.

Undoubtedly Snogg, egged on by his own creation, Ryley Steele, was helpful in breaking the case, but things looked pretty bad for Harry at one stage, and he was lucky that real-life detective Sexton Blake was at hand.

As one might have supposed, Snogg's experiences gave him ample inspiration for yet another Ryley Steele story.

S.B.L. 501 "Caribbean Crisis" by Desmond Reid.

On the title page of this book, you will come face to face with the portrait of a ghost. Not a traditional ghost of ephemeral form, but one with nicely brushed hair, and wearing a smart suit, shirt and necktie. There, for all the world to see, are the features of Desmond Reid, a person as fictitious as the characters of whom he is alleged to write. So now we have his picture, and wonder whether the nice young man who modelled for it is connected in any way with the Blake saga, or whether perhaps the portrait is a composite one, integrating the features of all the actual people writing behind the Desmond Reid facade.

S.B.L. 502. "The Weak and the Strong" by Arthur Kent.

From remarks made to me by people who have read this book, I gathered that one's stomach did not have to be particularly "weak" to find this story a trifle "strong".

Certainly there is preoccupation with sex, and much cold-blooded killing, but the sex is casual, even flippant, and certainly devoid of passion, and the killing is done without hate or malice, and even with some regret.

Hence I would be more inclined to call it a "justy" story, rather than a story of "lust".

Braddock, the chief criminal, was tall and very fair. Fortyish, with a lined, broad face which indicated intelligence, guts, and high and adventurous living, he had a brilliant mind. A smile would sometimes light his square chinned face. A tranquil peace enveloped him, for he was a calm, serene, confident man.

A man who refused to allow the emotional instability of his partners in crime to stampede him into an ill-considered move. A man whose philosophy was "There is no profit in revenge. If I knock somebody off, it's to show a financial profit, not to please an emotion."

I could not hate this man, and gained little satisfaction from knowing that he had to hang.

If I felt sick in the stomach at all, it was to find that vulture, Splash Kirby, at the end of the story, jubilant at the prospect of using this human tragedy to dredge up a story that would enable his newspaper to crow over its competitors.

"Man Pinches Bottom" by Jack Trevor Story.

No, it isn't a Sexton Blake story, but if you dig up a copy of S.B.L. 458 "Large Type Killer" by Richard Williams (from an original short story by Jack Trevor Story), you will find the same characters, and similar situations.

Meek, inoffensive Percy Paynter, editor of Consolidated Periodical's comic for infants, "Tommy Tucker", his trials and tribulations, and his eventual vindication and metamorphosis, are dealt with in both publications.

A slight difference in price, of course - in Australia, 1/3 for the S.B.L; 17/- for the new, hard-covered book.

The new book is certainly not for infants, and Percy Paynter, who had been content to slip a piece of ice down the girl's bare back in the S.B.L., resorted, instead, to the act from which the book title was derived.

There is an announcement on the dust wrapper inside panel, that a film, based on this novel, is in production. Expurgated version, no doubt!

A Very Merry Xmas to You One and All.

End.

READERS COMMENTS ON PREVIOUS ISSUES (Cont.)

WALTER WEBB: As a Sexton Blake fan I was naturally very interested in Vic Colby's PENNY POPULAR SEXTON BLAKE REPRINTS and herewith pay warm tribute to both his patience in compiling the information and his neatness in transferring it to paper so clearly and straightforwardly. Certainly a work of reference for the Blake fan to cherish and for its statistician to look back on with pride. That was a remarkably good likeness to Bill Lofts on the cover, and, as you said, a fitting tribute to his good work for the hobby.

A fine article that by Edward C. Snow, but he was a bit out about G.H.Teed. Teed was certainly the chief author of Sexton Blake, but Nelson Lee - never!

ERNIE CARTER'S COLUMN

FROM HERE, THERE and EVERYWHERE.

CHUMS 1908

The Biggest Annual Ever

The 1908 Chums Annual contained no less than 1140 pages which probably makes it the largest volume ever to be issued by any publishing firm in the world in the realm of boys fiction.

What a feast it contained for those boys of 54 years ago. Our own Vance Palmer started the ball rolling with a complete story entitled "The Treachery of Dirk Brady". Then there were serials by three well known authors. Maxwell Scott gave "On the Watch"; S. Walkey "Comrades in Peril" and Capt. Frank H. Shaw "The Peril of the Motherland".

In the latter story Russia is the enemy of England, not Germany. Shaw, like Pentelov in his cricket stories, used real characters in his serials. Lord Kitchener and the Czar are brought into the serial which tells of the attempted invasion of England. The other authors who contributed serials were perhaps not as well known as the above three, but nevertheless recognized then as good writers, e.g. Tom Fowler, G. Firth Scott, John Bloundell-Durton, Julian Linley and Robert Leighton with Paul Hardy illustrating various stories. Another well known Sexton Blake artist who also assisted was Harry Luns. Then there were hundreds of short stories and fine illustrations making up this tremendous volume.

Yes, certainly a volume to be cherished. The size and contents we shall never see again.

Eric W. Townsend

Boys Friend, Sport and Adventure, and Champion Writer.

Ernest L. McKeag mentioned Eric W. Townsend recently in an article for G.H. as having started him on the right track in writing boys stories. What happened to Townsend after that constitutes quite a human drama.

Did Townsend go on from success to success?

First of all let us slip back to the year 1922 and turn to the volume of Chums for that year. On page 222 you will see the photo of a handsome young man about 22 years of age. It is Eric W. Townsend. This is what the editor had to say about him — "The Editor of Chums has earned for himself a unique reputation as a discoverer of talent, and Mr. Eric Townsend was one of his happiest 'finds'. The first story he wrote for a boys' paper appeared in Chums, and perhaps that is why he likes writing for the Old Paper.

'I was a reader for many years', writes Mr. Townsend in a special message to readers, 'before I ever dreamed I should look upon my own yarns in each volume.'

'I have written much since that first yarn appeared; love stories, a play or two, occasional poems, but you can take it from me that I shall desire to be known always as a boys' author.'

'But then I'm still little more than a boy myself with writing as my chief occupation, motor cycling my pet hobby and my mother and my dog as my best friends. And I put it to you fellows - could I desire any finer comrades as I go through life, the best mother in the world, a faithful dog, and you who read my yarns?'

While Mr. Townsend has not actually said so you may take it from the Editor that "Blackbirders Treasure" is the finest yarn he has ever written, and will rank among the best of the serials that have appeared for over thirty years in Chums."

The year 1922 seems to be the year of triumph for Townsend.

Mr. Addington Symonds editor of the new paper "The Champion" with issue No.1 gave Eric the honour of having his 'new' serial "The Bell of Santadino" open the Champion's career. The strange fact about this serial is that it had already appeared in an Australian annual called "Pala" in 1921 as a complete story. When asked recently Mr. Symonds admitted that he had not known that the story had been used before, and he chose it himself as an excellent story to start the Champion.

Three months later on April 29th Eric Townsend opened another book appearing as the first contributor for a new paper entitled "Sport and Adventure". The story was "The Man from the Brooding Wild". At this time he was also writing for the Boys' Friend Library.

One of his famous yarns in the Boys' Friend Library was "Outlaws of the Yukon" which was reprinted in 1936. Townsend's work was highly thought of in the early twenties as one can see by his output and the various papers he contributed to.

Now we turn to the year 1955, 33 years later and this is what we read on page 135 of the Collectors Digest dated May of that year.

A Sad Story: A few weeks ago a man, aged 54 was charged with the theft of a jig-saw puzzle worth 1/6. In evidence it was stated he had only 8d in his possession, he had domestic trouble and his last job was picking flowers in Cornwall. He had never been in trouble before where the police were concerned. He was given a conditional discharge.

The defendant, whose coat and flannel trousers were patched, spoke in a cultured voice and said he used to write adventure stories for boys, but all that is gone now; he hadn't the incentive. He mentioned his pen name; that is what made me sit up and take notice for it was one familiar to readers of the A.P. papers and Chums of thirty years or so ago. He specialized in adventure serials many of which were republished in the Boys' Friend Library.

The report gave me the greater shock for only a week or two before I saw it, I had been looking at some biographies with photographs which appeared in one of the A.P. papers over 30 years ago, and this man in trouble was one of them!

The biography told of a cheery young man apparently without a care in the world, and whose stories were in great demand. The photograph showed him smiling, handsome and prosperous looking. I visualized the one time author now - grey-haired with patched clothes and 8d in his pocket who had spent a weekend in a prison cell. One doesn't know what brought him to such a pass in these days of little unemployment but I thought of what someone once said "There but for the grace of God go I".

I mentioned the sad business to one of our circle. He was shocked, for it so happened they had corresponded when both were young though they had never met. He had an urge to help if he could, so he wrote to the Chief Constable of the City in which the case had been heard. A reply was received saying that the man had stayed there for a few days and set off on his wandering again. "We are still hoping to trace him."

The late Herbert Leckenley wrote those words and shortly afterwards he advised me that the down and out author was Eric Townsend. Attempts were made to take up a collection for him but somehow Townsend got wind of it and asked Herbert for an advance sum. Herbert was advised by different organizations, such as the Salvation Army, Police etc., that Townsend was a hopeless case. He'd been offered use of a typewriter to rehabilitate himself in the most probable way, but it was of no use. So there the Townsend story ended.

It is better to remember him for his fine work of many years ago and he did not fail. For how many will be remembered with such affection as he? He gave good, clean golden hours to many, many thousands of youngsters, and that is a real reason for existence.

End.

READERS COMMENTS ON PREVIOUS ISSUES (Cont.)

G.R. SAMWAYS: Thank you for No.5 Golden Hours - an excellent production which does you great credit. Naturally, I was most interested in Mr. Twyman's article on Hedley O'Mant, one of my oldest and best friends. It is splendidly written and should create great interest among MAGNET enthusiasts. Hedley seems to come to life again in Mr. Twyman's moving and affectionate memoir, and I would not have missed that particular feature for the world.

ARTHUR HOLLAND: Many thanks for the latest issue of the G.H.M.(No.4). I'm highly pleased, considering it to be our best number to date. I was particularly interested in the excellent articles by Edward C.Snow and W.O.G.Lofts. I gained new knowledge from Victor Colby's contribution on Penny Popular Sexton Blake Reprints. And I'm sure Ernie Carter's new feature will be well received by the readers. As for the production itself -- for a home-made job it is a very commendable effort. In the Editorial, I was glad to see a word of praise to W.O.G.Lofts, and a sketch of him on the cover. He is certainly worthy of this tribute.