



# The Old Boys' Book Collector



IN THIS ISSUE - **FREE PLATE OF BILLY BUNTER!**

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# THE VANGUARD $\frac{1}{2}$

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No. 54

PUBLISHED EVERY TUESDAY

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## COMRIE, CENTRE FORWARD.

A THRILLING FOOTBALL STORY.

By NIGEL WALLACE.



Tricking the custodian in his old way, he shot past out of his reach as the backs closed in on him.

### ANOTHER PUZZLE FOR THE HAMILTONIANS

Was this a Hamilton? The author now reveals that he wrote about a thousand stories under a variety of pen-names for Trapps, Holmes and Co. See the article in this number. "The Rearguard of THE VANGUARD."

THE OLD BOY'S BOOK COLLECTOR is edited and published quarterly by Tom Hopperson at Courtlands, Fulford Road, Scarborough. Telephone: Scarborough 4310. Single Copies, 2/-, annual subscription, 8/- post free. Advertisement copy (rate 1d. per word) should be received a clear fortnight before publication dates — 1st January, 1st March, 1st June and 1st September.

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Cover design by "Magnet" artist C.H. Chagman

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### THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

I have noticed of late that the years which seemed to limp along on leaden feet when I was in my teens whizz by with indecent haste now that those teens are thirty years behind me. It occurs the calendar to re-assure me that it is three months since the first issue of THE OLD BOYS' BOOK COLLECTOR was consigned to the post, leaving me (a la Maxwell Scott) with bated breath and quivering with excitement to wait for the reactions of the readers.

There wasn't long to wait. The letters began to arrive almost by the return post, and the generous and unstinted praise set my mind at rest. It may be that there were a few who were not impressed: if so, they did not bother to say so, while among those who did take the kindly trouble to write there was undiluted enthusiasm. My natural diffidence revolts at the idea of printing even extracts. Stealing myself to do so, I dip at random into the pile for a short GABRIEL DEPARTMENT. It is pure if pardonable hornblowing, but I promise you that it will be the last trump.

"No. 1 is the best book I have ever read." D. Beeby, Wellingborough.

"A really top-hole effort. The amount of reading is amazing, and the quality matches it." Peter J. Henckley, Coventry.

"Slaughtering! The cover is a work of art and in my humble opinion worth the money. All the articles appeal to me." Charles Wright, London.

"Nothing else but praise for it. Not one fault, and the line-up for future numbers is to be envied." Norman Gregory, Birmingham.

"A very fine publication indeed. As soon as the fans get this mag in their hands it will be a sure hit." Wm. Jamison, Co. Down.

"The contents are fine, the format is delightful, the cover is a joy in itself." Stanley Smith, Basingstoke.

".. how much I enjoyed the first issue. I thought you really "went to town" on "The Landing Men". Don Webster, Liverpool.

"The best issue of any collectors' mag — ever!" Harry Dowler, M/C.

To quote, however shortly, from every letter would run to several pages, and I for bear, which does not lessen my gratitude to everyone who

showed his interest by making his comments and suggestions. In such a full flung circle as ours, personal contacts are limited, and your letters do relieve the otherwise inevitable feeling of working in a vacuum.

So here is the second number, in which are proudly introduced Mr. C. Maurice Dowd, the editor of "The Magnet", "The Gem", "The Popular", "The Boys' Friend" and "Modern Boy", to give us for the first time the thoughts of the man who conducted the papers, and Mr. Frank Richards, his star author. Peter Walker makes his bow in these pages, too. He can always be relied on to find an unusual angle of approach to the hobby, and he has succeeded so well in that that any comment would be unfair until you have read "Coloured Counties". Dennis Richmond's "Leading Men" produced more favourable comment than anything else in No. 1: his treatment of Dunter, D'Arcy and Lovell should not detract from that first impression, and The Welrus and the editorial odd-job men labour as before to give a balance and variety to the pages.

I remarked last time on the difficulties of laying down a rigid programme three months in advance, but among the features for the next issue are Michael Poole's "Synopsis of Forty Years", Dennis Richmond on "Hamilton's Cads", "L.C.D., A Revaluation of Sexton Blake," and the second part of "That Dreadful Mr. Reynolds". As the racing sheets put it, the above have arrived. The remaining articles will probably be taken from the list printed on the back cover of the first issue, but a word of caution! The unexpected generally happens, and complicates a schedule. The unexpected this time was Mr. Frank Richards' comment on "The Vanguard", with which it seemed best to combine the other later information and so finally dispose of the paper. By adding four pages to the nominal 32 and juggling the possible contents, it was done, but even so the sequence of the Reynolds article had to be broken. Hence the vagueness about No.3.

Delaying the Reynolds was a disagreeable expedient, and I was sorely tempted to push on to a full forty pages, include it, and damn the consequences. After much pondering, the temptation had to be resisted. With a stabilised circulation roughly thirty above what it appears to be, there is every chance of most numbers running to forty pages, and every increase in circulation will be ploughed back in extra pages and illustrations.

But, conversely, any failure to expand or actual shrinkage will bar that "bigger and better" aspiration and might even reverse it — although it would not under any circumstances bring the size to less than 32 pages. I see little chance of that, though, and if readers will bring the mag to the attention of their collecting friends who either have not seen it or belong to that cautious minority who refuse to be first in the water, there will be no chance of it at all.

Remarks made by several correspondents prompt my final comment. It would have been thoroughly stupid on my part if "The O.B.S.C." had been launched without an adequate reserve of copy, but that does not mean that its pages are closed. On the contrary, any article by anyone will be welcomed and given every consideration. If you have an idea for one in mind, don't let the list of futures throw you. The field is wide open, and 150 pages a year wait for you.

By C.M. Down, Editor of "The Gem" and "Magnet"

As Editor for many years of "The Gem" and "The Magnet", I have been ever mindful of the fact that "the play's the thing", that is, that the long complete stories of the famous characters of St. Jim's and Greyfriars respectively, and the drawings that illustrated them, were the focal points of the readers' interest. The editor's function has therefore been that of the anonymous back-room boy who plans the papers each successive week, and keeps them running smoothly, to the satisfaction - as far as possible - of all concerned. It is only now - more than forty years after I assisted in the preparation of Number One of the new "Magnet Library", price one half-penny - that I emerge from behind the scenes, as it were, at the particular invitation of the Editor of "The Old Boys' Book Collector".

What an interesting job it was, working on the staff of the Companion Papers! My early days, as a junior, were spent mainly in correcting proof pages, reading manuscripts, or in "making-up" the paper, that is pasting up galley-proofs of the stories and "pulls" of the pictures, adding the headlines and captions, fitting in hits and pieces here and there so as to construct a complete "dummy" of the next issue for the inspection of the Editor. Every issue had to be passed by him, of course, first in make-up form and then finally as the complete set of page proofs. In those early days, it was not infrequently between eight and nine o'clock on a Friday night before we Sub-editors got the Editor's O.K. on the final batch of proof-pages and were able to send them off to the printers. Then we would repair to a little restaurant in Fleet Street for a light supper and so home - having put another week's issues of the papers to bed! Even in those early days, the editorial staff of the Amalgamated Press worked only a five-day week, by command of Lord Northcliffe himself. No one minded working late hours towards the end of the week, to get the papers through, with the knowledge that one had the whole of Saturday and Sunday free. In this, as in so many other things, Lord Northcliffe's ideas were in advance of his time. He and his brother Harold (Lord Rothermere) each had his room in the Fleetway House, and they were at all times accessible to even the humblest member of the staff.

I remember seeing Lord Northcliffe, soon after the Fleetway House was built, pushing one of his brothers, who was crippled as a result of a motor accident, round the building in a wheel chair. His pride in the great new building and his tender care for his brother were pleasant things to see.

In my early days as a Sub-editor, I did not see very much of the author of the St. Jim's and Greyfriars stories. I say "author" for it is now, I believe, an open secret that Martin Clifford of "The Gem", Frank Richards of "The Magnet", and Owen Conquest of "The Boys' Friend" were - and still are - one and the same man, to wit Mr. Charles Hamilton. This fact was an official secret for some thirty years, and a well kept one, but to the really discriminating reader the delightful style of the writing, the vivid characterisation and the delicious humour which were common to all three

authors must have given a pretty plain clue to the true state of affairs.

Mr. Hamilton used to come up to the office perhaps once a week, stopping to exchange a few words with the Chief Sub-editor - then Herbert A. Hinton - en route and then disappear into the Editor's room. He would remain closeted there for an hour or more before leaving, without more than a passing glance at the latest-joined Sub-editor in the corner. From the day of my joining the staff, however, I made a point of reading every Hamilton manuscript that came into the office - and what a lot of pleasure I got out of that task! I became as familiar with every one of his characters - and there were quite a lot of them - as Mr. Hamilton himself. And as I read more and more of it, I came to have a great admiration which has continued to this day. The passionate attachment to the Companion Papers of so many thousands of readers was never a mystery to me, as it was to some of my colleagues. It was inspired by Mr. Hamilton's knack of projecting his own pleasant personality into his stories, through the characters he created.

These characters made a lasting impression upon several generations of young people throughout the British Empire - an impression that remains vivid to this day. St. Jim's, Greyfriars and Rookwood Schools are talked of familiarly by a large part of the adult population of this country today.

Billy Bunter made his debut on the Television screen in February this year, more than forty years after Frank Richards first invented him. And the very starting of "The Old Boys' Book Collector" shows how live remains the interest in Mr. Hamilton's immortal schoolboys.

As time went on, H.A. Hinton succeeded to the editorship of the papers and I became his Chief assistant. In this position I naturally played a considerable part in the development of the papers and also got to know Mr. Hamilton very well. My admiration for his work diminished no wit - in fact it grew. Then came a time when I left my job, in August, 1914, and was occupied elsewhere. For four years and four months I did not even see a copy of any of the Companion Papers, and scarcely even gave them a thought. But all things come to an end, and in February, 1919, I returned to Fleetway House and was back on the job. How the papers carried on during that interim period, I do not know to this day! I started once to work through the back files for those years, but found so many things that made me shudder that I soon desisted!

Those must have been times of tremendous difficulty, in the absence of so many of the staff, and of authors and artists. The papers had to be carried on somehow, of course, but ——! I prefer to draw a veil over that period in their history.

The years 1919 and 1920 brought the papers back on to their old footing, and also brought a number of new developments. "The Schoolboys Own Library" made its appearance, and also "The Greyfriars Holiday Annual". Both were an instant success. "The Greyfriars Holiday Annual", published at five shillings, was eagerly welcomed by the "Gem" and "Magnet" readers and quickly sold out a large edition.

I well remember writing the Editorial for that first volume - as I did for all the subsequent volumes - and thinking the while that it was a bold experiment to bring out a publication priced at five shillings for the benefit principally of the readers of "The Gem" and "The Magnet". In those days five shillings was five shillings!

Towards the end of 1920, H.A. Hinton left the Amalgamated Press, and I became Editor, a position I was to hold for twenty years.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty I then faced lay in the necessity I was under to have at hand one or more substitute writers capable of deputising for Mr. Hamilton in case of need. This had been a constant headache to both my predecessors in office, ever since "The Magnet" had become, a few months after its successful launching as a half-penny paper, a full-sized penny paper. To be responsible for two twenty-eight page weekly papers, each of which depended upon the output of the same author to fill three-quarters of its pages, fifty-two weeks in the year, was headache enough for any editor! In addition, of course, the highly specialised style and the complex nature of the characterisation made it quite impossible for any other author, however talented, to carry on the series even for one week, without prolonged study of Mr. Hamilton's work. When the decision was made to strengthen the appeal of "The Boys' Friend" by means of the Rookwood stories by Owen Conquest - Mr. Hamilton again under another guise - the position was still further aggravated.

So was Mr. Hamilton! Mr. Hamilton will, I know, forgive my "revealing" - in the style of the sensational Sunday newspaper - that he was (and is!) distinctly allergic to the idea of any other writer handling the Hamilton characters, and very naturally so, as they are the children of his brain. No one else can make them do their stuff as he can. I am on delicate ground here and feel that I must walk very warily. But let me say that in this matter I could not agree with Mr. Hamilton more. To make use of an understudy in place of the original author was ever, for me, a painful necessity. And I can lay my hand on my heart and say that, in all the years of my association with Mr. Hamilton, I never used one unless, in my view, it was unavoidable.

Nethertheless, understudies were necessary - if only to allow the editor to sleep at night! Suppose the misfortune of a bad accident or a serious illness had overtaken Mr. Hamilton, where would the papers have been then? In point of fact, Mr. Hamilton, in all the years I have known him has been singularly free from either accident or illness. He has maintained a very high output of grand quality with a regularity which is amazing to look back upon. No one else could have done it, of that I am assured.

But for many years the pressure upon him was such that no editor was able to amass more than about two weeks supply of his manuscripts for the papers - which is far too little for the editor's peace of mind. It was therefore absolutely essential to have one or more trained understudies available, who could take over the series in case of emergency. To per-

suade these understudies to undertake the necessary study of Mr. Hamilton's work, and to encourage them to try their 'prattice hands on Greyfriars or St. Jim's stories, involved a great deal of work on the part of the editorial staff. It also involved the purchase of some of these stories, to hold as stock against emergencies — and these stories had to be used at some time or other. Altogether the subject was one which was hedged about many difficulties. We may leave it here now, but perhaps, with your Editor's permission, we may have an opportunity at some other time of discussing some of these understudy (or "ersatz", as Mr. Hamilton called them!) writers, the identity of some of whom has become known to many of you.

In the days before the first World War, Mr. Hamilton used to live a good deal abroad, and manuscripts used to reach us from the Austrian Tyrol or from the French Riviera. Sometimes an odd manuscript would be delayed in the post from some Continental resort, and then there was a larva and despondency in the office, and telegrams would fly too and fro until the missing treasure turned up.

I have known occasions, too, when the margin of one of the pages of a Tom Merry or Harry Wharton story would be covered with figures, with certain numbers recurring at frequent intervals. Fishing the envelope out of the waste-paper basket and studying the postmarks and foreign stamps, I would discover, sure enough, that the manuscript had been posted in Monte Carlo. One can only assume that the figures represented the working-out of some system designed by the hopeful author to break the bank at Monte Carlo. But I never heard that he did it!

Mr. Hamilton's knowledge of foreign parts was, of course, utilized in the planning of his stories. Many of you will recall various series in which the boys of St. Jim's or Greyfriars have been transported to the Continent or even further afield, where the author's local knowledge has provided that authentic touch of local colour which makes all the difference to the story.

There is much more I could write, but I have come to the end of the space allotted to me. It is a privilege indeed to meet, in the pages of "The Old Boys' Book Collector", the Old Guard, as it were of my former readers, through whose enthusiasm the memory of the cheery chums of St. Jim's, Greyfriars and Rookwood will be kept alive, I hope, for many years to come

=====

**THE WHITE FEATHER DAYS:** Among innumerable silly stunts promoted by editors (The Walrus)

I award the hand-painted moustache trainer to H.A. Hinton for his long-standing fuss in "The Magnet" about his military service. As soon as the 1914 War began he announced that his departure was imminent. Time went on, so a few of the readers joined the Major-General in "The Pirates of Penzance" in saying: "But damn you don't go!" whereat the worthy editor howled the place down that he was being subjected to vile and filthy aspersions until he bored to tears the hundred or so thousand readers who were intensely interested in the Famous Five but didn't care particularly whether Hinton was an editor or a brand of tea. He eventually did serve in the Coldstream Guards, of course, and there ended the clamour.

Editorial Note: In the March, 1940, issue of "Horizon", George Orwell had a penetrating study, "Boys' Papers", in which he surveyed both the Amalgamated Press and Thomson-Lang weeklies, with particular attention being paid to "The Gem" and "The Magnet". This essay was reprinted in two books by Orwell, "Inside the Whale" and his "Collected Essays", both of which will be in most Public Libraries. Frank Richards came along with his reply in the May number. This is the first occasion on which he emerged from the obscurity of Fleetway House, and, as his vindication of his work, merits an availability which it has not up to now enjoyed. I gratefully acknowledge Mr. Richards' kind permission to reprint the piece. T.H.)

The Editor has kindly given me space to reply to Mr. Orwell, whose article on Boys' Weeklies appeared in "Horizon" No. 3. Mr. Orwell's article is a rather remarkable one to appear in a periodical of this kind. From the fact that "Horizon" contains a picture that does not resemble a picture, a poem that does not resemble poetry, and a story that does not resemble a story, I conclude that it must be a very high-browed paper indeed: and I was agreeably surprised, therefore, to find in it an article written in a lively and entertaining manner, and actually readable. I was still more interested as this article dealt chiefly with my work as an author for boys. Mr. Orwell perpetrates so many inaccuracies, however, and flicks off his condemnations with so careless a hand, that I am glad of an opportunity to set him right on a few points. He reads into my very innocent fiction a fell scheme for drugging the minds of the younger proletariat into dull acquiescence in a system of which Mr. Orwell does not approve: and of which, in consequence, he cannot imagine anyone else approving except from interested motives. Anyone who disagrees with Mr. Orwell is necessarily either an antiquated ass or an exploiter on the make! His most serious charge against my series is that it smacks of the year 1910: a period which Mr. Orwell appears to hold in peculiar horror. Probably I am older than Mr. Orwell: and I can tell him that the world went very well then. It has not been improved by the Great War, the General Strike, the outbreak of sex-chatter, by make-up or lipstick, by the present discontents, or by Mr. Orwell's thoughts upon the present discontents! But Mr. Orwell not only reads a dishevelled dunderheaded Tory into a harmless author for boys; he accuses him of plagiarism, of snobbishness, of being out of date, even of cleanliness of mind, as if that were a sin also. I propose to take Mr. Orwell's indictment charge by charge, rebutting the same one after another, excepting the last, to which I plead guilty. After which, I expect to receive from Mr. Orwell a telegram worded like that of the invader of Sind.

To begin with the plagiarism. "Probably", says Mr. Orwell, "'The Magnet' owes something to Gunby Badath, Desmond Cole, and the rest." Frank Richards had never read Desmond Cole until the nineteen-twenties: he had never read Gunby Badath - whoever Gunby Badath may be - at all. "Even the name of the chief comic among the Grayfriars masters, Mr. Prout, is

taken from Stalky and Co.", declares Mr. Orwell. Now, it is true that there is a ~~four~~ master at Greyfriars named Prout, and there is a house-master in Stalky named Prout. It is also true that the "Magnet" author is named Richards; and that there is a Richards in Stalky and Co. But the Fifth-form master at Greyfriars no more derives from the Stalky Prout than "The Magnet" author from the Stalky Richards. Stalky's Prout is a "gloomy ass", worried, dubious, easily worked on by others. The Greyfriars Prout is portly, self-satisfied, impervious to the opinions of others. No two characters could be more unlike. Mr. Prout of Greyfriars is a very estimable gentleman; and characters in a story, after all, must have names. Every name in existence has been used over and over again in fiction.

The verb "to jape", says Mr. Orwell, is also taken from Stalky. Mr. Orwell is so very modern that I cannot suspect him of having read anything so out-of-date as Chaucer. But if he will glance into that obsolete author he will find "jape" therein, used in precisely the same sense. "Frabjous" also, it seems is borrowed from Stalky! Has Mr. Orwell never read "Alice"? "Frabjous", like "chortle" and "burble", derives from Lewis Carroll. Innumerable writers have borrowed "frabjous" and "chortle" - I believe Frank Richards was the first to borrow "burble", but I am not sure of this: such expressions, once in existence, become part of the language, and are common property.

"Sex", says Mr. Orwell, "is completely tabu." Mr. Noel Coward, in his autobiography is equally amused at the absence of the sex-motif in "The Magnet" series. But what would Mr. Orwell have? "The Magnet" is intended chiefly for readers up to sixteen: although I am proud to know that it has readers of sixty! It is read by girls as well as boys. Would it do these children good, or harm, to turn their thoughts to such matters. Sex, certainly, does enter uncomfortably into the experience of the adolescent. But surely the less he thinks about it, at an early age, the better. I am aware that, in these modern days, there are people who think that children should be told things of which in my own childhood no small person was ever allowed to hear. I disagree with this entirely. My own opinion is that such people generally suffer from disordered digestions, which cause their minds to take a nasty turn. They fancy that they are "realists", when they are only obscene. They go grubbing in the sewers for their realism, and refuse to believe in the grass and flowers above ground - which, nevertheless, are equally real! Moreover, this "motif" does not play so stupendous a part in real life, among healthy and wholesome people, as these "realists" imagine. If Mr. Orwell supposes that the average Sixth-form boy cuddles a parlour-maid as often as he handles a cricket-bat, Mr. Orwell is in error.

Drinking and smoking and betting, says Mr. Orwell, are represented as "shabby", but at the same time "irresistibly fascinating". If Mr. Orwell will do me the honour of looking over a few numbers of "The Magnet" he will find that such ways are invariably described as "dingy" - even the "bad bats" are a little ashamed of them; even Billy Bunter, though he will smoke a cigarette if he can get one for nothing, is described as being, though an ass, not ass enough to spend his money on such things. I submit that the adjective "dingy" is not equivalent to the adjective "fascinating".

Mr. Orwell finds it difficult to believe that a series running for thirty years can possibly be written by one and the same person. In the presence of such authority, I speak with diffidence; and can only say that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, I am only one person, and have never been two or three.

"Consequently," says Mr. Orwell, cheerfully proceeding from erroneous premises to a still more erroneous conclusion, "they must be written in a style that is easily imitated." On this point, I may say that I can hardly count the number of authors who have striven to imitate Frank Richards, not one of whom has been successful. The style, whatever its merits or demerits is my own, and - if I may say it with due modesty - inimitable. Many have tried; but as Dryden - an obsolete poet, Mr. Orwell has remarked:

"The builders were with want of genius curst,

The second building was not like the first."

Mr. Orwell mentions a number of other papers which - egregiously - he classes with "The Magnet". These papers, with the exception of "The Gen" are not in the same class. They are not in the same street. They are hardly in the same universe. With "The Magnet" it is not a case of primus inter pares; it is a case of Eclipse first and the rest nowhere. Mr. Orwell in effect admits this. He tells us, quite correctly, that Billy Buter is a "real creation": that he is a "first-rate character": and that he is "one of the best-known in English fiction". He tells us that in "The Magnet" the characters are so carefully graded, as to give every type of reader a character he can identify himself with". I suggest that an author who can do this is not easily imitated. It is not so easy as Mr. Orwell supposes. It cannot be acquired: only the born story-teller can do it. Shakespeare could do it as no man ever did before or since. Dickens could do it. Thackeray could not do it. Scott, with all his genius, could only give us historical suits of clothes with names attached. Can Bernard Shaw make a character live? Could Ibsen or Tchekov? To the highbrow, I know, a writer need only have a foreign name to be a genius: and the more unpronounceable the name, the greater the genius. These duds - yes, Mr. Orwell, Frank Richards really regards Shaw, Ibsen and Tchekov as duds - these duds would disdain to draw a schoolboy. Billy Buter, let us admit, is not so dignified a character as an imbecile Russian or a nerve-racked Norwegian. But, as a nineteenth-century writer, whom Mr. Orwell would not deign to quote, remarked: "I would rather have a Dutch peasant by Teniers than his Majesty's head on a signpost.

Mr. Orwell accuses Frank Richards of snobbishness; apparently because he makes an aristocratic character act as an aristocrat should. Now, although Mr. Orwell may not suspect it, the word "aristocrat" has not wholly lost its original Greek meaning. It is an actual fact that, in this country at least, noblemen generally are better fellows than commoners. My own acquaintance with titles Noble is strictly limited: but it is my experience and I believe everybody's, that - excepting the peasant-on-the-land class, which is the salt of the earth - the higher you go up in the social scale the better you find the manners, and the more fixed the principles. The fact that old families almost invariably die out in the long run is proof

of this: they cannot and will not do the things necessary for survival. All over the country old estates are passing into new hands. Is this because Sir George up at the Hall is inferior to Mr. Thompson from the City - or otherwise? Indeed, Mr. Thompson himself is improved by being made a lord. Is it not a fact that, when a title is bestowed on some hard man of business, it has an ameliorating effect on him - that he reacts unconsciously to his new state, and becomes rather less of a Gradgrind, rather more a man with a sense of his social responsibilities. Everyone must have observed this. The founder of a new family follows, at a distance, in the footsteps of the old families; and every day and in every way becomes better and better! It was said of old that the English nation dearly loves a lord. The English nation, in that as in other things, is wiser than its highbrowed instructors. Really, Mr. Orwell, is it snobbish to give respect where respect is due; or should an author, because he doesn't happen to be a peer himself, inspire his readers with envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness?

But Mr. Orwell goes on to say that the working-classes enter only as comics and semi-villains. This is sheer perversity on Mr. Orwell's part. Such misrepresentation would not only be bad manners, but bad business. Every paper desiring a wide circulation must circulate, for the greater part, among the working-classes for the simple reason that they form nine-tenths of the population. A paper that is so fearfully aristocratic that it is supported only by marquises and men-servants must always go the way of "The Morning Post". "Horizon", I do not doubt, has a circle of readers with the loftiest brows; but I do doubt whether Sir John Simon will bother it very much for the sinews of war. Indeed, I have often wondered how so many young men with expansive foreheads and superior smiles contrive to live at all on bad prose and worse poetry. Directors, editors, and authors must live; and they cannot live by insulting the majority of their public. If Frank Richards were the snob Mr. Orwell believes him to be, he would still conceal that weakness very carefully when writing for "The Magnet". But a man can believe that the "tenth possessor of a foolish face" has certain qualities lacking in the first possessor of a sly brain, without being a snob. I am very pleased to be an author, and I think I would rather be an author than a nobleman; but I am not fool enough to think that an author is of such national importance as a farmer or a farm labourer. Workmen can, and often do, get on quite well without authors; but no author could continue to exist without the workmen. They are not only the backbone of the nation; they are the nation: all other classes being merely trimmings. The best and noblest-minded man I ever knew was a simple wood-cutter. I would like Mr. Orwell to indicate a single sentence in which Frank Richards refers disrespectfully to the people who keep him in comfort. There are three working-class boys in the Grayfriars Remove; Mr. Orwell mentions all three by name; each one is represented as being liked and respected by the other boys; each in turn has been selected as the special hero of a series; and Mr. Orwell must have used a very powerful microscope to detect anything comic or semi-villainous in them.

It is true that if I introduce a public house loafer, I do not make

him a baronet: and the billiards marker does not wear an old school tie. But something, surely, is due to reality: especially as Mr. Orwell is such a realist. If Mr. Orwell has met public-house loafers who are baronets, or billiard markers wearing the old school tie, I have never had a similar experience.

Of strikes, slumps, unemployment, etc., complains Mr. Orwell, there is no mention. But are these really subjects for young people to meditate upon? It is true that we live in an insecure world: but why should not youth feel as secure as possible? It is true that burglars break into houses: but what parent in his senses would tell a child that a masked face may look in at the nursery window? A boy of fifteen or sixteen is on the threshold of life: and life is a tough proposition; but will he be better prepared for it by telling him how tough it may possibly be? I am sure that the reverse is the case. Gray - another obsolete poet, Mr. Orwell - tells us that sorrows never come too late, and happiness too swiftly flies. Let youth be happy, or as happy as possible. Happiness is the best preparation for misery, if misery must come. At least, the poor kid will have had something! He may, at twenty, be hunting for a job and not finding it - why should his fifteenth year be clouded by worrying about that in advance? He may, at thirty, get the sack - why tell him so at twelve? He may, at forty, be a wreck on Labour's scrap-heap - but how will it benefit him to know that at fourteen? Even if making miserable children would make adults happy, it would not be justifiable. But the truth is that the adult will be all the more miserable if he was miserable as a child. Every day of happiness, illusory or otherwise - and most happiness is illusory - is so much to the good. It will help to give the boy confidence and hope. Frank Richards tells him that there are some splendid fellows in a world that is, after all, a decent sort of place. He likes to think himself one of these fellows, and is happy in his day-dreams. Mr. Orwell would have him told that he is a shabby little blighter, his father an ill-used serf, his world a dirty, muddled, rotten sort of show. I don't think it would be fair play to take his twopence for telling him that!

Now about patriotism: an affronting word to Mr. Orwell. I am aware, of course, that the really "modern" highbrow is an "idiot who prides in enthusiastic tone, all centuries but this, and every country but his own". But is a country necessarily inferior because it is one's own? Why should a fellow not feel proud of things in which a just pride may be taken? I have lived in many countries, and talked in several languages: and found something to esteem in every country I have visited. But I have never seen any nation the equal of my own. Actually, such is my belief, Mr. Orwell.

The basic political assumptions, Mr. Orwell goes on, are two: that nothing ever changes, and that foreigners are funny. Well, the French have a proverb that the more a thing changes, the more it is just the same. Temporary mutations are mistaken for great changes - as they always were. Decency seems to have gone - but it will come in again, and there will be a new generation of men who do not write and talk muck, and women with clean faces. Progress, I believe, goes on: but it moves to slow time. No real change is perceptible in the course of a single lifetime. But even

if changes succeeded one another with kaleidoscopic rapidity, the writer for young people should endeavour to give his young readers a sense of stability and solid security, because it is good for them and makes for happiness and peace of mind.

As for foreigners being funny, I must shock Mr. Orwell by telling him that foreigners are funny. They lack the sense of humour which is the special gift of our own chosen nation; and people without a sense of humour are always unconsciously funny. Take Hitler, for example, - with his ewestlie, his "good German sword", his fortifications named after characters from Wagner, his military coat that he will never take off till he marches home victorious: and all the rest of his fripperies out of the property-box. In Germany they lap this up like milk, with the most awful seriousness; in England the play-acting ass would be laughed out of existence. Take Mussolini - can anyone imagine a fat man in London talking the belderdash that Benito talks in Rome to wildly cheering audiences, without evoking, not wild cheers, but inextinguishable laughter? But is il Duce regarded as a mountebank in Italy? Very far from it. I submit to Mr. Orwell that people who take their theatricals seriously are funny. The fact that Adolf Hitler is deadly dangerous does not make him less comic.

But what I dislike most is Mr. Orwell telling me that I am out of date. Human nature, Mr. Orwell, is dateless. A character that lives is always up to date. If, as Mr. Orwell himself says, a boy in 1940 can identify himself with a boy in "The Magnet", obviously the boy in "The Magnet" is a boy of 1940.

But it is quite startling to see what Mr. Orwell regards as up to date. The one theme that is really new, quoth he, is the scientific one - death-rays, Martian invasions, invisible men, interplanetary rockets, and so on. Oh, my Hat! if Mr. Orwell will permit that obsolete expression. This kind of thing was done, and done to death, when I was a small boy; long before "The Magnet" was born or thought of. Before I reached the age of unaided reading, a story was read to me by an elder brother, in which bold travellers hiked off to the moon, packed inside a bullet discharged from a tremendous gun. The greatest of submarine stories - Jules Verne's "20,000 Leagues" - was published before I was born. The Martians invaded the earth while I was still mewling and puking in the nurse's arms. In the nursery I knew the Invisible Man, though his invisibility was then due to a cloak of darkness. More than twenty years ago I wrote a death-ray story myself: but did not fancy that it was a new idea; even then it had an ancient and fish-like smell. Some of my earliest reading was of flying: there was a strenuous character in those days, who sailed the skies in what he called an aeronaf: a direct descendant, I think, of Verne's "Clipper of the Clouds" of twenty years earlier: and Verne, I fancy, had read "Peter Wilkins" of seventy years earlier still; and I believe the author of "Peter Wilkins" had not disdained to pick up a tip or two from Swift's writings in the eighteenth century. Did not Lucien tell them something about a trip to the moon in the second century? The oldest flying story I have read was written in Greek about three thousand years ago; but I do not suppose it was the earliest: I have no doubt that when they finish

sorting over the Babylonian bricks they will find a flying story somewhere among the ruins, and very likely a death-ray and an invisible man keeping it company. If this stuff is new, Mr. Orwell, what is old?

To conclude, Mr. Orwell hopes that a boys' paper with a left-wing bias may not be impossible. I hope that it is, and will remain, impossible. Boys' minds ought not to be worried or disturbed by politics. Even if I were a Socialist or a Communist, I should still consider it the duty of a boys' author to write without reference to such topics: because his business is to entertain his readers, make them as happy as possible, give them a feeling of cheerful security, turn their thoughts to healthy pursuits, and above all to keep them away from unhealthy introspection, which in early youth can do only harm. If there is a Tchekov among my readers, I fervently hope that the effect of "The Magnet" will be to turn him into a Bob Cherry!

(Editorial Note: There was a sequel of sorts to the above article. In the following number of "Horizon" appeared a letter by Mr. Harold A. Albert, and a reply by Mr. Richards, the unusual acidity of which seems to indicate that he found Mr. Albert's "editorial gossip" much more galling than Mr. Orwell's reasoned criticism. And with this second reply the matter ended.)

Harold A. Albert: As a professional writer, I have been uncommonly interested in the great controversy on Boys' Weeklies, but both Orwell and Richards miss a main point. Current in Fleet Street there is a very simple and credible explanation of why "The Magnet" and "The Gem" stories give such a scant reflection of the modern world, and seem scarcely to have changed in thirty years. It is due, it would seem, neither to the vile machinations (? casual control) of a Tory millionaire on the one hand nor the alleged out-datedness of Mr. Richards on the other. It is merely that, so editorial gossips tell me, "The Magnet" and "The Gem" stories regularly revolve in an eight-year cycle. Every eight years, so they say, the old stories are touched-up and painted over, to appear again with fresh gloss and entertain a new generation of boys. I have not the time necessary for research to confirm this. Mr. Orwell has obviously missed it, but what does Mr. Richards say? If the stories are recurrent, such is explained. It rully shows why they smack of 1910, clears up Mr. Richards's otherwise inexplicable literary output, and puts boyhood on its proper level of timelessness. Besides, I much prefer the picture of Mr. Richards touching up his past work to the awful ordeal of an author condemned to inventing new Greyfriarsians every week for life.

Frank Richards: Mr. Harold A. Albert tells us that he is a professional writer, on gossiping terms with editors who in their gossipy moments appear to have been pulling his leg to a considerable extent. I prefer to take this charitable view rather than to believe that Mr. Harold A. Albert is an unsuccessful scribe whose way to the editorial sanctum is barred by some inexorable Cerberus, and who, consequently, like so many disappointed Paris at the gate of Paradise, allows his judgement of those

within the magic portals to be clouded by his irritation. In either case, Mr. Harold A. Albert is talking nonsense.

Mr. Harold A. Albert states that it is "current in Fleet Street" that "The Magnet" revolves in an eight-year cycle, and at these regular intervals, old Magnet stories are touched up and reprinted; which, says, Mr. Harold A. Albert, explains "why 'The Magnet' gives such a scanty reflection of the modern world" - an utterly unfounded statement, by the way. Mr. Harold A. Albert must have provided himself with an Ear of Dionysius seventy-seven times amplified, to hear even a whisper of such gossip in Fleet Street. He tells us that he has no time to confirm this. Mr. Harold A. Albert's time no doubt is extremely valuable, but a few precious moments should have been sacrificed to confirming such a statement before chucking it at the public. It would have been easy to examine an old file of "Magnets", which would have led Mr. Harold A. Albert to the startling discovery that every "Magnet", from the first issue, had contained a new and original story. The same characters, certainly, appear each time, but the plots are infinitely varied, many of them connected with current events that could not possibly serve a second or third time. And - though I do not expect Mr. Harold A. Albert to understand it - "The Magnet" gives a faithful reflection of life at the very hour of printing. "The Magnet" author knows his business so well, that every number is right up to date, the fact that the characters have been before the public for thirty years making no difference whatever to this.

There were strikes, slumps, unemployment, Socialism and Communism and other blunders and imbecilities, before 1910, and Frank Richards left them alone then, as he leaves them alone now, because they are not proper subjects for healthy young people to contemplate. The Human Boy is Frank Richards's subject, and except for "light externals", The Human Boy hasn't changed since Tom Brown went to school. Frank Richards keeps a careful eye on those light externals; for the rest he is content with human nature, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.

Frank Richards will write of Socialist schoolboys, or Communist schoolboys, or schoolboys deeply concerned with the influence of blues in the arts, when he finds such schoolboys in actual existence. So far, he has never had the misfortune to encounter any such young asses.

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WANTED: Magnats, S.O.L's, 1933-1940. Your price paid.  
Highton, 14 Grayhound Road, Willesden, London, N.W.10.

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IN THE NEXT NUMBER

A FORTY YEARS SYNOPSIS

MICHAEL POOLE'S FASCINATING STORY OF HIS FLEET STREET DAYS.

by The Walrus

Tut! Tut! Department: Yorkshire is being misrepresented again, and I'm not talking about that wetted boot leather Couden restaurants persistently serve as Yorkshire pudding. In "Billy Bunter and the Blue Mauritius", Frank Richards has the Owl tread by a Yorkshire terrier, and he could not have made a better choice. Any yappy Yorkie would take a fussy delight in hurling every ounce of its two-and-a-half pounds into keeping Bunter's fourteen stone out on a limb, a job which would be thoroughly gratifying to its self-importance. But in the frontispiece which depicts the scene, R.J. Macdonald shows the gamekeeper as accompanied by a dun-coloured object the size of a young donkey. Really, Mr. Macdonald, it is the county that is a big un, not the pooch.

Prices is Rise: Or so Fisher T. Fish would say. But those of us who feel disposed to bewail the steady rise in the cost of collecting would have much more to wail about if we were on the other side of the Atlantic. It must be well inside twenty years since Woolworth's book counters were packed with remaindered copies of American-printed dime novels at 5c each. I found Horatio Alger, with his Smilesian-larded "From Farm Boy to Senator" stuff, singularly unattractive, but Burt L. Standish appealed to me as a yarn-spinner of merit, even if the morality of his tales was a trifle obtrusive. I accumulated fifty or sixty of the Merriwell books and later, I suppose, consigned them to the dustbin. A short pause here, while I gnash my National Healths. I have just been looking through the catalogue issued by Charles Bragin of New York, and I see that they are listed at \$3.75 in Fishy's "real money", or just over a quid in ours. That seems to be the standard price for the old ten cent books, while the five cent weeklies such as "Tip Top" and "Work and Win" which were the equivalent of our "Magnet" and "Boys' Friend" come in at a mere dollar. If anyone is really interested, however, he can cut this price down, by taking the entire 245 volumes of the Merriwell stories at \$750.

Tastes Differ: Mr. Bragin lists about 1300 titles, and the first thing that leaps to an English eye is that only three or four are identifiable as school stories. Our American friends, whether prompted by nostalgia or escapism in their collecting, apparently are indifferent to the charms of the schoolhouse. The college (university) makes a much better show, although it is still in a hopeless minority, and I was a little surprised to find the Wild West heavily outnumbered. Nick Carter leads the field with over 400 titles, the Merriwells come a bad second with 245, while Buffalo Bill can only limp into third place with 200. Among the papers which are strange to me, I spot one which seems to have been a noteworthy example of endurance writing. "The Liberty Boys of '76" began in 1901 as "A Weekly Magazine containing Stories of the American Revolution", and 543 issues later (possibly more) Moore still had the

Liberty Boys whaling the tar out of the Redcoats. How the ingenious Harry managed to vamp out so many variations on such a restrictive theme, Heaven knows: at a dollar a time I never shall.

Our Maths Class: In a field where there is so much dependent on personal taste we should show proper gratitude for the few hard facts that do come our way. "What Do Boys and Girls Read", by A.J. Jenkinson has been mentioned a couple of times in collecting mags, but his tabulated figures - as he presents them - don't do much except show the amazing lead the Thomson papers had over their rivals in 1959. Recalculated %s percentages, quite a number of conclusions leap to the eye.

Secondary Schools: 956 Boys

	Percentage reading at age			
	12+	13+	14+	15+
Wizard	49%	41%	25%	22%
Champion	24%	24%	15%	5%
Magnet	15%	18%	17%	11%
Gem	9%	9%	5%	Nil
B.O.P.	4%	9%	7%	5%

Senior Schools: 634 Boys

	Percentage reading at age		
	12+	13+	14+
Wizard	62%	60%	60%
Champion	27%	18%	19%
Magnet	12%	16%	21%

(Neither "The Gem" nor "The Boys' Own Paper" appear in this list and must, therefore, have been read by less than 2%)

Among the (presumably) better educated boys, the peak age for the "new" papers is twelve, after which they show a rapid decline. "The Magnet" appealed to the elder boys, and did not plunge nearly so much. In the Senior Schools, both "Wizard" and "Champion" exerted a steady appeal, but "The Magnet" was the only one in the then lengthy list of weeklies to show a steady climb. It is a pity that no figures were obtained for those who had recently left school. The trend seems to indicate that reading "The Wizard", like the sucking of lollipops, was a purely fleeting phase, and that the appeal to a more discriminating reader of the Hamilton stories was sustained after school days.

And the Old Boys: The combined influence of Mr. Jenkinson and of having just sweated through my income tax return must have put me in the mood for statistics, for I next delved into the Collectors' Who's Who in "The Collectors' Digest Annual". This lists 202 of the fraternity, and they are not as easy to sort out as those boys of 1959. 119 of them spread their favours over more than one type of paper, while of those

who plump for one type, 52 are exclusively Hamilton fans, 6 Blakians and two follow Nelson Lee. Where the first preference for a paper is given, 61 give "The Magnet", 18 "The Nelson Lee", 15 "The Gem", 7 "The Union Jack" and three "The Sexton Blake Library." In some way or other, 166 take an interest in Hamilton papers, 76 in Sexton Blake, 75 in Nelson Lee, 34 in the early "Boys' Friend" and similar weeklies, and 25 in the Victorians. The interest shown in Hamiltonia is most likely not fully reflected in the figures, as a preference can be shown for, say, "The Boys' Friend" or "Modern Boy" when the sole attraction is Rockwood or King of the Islands. This is hardly likely to be the case with the other groups, but as there is no accurate way of gauging the exact degree of preference, it is easy to make the figures a nose of wax which can be twisted to suit.

Saddle Black Bess Again: I had to shove the old nag back in the stable before I had really finished with her in the last issue, and just as she had reminded me that anyone with a taste for bibliographical exactitude would be well advised to leave penny-dreadfuls alone. Otherwise, he is liable to be found running round with straws in his hair. "Black Bess" has the dual distinction of being the longest and one of the best known of the genre. It has others too, such as an airy disregard for the calendar which involves Dick Turpin in adventures taking place over twenty years after he made the fatal mistake of coming to Yorkshire. Mais, revançons notre cheval. It was published by E. Harrison in 1867, was by Edward Viles, and the re-issues in penny and halfpenny form are duly noted — a nice, clean, neat and tidy entry for the check list. And then Montague Summers has to come along and muck things up with his claim that Viles was a charming generous man, whose main weakness in life was an urge to appear in the public eye as what he was not — an author. One result of this, Summers claims, was that Viles fathered (or should it be sired?) "Black Bess" and signed the book, although it was written for him by the redoubtable J.F. Smith at the rate of £3.10.0 per weekly instalment. As Edward Lloyd was supposed to pay only 10/- a number to his unfortunate writers, and Edwin Brett could not find it in his miserable heart to disgorge more than £2 a week to Bracebridge Heming for the "Jack Harkaway" series, the adjective "generous" seems to be justified. But, against that, "Black Bess" was an amazing success, so if Viles did not write it he could congratulate himself that he acquired fame and fortune at a low premium.

Back To 1952: I have now read all the Goldhawk Books issued to date, and have found an undiluted pleasure in the reading. Really, I suppose I ought to be ashamed of myself for mentioning the one petty fly in a sea of balm, which is that they just don't look right, which is entirely the result of having collected a few "Gems", and so contracted the habit of seeing Martin Clifford's text in association with a MacDonald drawing. Oddly enough, I dislike J.A. Cummings' drawings nearly as much as I do Val's, but a Jack, Sam and Pete yarn without Cummings, or Calcroft without Val have the same effect of leaving something wanting. Habits!!!

by P.A. Walker

Somerset and Dorset are two counties which no doubt many readers of "The Old Boys' Book Collector" have visited. They are two counties which, to my mind, contain some of the most interesting scenery, some of the loveliest villages, and some of the most ancient and beautiful buildings in the whole of the country. I had occasion to visit many parts of this area a few months ago, and I there had one of the most unusual adventures of my life.

"Would you like to come with me", said my friend George, one day on the bus, "on a short trip to those fabulous caves at Cheddar and Wookey, near Wells?"

"Wouldn't I just!" I answered. "But when do you want to go? I've a job, you know, and I can't just leave it like that."

"Have a week's holiday," said George. "You're entitled to a holiday, I suppose."

"Oh, yes," I replied. "But, as I said, when do you want to start?"

"In a fortnight's time," said George, "and I intend to spend a lovely week away from all my troubles. What do you think of exploring not only the Caves at Cheddar, but Wells and Glastonbury, and the Mendips and the Quantocks, finishing up at Lynton and Lynmouth?"

"No need to think of it," I decided. "I'll bring forward a week of my holiday, and I'll come with you."

And so it was, that on a lovely day towards the end of May, George and I set out by bus for Wells in Somerset. To reach Wells you go over the Mendip Hills, and on this exquisite morning it was an unforgettable experience. So, indeed, is the first sight of Wells Cathedral, a noble building, and well worth every minute of the three hours that George and I spent within its precincts. Really, this story starts there. George and I were sitting by the side of the moat which flows by the Bishop's Palace, waiting for one of the famous swans to come along and ring the bell near the bridge over the moat in order to draw attention to the fact that it was dinner time, when a rather elderly gentleman sat down contentedly on the same seat.

"A lovely day, gentleman," he said, "to spend in such delightful surroundings."

We agreed heartily, and before you could say Arthur Augustus D'Arcy the newcomer was giving us the history of Wells. It was then that George let out something which was to lead us towards our strange adventure. A party of schoolboys in red cape and black blazers, with their master in charge, were walking towards the ancient gateway between the Cathedral Close and the main street in Wells.

"There's old Quelch taking the Greyfriars Remove out for a botany stroll," he remarked.

I smiled, and the elderly gentleman started quite visibly.

"Did you say the Greyfriars Remove?" he asked.

"Sorry, sir", said George, with a nod and a grin. "Just a little joke. I used to read about them, and still do for that matter, in the old 'Magnet', a school atory paper that ran for many years before the War, although I'm sorry to say it's defunct now".

"I am more than interested", said the elderly gent. "I have a collection of old boys' papers, including 'The Magnet'".

Naturally, we were all attention at once.

"Yes," said our new found friend. "I have been collecting boys' journals for upwards of fifty years."

"You must have a pretty good collection, then!" I exclaimed.

"I have indeed," he replied. "My name, incidentally, is Dr. Duncan. I live near Weymouth, in Dorset, but am spending a day or two on a pilgrimage to this lovely spot, and have just been visiting the caves at Cheddar Gorge. It may interest you to know that one of the reasons for my trip into these parts is a chase after a large quantity of old 'Magnets' and 'Gems' dating back to No. 1."

We both sat up at this, and Dr. Duncan went on: "Some months ago, an old friend of mine came to live in Wolve, and I have just heard that he died here about four months ago. He possessed what was probably the best collection of 'Magnets', 'Gems,' and other papers in the country, so I came over to find out who now lived in his old house. Unfortunately, his housekeeper has left and all the furniture and effects have been moved. The new tenant was most helpful and told me that my friend's housekeeper was now living near Glastonbury. Off I went to Glastonbury, and found the lady, but once again I was unlucky about the papers. She had disposed of them for a few shillings (!) to a dealer in books. That, gentlemen, is as far as I've got in my investigations, except that this dealer is expected to be attending a country house sale in a village a couple of miles from here, this afternoon. I had intended to visit this sale and see if I could contact the gentleman, which is why I happen to be in Wells at the moment. Probably you would like to come along."

We answered that we would, and we sauntered to the nearby Market Square, where we boarded a convenient bus, arriving in about ten minutes at our destination, a small village of typical Somerset houses with a perfect church. On leaving the bus we followed a narrow lane flanked by tall hedges and beech trees, at the end of which stood a beautiful old house with an impressive garden full of spring flowers. A number of people were standing about the garden, looking at articles of furniture on the lawns. Inside the house were even more people, and the sound of an auctioneer's voice reached our ears. Among the items for disposal were several cases of books, and it was evident that these were being bought up by dealers. We waited interestedly for about half an hour, when nearly all the books had passed into the hands of two or three dealers, and we continued to wait with rather less patience until they had completed their individual arrangements for removing their Dickens, Scott and Jane Austen bargains. Then Dr. Duncan approached one of them.

"Pardon me, sir," he said, "but I am looking for a Mr Parslow."

The dealer smiled. "Lucky first time. My name is Parslow."

"I am always lucky," said Dr. Duncan, with an answering smile, and he introduced George and me. "We are interested," he went on, "in a number of parcels containing 'Magnets' and 'Gems', boys' papers not now published, which we are led to believe you purchased some time ago in Wells."

The dealer stared. "That is so," he answered, "but actually this is rather astonishing. The whole lot vanished from my premises about three weeks ago, and I must admit that I have been considerably puzzled as to why anyone should want to steal a few shillingworth of old boys' papers."

George glowered a little. "A few shillingworth, indeed!" he exclaimed. "Don't you know, Mr Parslow, that if all these papers have been stolen from you, somebody has made off with more like two hundred pounds worth?"

Mr. Parslow stared even harder. We explained the whole position to him, telling him of the existence of the circle of collectors, the value of some of the oldest "Magnets" and "Gems" and why we were so interested in the parcels, which contained over 5000 of them, dating back to 1907.

"This, then, gentleman," he said at last, "is a case for the police."

Dr. Duncan agreed, but suggested that before we did actually call in police help, Mr Parslow might recall a few details about where the papers were in his bookshop, and some of the circumstances leading up to their disappearance.

"Certainly," said Mr. Parslow, "I had undone one of the bundles and put a small pile of 'Magnets' on one of my counters. I remember a young man came into my shop, and after glancing through the twenty or so copies he inquired the price. I told him twopence each. I recall now that he seemed a trifle surprised, but he picked up the papers and gave me the correct money. I told him that I had a large number of them if he was interested, and he said he was. So I opened one of the other parcels, and the young man inspected them. When I told him that I had about 3000, he seemed more surprised, and asked me if I would keep them until the following day, when he would call with his car, as he couldn't possibly carry such a quantity. I didn't see him again, but it was during the following day that I missed the papers."

"Well, thank you, Mr Parslow," said Dr. Duncan. "At the moment I don't think we should trouble the police. But we will certainly continue our investigations, and if we come across these papers, we will pay you more than twopence each for them."

He thanked the book-dealer, and we made our way back to the bus stop, where we luckily had only a few minutes to wait before we were bowling back to Wells. George, as usual, suggested a cup of tea, to which we heartily agreed, and we entered a pleasant cafe overlooking the Cathedral Close.

"Of course," said George, "this bloke knows something about old

boys' books. The point seems to be, does he want to hang on to them, or to sell them."

Dr. Duncan smiled, and said: "I should imagine that the fellow knows something of the prices the old papers are fetching, and I suggest that he would be more likely to try to dispose of them."

"At that rate," said George to me, "fish out that 'Exchange and Mart' you bought this morning and let's have a look."

I found the paper in my rucksack. "Nothing on that page," he grunted. "Turn over. Blow the 'B.O.P.' Ah! What's this? 'For sale: 'Magnets' and 'Gems' - all periods from 1907, early issues 10/- each, later issues 5/- and 2/6d each. Excellent condition. Apply, Northfleet, Channel View, Bowlease Cove, Weymouth, Dorset.'"

"Queer!" I remarked. "I don't remember that chap advertising before."

"It looks as if there might be some connection," said Dr. Duncan. "Look here, Weymouth isn't so far from here, and I was going home tomorrow. If you gentlemen will accept my most cordial invitation to come home with me, we can carry out our investigations together."

So the following morning found the three of us on our way to Weymouth which we reached by mid-day. We had an excellent lunch at the doctor's house and then started in his car for Bowlease Cove, where the quest for Channel View ended at a fairly new house on a branch of the main Bourne-mouth road. George's pessimistic assurance that the man was more likely to be at work than at home at three in the afternoon was wrong, as the young fellow who opened the door to our ring was Mr Northfleet himself.

"We are here," said the doctor after we had introduced ourselves, "in connection with your advertisement about the sale of a large number of 'Magnets' and 'Gems'."

"I am not a collector myself," Northfleet explained, "so consequently when I picked up this huge quantity of the old weeklies cheaply, my first thought was to make them available to those who are most interested."

"It's a pity more people weren't as thoughtful," I said. "But here we are, hot on the track."

"You certainly are," agreed Northfleet, "and as you are the first, here they are." He undid several brown paper parcels, and we were gazing at perfect early copies of "The Gem" for the year 1912. He untied still more, and George and I picked up with a certain reverence a beautiful No 1 of "The Magnet".

"Might I inquire," asked the doctor, "how you were lucky enough to obtain such a haul?"

"Why not?" answered Northfleet. "I bought them in Dorchester nearly three weeks ago."

"Dorchester!" we all exclaimed in astonishment. Northfleet looked surprised too. "Yes. Much to my amazement I found them at a second-hand bookseller's, and I paid approximately 6d each for them. Anyway, I paid the dealer with a cheque for £75."

Northfleet seemed obviously a decent type, and there could be no

point in concealing the story of our chase. It was fairly evident that he had made the purchase in good faith and had paid for it. He said that he had hoped to make a profit out of his good fortune, and had proposed charging a shilling each for the whole of the 3000 "Magnets" and "Gems" if he found he could not raise the advertised price.

"Well," said George, "I can't afford to spend £150 on the old papers, much as I should like them. But I wouldn't mind about five quid's worth at a bob a time!"

"That goes for me too," I said. "There are quite a number among them I should dearly like to possess, but I simply couldn't afford to buy the lot."

Dr. Duncan produced a cheque book. "I'll give you your price," he said, "but I certainly think we must carry out our investigations. I think Mr. Northfleet should accompany us to Dorchester, and we will interview this bookseller."

Northfleet was in agreement, and once again we climbed into Dr. Duncan's car, this time squeezed up among 3000 "Magnets" and "Gems". It is only a short run to Dorchester from Weymouth, and within an hour we were in the bookseller's shop, after having had a cup of tea in a quaint cafe in the old town. The elderly bookseller came forward.

"You may remember," said Northfleet, "that a week or two ago I paid you £75 for a large stack of 'Magnets' and 'Gems'."

"I do indeed, sir," said the old bookseller, whose name, curiously enough, was Cherry. Northfleet introduced us and explained our mission, thoroughly perturbing Mr. Cherry with the knowledge that he had been dealing unconsciously in stolen goods.

"I paid 4d each for those papers, gentlemen," he said, "and charged Mr. Northfleet here 6d each. I had some idea that fairly high prices were being paid for some of these papers, so I considered that 6d wasn't unreasonable."

"I thought it very reasonable indeed," said Northfleet.

"As a matter of fact," said Dr. Duncan, "I have just paid Mr. Northfleet a shilling each for them, and know that I'm getting a bargain. What we are interested in, of course, is how they were stolen from Mr. Parslow's shop in Wells, and the person responsible for the theft."

"A man of about 36 to 40 brought them here," said Mr. Cherry, "and said that he used to collect them years ago, but was now short of cash and as prepared to sell them quickly for fourpence each. He was dark and had a slight moustache. He came here in a car, the number of which I just didn't notice. One thing I do recollect, though, was that while most of the papers were neatly tied up in parcels of a hundred, there were about twenty copies in a roll with a rubber band to secure them."

Dr. Duncan's eyes gleamed. "That's interesting!" he exclaimed. "That roll is still intact. We'll have a look at it. If you remember, gentlemen, Mr. Parslow mentioned that he had about twenty copies on show on his counter, keeping the remainder in parcels. The twenty were bought by our mysterious friend over that counter in Parslow's."

He unfastened the rubber band, and revealed a bunch of 'Magnets'

whose red covers were of the rare 1910 vintage. We examined them closely, and suddenly the doctor gave an exclamation.

"Look!" he said. "On the back cover of this one. Quite a new dirt stain - in fact, it's mud! Dried mud! And, if I'm not mistaken, it's mud from the caves of the Cheddar Gorge. Our 'friend' has dropped this copy in the caves."

"Can't say that helps us a lot," said George.

"You never know. Anyway, it is the only lead we have, so I suggest that a trip to the Cheddar Caves is indicated tomorrow."

So we took our leave from Mr. Charry's shop and enjoyed the doctor's hospitality for the night, setting out the following morning in his car for the famous caves at Cheddar in Somerset. At the entrance I was just about to pay the price of admission when I noticed that Dr. Duncan had left us to approach the official guide, producing the muddy "Magnet" as he went.

"Have you seen anything like this before?" he asked the guide, who stared hard at the paper.

"Well, that's queer," he replied. "Only a week or two ago a chap came in here and dropped one of those 'Magnets' in the mud." He indicated where water dripping from the stalactites had made muddy pools in places. "I was rather interested because I used to read the old 'Magnet' when I was a boy, and I hadn't seen one for years."

"What was the man like?"

"Oh, dark, thick-set .... a thin moustache .... dressed in a grey jacket with flannels. He came up in a car...." His brow wrinkled in thought for a moment before he ended with a triumphant grin, "Yes! I remember the number. It was XZ 635."

"Grand!" exclaimed the doctor. "I never thought we'd be so successful. All we have to do now is trace XZ 635."

Subsequently we called at the local police station and related the history of the "Magnets" and "Gems" to a slightly bored sergeant, who promised to look into the matter.

"Not very helpful," was Dr. Duncan's comment as we began the journey back to Weymouth, and we felt we had to agree. But within two days the police were on the 'phone to him with the information that the wanted car had been found overturned at the foot of a steep gorge near Cheddar. The body of a young man who answered the description given to the police by Dr. Duncan had been found some yards away.

"It seems the car had been stolen," said the doctor as he slowly replaced the receiver. "Well, we shall never meet the poor devil now. He must have crashed within a few minutes of our going to the police."

"No doubt about the identity?"

"None! He had a green-covered 'Gem' in his pocket -- it's title was THE BLACK SHEEP!"

The rest of the week George and I spent browsing through old "Gems" and "Magnets", and when we finally left Dr. Duncan's pleasant home in Weymouth we brought with us as compensation for our diverted plans a precious burden of red-covered "Magnets" and green-covered "Gems" -- which are not for sale.

by Herlock Hopperton

Herlock Hopperton??? Read on, friend, read on!

Such is the cussedness of collecting that when I decided that the chance of getting copies after No. 84 was too remote to bother with and wrote the article on "The Vanguard Library" for the last issue, the ink was barely dry on it before I was offered long runs of it up to No. 137. Naturally, I leaped at the chance, hoping to have some light thrown on the problems posed by the earlier numbers.

In the price and appearance of the paper, at least, there was no change during this period, for it kept to its pink-covered sixteen pages for a halfpenny, although everything else was in a state of flux. The two leading authors suffered a sea change. Charles Hamilton in his proper guise had disappeared, while Philpott Wright had allowed Taffy Llewellyn to grow up sufficiently to leave school and become the assistant of Lowden Leath. And with that name, what else could he be but "the famous detective"? Billy Bunter and the rest of the gang, however, must have been left at Blackminster College. Taffy detected about once a fortnight for a few months, whipping round the world to Turkey, China and Egypt, until his nose was pushed out almost completely by another crime hunter.

This was Jubal Grail, the creation of Captain Addison, who had an even shorter run. This chopping and changing, and the constant supersession of one short-lived series by another cannot but create the impression that the paper was encountering difficulties, and that the editor was casting about frantically for material that would "click". If this is not so, and the editor veered about from choice, then he must have been singularly blind to the lessons of the Amalgamated Press papers. So far, the only really regular thing had been the steady employment of W.F. Coles as the leading artist, with S.E. Board, who had a similar style, as his deputy. Even Taffy in his heyday was not given the dignity of a regular run.

The cover design which had done service from the start of the paper - shown in the illustration on our inside cover - was dropped after No. 132, a more elaborate mechanically-tinted job taking its place. From Nos. 133 to 137 a new experiment was tried out, when Jack Gaily was featured every week. Stephen H. Agnew really got down to business with this youth, who was expelled from Sexton's School the first week, did a stint at Black Rock "reformatory college" the second, and turned up at Greyminster public school where he managed to stay put for the three weeks that elapsed before another and radical change.

Up to now, "The Vanguard" had never had an editorial. With No. 137, 14th December, 1909, the whole of the inside back cover was taken over by a new editor who, if the accompanying cut can be believed, was a heavy-jawed, ruthless-looking chap with pince-nez glasses, got up in the regulation harness of the prosperous business man, down to the white slip in the waistcoat opening and the four-inch tube of starched constriction that did

duty as a collar in 1909. The new broom gave himself quite a build-up as being "whether on a racing motor on Brooklands track, or on the wildest of wild horses, equally happy, equally at home." He claimed to have been the captain of a University football team, prominent in a number of sports "in most quarters of the Globe", as well as having "been at the editorial game a good long time." Said he: "I am going to shake up the old paper in a way that will surprise and delight you."

So there was I with No. 157 in my hand, worked up into a suitable lather of anticipation — and no No. 158 to find out just what this new wonder actually did. But, for once, my fairy-godmother wasn't sleeping it off in a corner, and I did get the following issue.

When H.A. Hinton reorganised "School and Sport", he pulled it down from "Boys' Friend" size to "Magnet" size. The "Vanguard" editor did exactly the opposite, although it wasn't "The Boys' Friend" he had his eye on. The price stayed at a halfpenny, with eight large pink pages headed: "THE VANGUARD Library of Football, Sport and Adventure", which savours more than somewhat of "The Boys' Realm". A sepia presentation plate was promised for the following week, when "a new author" was to do "The Demon Submarine". And that, I regret to say, is as far as I have got, although if someone will give my fairy-godmother another prod in the ribs I might yet know whether the new editor was as successful at running a paper as he claimed to have been at so many other things.

But if I am still hazy about the close of the paper, I received unexpected clarification on its youth. When I read "The Autobiography of Frank Richards" shortly after finishing my article, a few relevant passages took my eye, such as: "Charles, in spite of the persuasive Percy, was still turning out huge chunks of copy for H.J.D. of Trappe and Holmes", and "But Trappe and Holmes, like the poet's brook, went on for ever. It was not until after Charles had contacted Percy Griffith at the Carwilitz House, that he reluctantly severed all other connections, under pressure from the pushful Percy." The references to copious quantities of copy rather puzzled me, as I had heard of only about a dozen stories in "The Vanguard", but the mention of pressure re-inforced my supposition that the pen-name "Frank Drake" was used because of repercussions from the A.P.

Came the dawn, as Pearl White's sub-titles used to say, in the shape of the following letter:

"1st March, 1952.

"Dear Tom Hopperston,

For the love of Mike, not so many of your wild surmises! I have read so far in the now quarterly only the article headed "Vanguard Library". Having done so, I wish to the typewriter to reconstitute.

The "protean author" did NOT think it wise to "camouflage" his activities: he never even dreamed of anything of the kind. So far from a "serious and deliberate attempt to add the Vanguard's scalp to his belt", that author had to guard with his left to

"keep the whole outfit from being landed on him: and could have written every single number if he had liked — which he did not, having no time for it.

As for "competing with Philpott Wright", I never even knew his name, let alone his works. I cannot remember ever looking even once at a Vanguard number not my own — why should I? I was asked to write all I could for the paper, and did so — and did not care a single solitary boiled bean how the remaining numbers were filled.

Pat O'Neil was NOT an off-set to anybody or anything. As a spotter of secret history, my dear boy, your exploits ranked me not of Sherlock Holmes, but of Herlock Sholmes.

Since these amazing discoveries of yours will be read by all our friends of the O.E.B.C., I think it only just that you should print this letter in your next number as an antidote.

Sincerely,

FRANK RICHARDS"

Well, well! I can think of nothing more thoroughly shattering to one who served his apprenticeship under Sexton Blake and Ferrars Locke than having his best deductive efforts stigmatized as "wild surmises". Surmises ... yes! Wld? I have looked again through the article in No.1 and slice me if I can admit the impeachment of the adjective. On the data then available, I will plead guilty to "rash", though.

All of which does not alter the fact, of course, that the conclusions I drew were incorrect, and I gladly make the correction. One of the beauties of the Herlock Sholmes stories is that regardless of the methods, all comes well in the end, and my Herlocking has at least had the merit of prompting Mr. Richards to a fuller account of his work than appears in the "Autobiography", for when I replied to him he was kind enough to clear the two or three points which still remained in doubt, as follows:

"You say 'there appear to have been only about a dozen stories'. I really don't know how many stories I wrote for Trapps and Holmes, half-a-century ago, but certainly not fewer than a thousand. 'Frank Drake' was one pen-name among a good many. And when Percy did succeed in broaking me off entirely from that firm, I never wrote again for them under either my own name or a pen-name. In the Gem and Magnet I retained the same pen-names all the time: but H.J.D. had different ideas, as he was entitled to have if he liked. Then you say that I might have looked at the Vanguard to make sure that I was not traversing the same ground as other writers! Can you possibly suppose that a busy author could find time to do anything of the sort? For all I know, similarities may have cropped up: I did not know and certainly did not care. I had quite enough to do minding my own business: and when I had time for reading I read Horace, Keats, Dante, Shakespeare and Milton:

most assuredly not the Vanguard!

As for H.J.D. being a "vanity" publisher, I think that might apply to the books he published; certainly not to his comics, which were widely-circulated and very well paying propositions in their day. They were utterly unlike the so-called "comics" of the present day — it was before American trash invaded this country and vulgarized everything.

If there was a "marred change" in my work, I was unaware of it. Change is bound to occur: every writer gets better and better as he goes on, year after year, if he be capable of improvement at all. The early Gems and Magnets, for example, are very poor stuff compared with the Bunter books and Tom Merry books. But I never noticed any change while it was going on."

That put a different complexion on the case, with a vengeance! I thought I was talking about a dozen stories: Frank Richards knew he was talking about a thousand. No wonder that he was amazed at the conclusions arrived at.

This new information presents something into which those of the collecting clan with a taste for research can really get their teeth. Embedded somewhere in SMILES, FUNNY CUPS, THE WORLD'S COMIC, PICTURE FUN, and THE VANGUARD are about a thousand unknown Hamilton stories, under a variety of unknown pen-names. It is a pity, in a way, that I have retired in despair from the business of literary detecting. If I hadn't, I might have suggested to the researchers that a useful starting point might be the stories ascribed to Ridley Redway (does the surname ring a bell?) and Nigel Wallace: as I have, I shan't even breathe it!

#### STILL AVAILABLE

A FEW COPIES OF NUMBER ONE OF "THE OLD BOYS' BOOK COLLECTOR",

CONTAINING "FRANK RICHARDS REMINISCENT", "KESTREL IN RETROSPECT", "THE GREYFRIARS HERALD", "JACK SHEPHERD", "FRANK RICHARDS' SCHOOLDAYS", "THAT DREADFUL MR. REYNOLDS", "HAMILTON'S LEADING MEN", ETC., ETC.

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by Dennis Richmond

If you travel to work by train, you have one too — the television bore. He has a set, and either he is determined that the world shall not forget he paid eighty quid for it, or he fatuously believes that everyone is as absorbed in his peepshow as he is. I had bagged a corner seat one morning in February and was sitting at peace with the world when our pest climbed in. I prepared to shelter behind my paper, but for once I didn't need to. He was full of Greyfriars, and in a brace of shakes the place was such a parrot-house as I haven't heard in a railway carriage for years. Bunter, Wharton, Bunter, Inky, Bunter, Cherry, Bunter! It always got back to Bunter, though. With this article pending, I had been standing quite some time with the Owl, and as a subject for me he had most of the hair worn off. I broached "The Gem".

"Bei Jove! Yeas!" shouted our other menace, the would-be comedian. "That weally wipping D'Arcy. He always wore a plug hat and spats." So we were off on St. Jim's, with Gussy evidently uppermost in everyone's mind.

But I nearly drew a blank with Rookwood, and it was only with a little nudging that I got their memories working. Even then the talk was rather vague and hesitant, except that the comic dredged from the depths a surprisingly complete picture of Teddy Grace. On second thoughts, it is not so surprising. If the child is the father of the man, he must have revolved in the practical joking Putty as a kindred spirit.

My miniature Gallup Poll quite confirmed my opinion that the chap who is relying solely on toon-age recollections will always have Bunter and Gussy looming large. Mr. Hamilton has at least one thing in common with Cecil B. De Mille: he likes a crowded stage and manages it very well. Most of the juniors at all three schools are marched across the stage for our inspection at some part of every story or series, which is a useful device against the day when their turn comes to abandon the role of super for the temporary spotlight. But there is such a crowd that the finer distinctions can hardly be expected to persist through thirty years. Bunter and D'Arcy, both by a touch of caricature and continual employment, stick in the universal memory: there was no such character at Rookwood.

And here is where I have to depart from one theory of how to run this series, which was that it would be simpler to take the characters in chronological order. It simply won't do here. Bunter was pre-eminently the key man of key, <sup>and</sup> demands prior consideration.

Well, Mr Richards said in No. 1 of "The Old Boys' Book Collector" that the Owl "almost stole the show", and as he has done it so often, it won't matter if he jumps his place in the queue now. But Mr. Richards also said that "Frank Richards sometimes wonders a little" about every other character having "to take second place to the egregious Owl." As an on-looker, who is supposed to see most of the game, I wonder why Mr. Richards wanders. Long before there was anything about Bunter to grip the reader's liking or attention, he had seized his creator's mind, and the eminence of

William George is surely due to the fact that his author laboured incessantly to put him across, pushing him into the centre in every story, and continually polishing, adding to and improving his character.

Take Bunter's first appearance: No. 1 of "The Magnet".

"The newcomer was a very fat junior, with a fat face and an enormous pair of spectacles. "Yaroooh!" ejaculated the junior, as he sprawled on the floor over Harry Wharton's legs. "What's that in the way? What do you mean by having a dog in the study, you silly bouders, for a short-sighted fellow to fall over?"

There is a little more lukewarm humour about Bunter's sight, while he utters half-a-dozen times what was then his stock speech: "I'm sincerely sorry!" In the second story, when Hazeldene bursts Bob Cherry's box and the juniors are whacking out the grub, Bunter hositates to join in the feed. We learn, too, that Wharton and Nugent "didn't object to Billy Bunter, who was too harmless for anybody to object to him. Billy's only fault was a perennial impunctioeity, and he would cheerfully share in anything that was going on, explaining on all occasions that he was in a stony state, which he hoped would soon be relieved by the arrival of a postal order which seldom arrived."

That makes it clear that at the beginning Bunter had in common with his later self his girth, his glasses, and his postal order, plus a certain dullness of intellect. Nothing more! This was the seed on which the gardener lavished his care, grafting and pruning, until in about eighteen months he produced what might be called a rough casting of the final Owl. From about 1910 until nearly twenty years after, the fettle chipped and polished (Yes, I know the metaphors are getting involved!) but without making any pronounced improvement. It was not until the last dozen or so years of "The Magnet" that Bunter took his final shape.

It was during this middle period that most of us enlisted first under the Grayfriars banner, so W.G.R. was presumably good enough for us, even in his imperfect form, although I sometimes wonder when reading earlier stories whether we followed "The Magnet" because of Bunter or in spite of him. The original "only fault" had spawned gluttony, grubbiness, untruthfulness, dishonesty, selfishness accompanied by practically every other unpleasant trait it is possible to find in a boy, and the original dullness became a smirking, self-satisfied obtuseness. Mr. Richards evidently knew what he was aiming at, but couldn't quite get it down on paper — and if he could not put it across, there is little wonder that the substitute authors did some remarkable and regrettable things with his character.

He finally succeeded. Just how the trick was turned is not easy to detect in the reading, and even less easy to convey by description, but turned it was. The effect was to turn Billy Bunter into a sympathetic character — at least to a certain degree — and the reader, instead of viewing his antics with either dislike or detachment, found he was associating himself with the Owl to a sufficient extent to wish him well in his thoroughly immoral enterprises.

With a character so steeped in what are normally unpleasant habits, the only thing that can possibly redeem him from being a sordid nuisance

in the story is a convincing glossing of fatuity. This was what was lacking in the earlier days, and what was finally provided. It shows up best in what became a familiar situation - the tale where Bunter's eavesdropping puts him in possession of the shady secret of some disreputable member of the school such as Loder. The knowledge provides a horn of plenty for the ever hungry one both in the early and late stories: the difference is in the way the blackmailing is conducted. In Blue Magnet days, Bunter sets about screwing loans out of his victim in a cool, hard, calculating manner worthy of Sir Philip Champion trying to replace the Criminals' Confederation's lost ships by threatening Lord Garrock with exposure if he doesn't hand over his line of cargo oats. Mr. Richards, in a sort of running commentary, assured us each time that Bunter meant no real harm and that he was just too fat-headed to grasp the full significance of his actions. The fact that he found it necessary to do so indicates the fundamental weakness of his position. In reading fiction, we don't believe what the author, speaking in his proper voice, tells us about the character: we believe what the character himself proves to us by his speech and actions. No matter how many manifestoes Mr. Richards issued about the intrinsic harmlessness of Bunter, W.G.B. contradicted him by acting like a thorough-paced graduate of Borstal.

These assurances were neither necessary nor given in the later days. Bunter, by his waffling and wumbling, made us believe in a fatuousness that not only excused his nefarious schemes, but made them fairly funny. There is a great deal more in him as he finally performed than meets the casual glance - so much that he will repay a close study. Mr. Richards has an exceptional and widely recognised facility in characterisation. It took him twenty years to lick Bunter into shape. Need I say more?

So much for the character. He could have been better or worse and still hardly admissible to this article. It was his employment that made him so, and the labelling of "The Magnet" in its closing years as "Billy Bunter's Own Paper" was only the culmination of a process that had been going on practically from the start. Mr. Richards's description in Bunter gave us a unique character: it was also, to my taste, something of a detraction, because it led to the Greyfriars stories being written to a formula, and any continually repeated formula leads to a stricture in the flow of inspiration. Or am I grumbling because the oyster which produced perfect pearls didn't produce rubies?

Dodging the answer to that question, the formula was a simple one - being to drag Bunter in at every opportunity and to make the plot turn upon him. Is Wharton in trouble? Then Bunter's prying probably got him there in the first place and his tattling will certainly push him further in the mire. Is there a secret in Greyfriars? (and, my word! it had its share). Then Bunter, gone to earth behind the crutch from the vengeance of the owner of the missing tuck, will hear it and either blackmail its owner or blurt it round the school. Is there a criminal in or about Greyfriars? (and, my word! etc). Then Bunter will unconsciously aid him in some way and just as unconsciously lead to his capture. He had a finger in every pie, actual and textual. Bunter is part of the warp and

wool of every story, no matter who the nominal lead may be, and it is impossible to disentangle him and leave the stories recognisable. I feel that if he had been discarded occasionally for a few weeks we should have in our memories and our collections a number of stories of greater dramatic power, stories which gave more scope to the equally impressive characters who abounded in the Remove, and stories which would have been unusually interesting because they were outside the formula. But he wasn't rested, and he is the key without which it is impossible to unlock the door to Greyfriars. Besides, I can't get that oyster and the pearls out of my head.

From William George Sumter to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy is about as violent a jump as one can make, and - if we did not know differently - it would be easy to make out a convincing case that Sumter must have been concocted by taking the direct opposites of Gussy's characteristics and lumping them together to form a new character. Consider the applicable adjectives. Slim, gross: foppish, slovenly; truthful, mendacious; honest, unscrupulous; fastidious, gluttonous; generous, greed; handsome, pudding-faced; aristocrat, snob; sportsman, rabbit.

D'Arcy has so many good qualities that he could be used to stock a normal hero and still have a surplus in hand. Yet he is more genuinely amusing than Sumter, and the explanation is as simple as Gussy. Everyone will remember that long running and oft-revived play and film, "Nothing But The Truth", in which the hero bets that he will speak nothing but the truth for twenty-four hours, and the social disasters in which his candour lands him. The only trouble with D'Arcy is that he has a complete set of high principles - or, rather, he has the principles and his trouble is that he tries to live up to them, regardless of the consequences. And as an unbending ethical code is about the most uncomfortable piece of mental equipment one can have, consequences abound.

D'Arcy on his high horse because some careless oungtah has infringed his personal dig, D'Arcy hopelessly bewildered because Cutts has twisted an innocent statement of the one and only's into an admission of a bet, D'Arcy in the throes of romance and disgusted by the ribald levity of the other juniors, D'Arcy giving his vaunted tact and judgement an airing to the growing fur of its victim, D'Arcy as the victim of a series of jokes and debarred from retaliation by the ironic repetition of his own precept that "from one gentleman to another an apology always puts things right", these are the very stuff of genuine comedy and more truly funny, because truer to life, than all the antics of all the Bunters who ever Buntered.

It has never been my luck to lay hands on the "Pluck" in which Gussy came to St. Jim's, but I have followed him through the later "Plucks" and - with gaps - "The Gem". There was, of course, a certain refinement in the drawing of him developed with the years. There was a touch of foolishness about him in 1907 which was smoothed into the later and more attractive simplicity, but for every practical purpose D'Arcy in the Goldhawk Books is the D'Arcy of old. Long may he delight us!

Gussy's appearance in "The Gem" was as regular as that of Sumter in the companion paper. How different was the handling. He provided a goodly share of the humour, and he played the leading role in dozens of stories.

But I don't think anyone could become oppressed by him. Not only was he a more credible character than Bunter; his leading roles were logical, and the plots that brought him to the fore were always thoroughly legitimate. There were a few early stories in which Mr. Clifford ran him in double harness with Skimpole, generally in some detective stunt or other. They were singularly stupid tales. With these exceptions, Arthur Augustus went through the years as an unfailingly attractive character, used with discrimination, yet as essential to "The Gem" as steak to a steak and kidney pie.

Rookwood presents a problem of a different type, because it is just not possible to survey that light-hearted establishment and trace a set pattern as well defined as that of St. Jim's, much less of Greyfriars. In one form or another I have about 500 of the stories, from which I gain the impression that Morcington must have been the most used character. Morry, however, had too much in common with Carlew to bear the stamp of real originality, just as Muffin derived from Bunter, although without being as crude as his St. Jim's counterpart, Baggy Trimble. Incidentally, I suggest that the reason why these Bunterish characters were left in their early rawness was that it took Mr. Richards many years to work out what was probably the only way of refining Bunter. Messrs. Clifford and Conquest, because of varying circumstances, did not have the time, perhaps not the same interest, and probably would not have been able to solve their problem without exactly duplicating the Owl in any case.

No, for the type of plot which gives the full flavour of Rookwood and was unique to it, it is necessary to turn to one which was not used to excess and was comparatively late in developing - that which employed Arthur Edward Lovell. Lovell, like Jack Blake, had fallen from a high estate, as he was described in the first story as "junior captain on our side" and "an elegantly dressed youth". Unlike Blake, who ran on and on in the same groove, Lovell began to develop and ended as an unusual and entertaining character. Harry Wharton, Horace Coker and Lovell seem a thoroughly assorted bunch of characters. They were, yet, in essence, the main ingredient in each one's character is a complete belief in his own rightness, and it is no mean performance that the author, starting from the same basis, worked out three such detailed and varying characters.

The cream of the Rookwood stories are undoubtedly those in which Lovell's pig-headedness involves the Pistical Four in trouble, and, despite Silver's patient reasoning, Newcome's gentle sarcasm and Ruby's more pointed reproofs, he continues to blunder obstinately from one morass of trouble to another until it appears inevitable that they shall be finally engulfed. There is nothing quite like them in the entire field of Hamletonia. Lovell, in effect repeating with Henley that his head is bloody but unbowed, is yet another first-class funster and Rookwood is never so much Rookwood as when Arthur Edward has the bit between his teeth. I am sure that Mr. Conquest agrees with me. When he emerged from his long retirement a few weeks ago with "The Rivals of Rookwood", whom did he select as his key-man. That's right! Master Lovell.

# NED KELLY

THE  
IRONCLAD  
AUSTRIAN BUSHRANGERS



## THE AUSTRALIAN No. 1.

Quite a number of unpleasant characters who achieved some eminence in popular reading have endured beyond any reasonable expectation. Jesse James, who inspired more dime novels than any other Western outlaw, has taken a new lease of life and is currently featured in several of those Yankee 'comics' which are no improvement to English bookstalls. The Amalgamated Press started a series of *Thriller Comics* a few weeks ago, and lo! they dug up our old friend Dick Turpin for the No. 1. But

against this, the rogues who were Australia's contribution to the calendar of crime - the bushrangers - seem to have faded out completely, although for many years they inspired a voluminous literature to which Henty and Hornung were not the least of the eager contributors.

Ned Kelly, in truth, seems to have attracted more wordage than any other Australian, and the fact that every detail of his real career was well and recently known did not prevent the blood-morchants from

setting up their presses almost in the shadow of his scaffold and weaving round him such a web of romance as would have amazed its inspirer. They did it in every form from the penny pamphlet upwards, but pride of place undoubtedly goes to that formidable volume, NED KELLY, THE AUSTRALIAN IRONCLAD BUSH-RANGER. By One of His Captors.

Kelly was only a few weeks dead when Alfred J. Isaacs and Sons, 16, Camomile Street, London, E.C. began to issue the work in penny numbers. They were not primarily publishers of penny-dreadfuls. Rather, they operated more on the general lines of Jack Bernstein, the Holywell Street publisher in Michael Sadleir's *Forlorn Sunset*. W. Stephens Hayward's "fierce" novels were in their list (*The Cloud King*, *Robert the Rover*, *The Black Privy-leer*, etc.) but their star line was the notorious "Anonyma" series of yellow-backs. Such titles as *Anonyma*, or *Fair But Foul*, *Delilah*, or *the Little House in Piccadilly*, *The Soiled Doves*, and *Love Frolics of a Young Scamp* give a rough idea of the trend of the stories, and one oddity about them is that the credit - or blame - for writing them is generally attached to Braebridge Memyng, the creator of the interminable Jack Markaway tales.

Still, when the Isaacs tackled a book they made a good job of it. Any of the type which failed to tickle the public palate were hacked to pieces to bring them to a speedy end. Not so *Ned Kelly*, which ran on to fill 456 double-columned pages, each 11" x 8 1/2". There were practised hands behind it, who had nothing to learn of the tricks of the trade, for ascribing the authorship to "One of His Captors" was an exceptionally impudent piece of literary license. The authors had as much to do with the capture of Kelly as I had with the shooting of Wild Bill Hickok.

Desmond Goke's collection of dreadfuls includes the copy of *Ned Kelly* which originally belonged to G. D. Boucicault, who had liberally annotated it on almost every page, from which we learn that it was: "Conceived by G. B. Boucicault. Commenced by Barfasse. Continued by Percy B. St. John. Completed by M. Vizatelly. Cut up generally (under pretext of sub-editing and otherwise improving) by G. D. Boucicault." So runs

of Boucicault's notes, but there must have been yet another hand engaged in the editing, because he complained that some of his choicer passages had been interfered with.

Dr. John on had it that no one but a fool would write for anything save money, and Boucicault's cynical gloss would dispel any misguided idea that either publishers or authors were under the illusion that they were producing enduring literature. But, for once, too many books did not spoil the broth, and any tongue-in-the-cheek approach does not show through the lurid, lusty and eminently readable yarn that resulted. It brings in most of the facts of the Kelly Gang's career, plus, of course, the inevitable embroidery and it ranges over quite a chunk of territory, including California. As there is no record that Kelly ever left his homeland, this smacks a little of St. John. He had already managed to transport Dick Turpin - of all people - to the Wild West and involve him in warfare with the Redskins, so getting the Kelly across the Pacific would be child's play to Percy.

But even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea, and the far from weary tale of the greatest of the bushrangers ended at the thirty-eighth week, when the noose tightened at last round his fictional throat as surely as it had done in real life a year before on 11th November, 1880.

In common with many another callous and murderous ruffian, Kelly held a strange glamour for thousands of his countrymen. The son of a transported Irish criminal, and a woman of bad character, he gravitated naturally to crime in his teens. There seems to have been little to commend him except a sort of brutal courage, yet, although the price on his head rose to £6,000, he never lacked for aid from often unexpected quarters, and after twenty years of robbery and murder there were still over 32,000 who signed a petition for his reprieve. Except for being mentioned in a recent *Fifty Greatest Rogues* published by Odhams, he appears to be well on the way to oblivion at this side of the world, but it would be interesting to learn from some of our Australian readers whether his fame still endures in his native land.

T.H.