STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL. 27 Nº 316 APRIL 1973

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CRICKET IN FICTION

Under this title, in the March issue of "The Cricketer," there is an article by Alan Gibson. It is an interesting and well-written article, well worth adding to one's scrapbook.

We ourselves have, of course, published a number of articles on the same subject. One of them, from our Let's Be Controversial series, was published in a cricket Annual last year, and another is to be reprinted in the same publication this year.

Mr. Gibson looks at such writers as Hylton Cleaver, John Mowbray, and Gunby Hadath, and, inevitably, dwells affectionately on Wodehouse's "Mike." He mentions that Talbot Baines Reed was an excellent writer of school stories, and adds that some of Reed's cricket matches hold your attention.

Personally, I cannot recall anything outstanding in the cricket line from Reed, but it is a long time since I read most of his stories. "Mike," of course, is a cricket classic (we have referred to it many times before), and I always regard Coke's "The Worm" as one of the most believable of all such tales. Mr. Gibson does not mention Coke at all.

What I find slightly surprising in the article is that Mr. Gibson says that "At the other extreme was Frank Richards whose matches nearly always ended in a victory by one run or one wicket." Just what Mr. Gibson means by "the other extreme" I do not know. After all, most of the school story writers had their stories in magazine serial form. Were those who featured in the more expensive format at one extreme, while Richards, whose work appeared in the cheaper weeklies, was at the other? Richards wrote plenty of cricket stories which were indifferent, but he also wrote at least as many real cricket masterpieces as the others - and probably more. And though Richards is still read widely today, the others, with the exception of "Mike" are largely forgotten.

THE MONTH AFTER

I wish to thank most warmly the large number of readers who have written to me, or telephoned, concerning the matters discussed in pages 20-22 of last month's C.D. I have been deeply moved by so many expressions of loyalty and support.

I should add that Mr. Acraman telephoned me in the middle of the month, we had a chat, and we have agreed that the matter is now closed. It ends with Mr. Wilde's reply this month.

The risk connected with anything of this kind is that contributors may become inhibited, discussions may become stunted, and the magazine may be emasculated. We must not let that happen. As I commented last month, a literary magazine can thrive only on its

discussions, and, even if those discussions at times become sultry, no harm is done providing we insure that we never lose our sense of humour.

WHERE'S MY C.D.?

Last month, owing to the strikes and chaos on the railways, resulting in serious disorganisation in the postal services and particularly the parcel post, C.D. did not reach readers until some eight days later than is normal. As readers, who were asking "Where's my C.D.?" will appreciate, it was a matter entirely beyond our control.

THE EDITOR

* *

DANNY'S DIARY

APRIL 1923

Real goings-on concerning Rookwood in the Boys' Friend. The editor hints that Jimmy Silver & Co. are leaving school life for good, and going to Canada to feature in western adventures. I don't know whether I like the idea or not, but the Rookwood tales are now lengthened, and they feature on the cover again after a long absence from that honourable position. The tales must be quite 50% longer now than they have been for years, and are no longer printed in the very small type.

Opening tale this month is "The Cousin from Canada." Jimmy Silver is expecting the arrival of his cousin, Hudson Smedley, whom he has never seen. A fearful character arrives - a rough in corduroys - who claims to be Mr. Smedley. He gives Jimmy a terrible time, until the gentlemanly Mr. Smedley - the real one - turns up, to Jimmy's relief. The impostor was Peele in disguise.

In "The Rancher at Rookwood," Mr. Smedley invites the Fistical Four to go to live on his ranch in Alberta, but he warns them he will give them a test to make sure of their worthiness. When Smedley is out in the woods with the Fistical Four, they are attacked by four toughs, but the Fistical Four rout the toughs. It turns out that the toughs were employed by Mr. Smedley. This was the "test" he had spoken about.

And the four Rookwooders set sail for Canada with Mr. Smedley.

"Jimmy Silver & Co. Out West" starts in the little shack town of Mosquito. The Four wake up to find that Mr. Smedley has gone on to the ranch while they slept, and they are to follow the next day. However, the Four get horses and set off for the ranch which is 30 miles away. Pequod Le Couteau tries to steal their horses, but Jimmy & Co. get the better of him.

In "The Rookwood Tenderfeet," the Four are safely at the Windy River Ranch, but they don't get on too well with the cowhands. A particularly unpleasant one named Kentuck, goads Jimmy into riding a wild horse, Blazer. The horse bolts with Jimmy, and he is thrown off into a raging creek. He is rescued by a Blackfoot Indian named Cloudy Face. Jimmy returns to the ranch, but he has lost Blazer. So far I like the Rookwooders in Canada very much.

Summer time came in on 22nd April, but it was not very summery weather. The weather was very cold, and there was a lot of snow during the first fortnight of the month.

The Cup Final was held in the new stadium at Wembley. There were 200,000 people there, and riots broke out, and there were extraordinary scenes. There were some people hurt, but none seriously. Bolton Wanderers beat West Ham in the Final by two to nil.

The Duke of York, the second son of the King, was married this month to Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon. We saw the wedding in the Topical Budget at the pictures, and it was beautiful to watch.

First story in the Magnet was "The Jester of Greyfriars" which was supposed to be very funny but wasn't all that good. Skinner sent a telegram to call away the Head for the day, as an April the First joke, and then gave the whole school a holiday by another trick. Bunter spilt the beans, but the Removites had gone to a theatre, and Wingate and the prefects went after them, burst into the theatre, and caused a disturbance so the curtain had to be rung down.

In "Rivals & Chums," the new curate of Friardale, a handsome young man, caught some Greyfriars boys behaving brutally to Towler & Co., the lads of the village. Mr. Tremaine thought the schoolboys were Harry Wharton & Co. but actually they were Skinner & Co.

Then came a fine new series. In "How Levison Minor Came to

Greyfriars," Levison Minor has run away from St. Jim's (as told in this month's Gem). He is found near Greyfriars by H. W. & Co., and they hide him in the Old Tower. Later, suffering from exposure, he is transferred to the school sanny.

Next week "The Boy With a Bad Name" was Ernest Levison who was allowed to be with his brother at Greyfriars. Skinner & Co. did not know that Levison had reformed since the days when he was a Greyfriars boy, and they don't believe it. In fact, they try to fake evidence that Levison hasn't reformed at all.

The price of milk has dropped to 3d. a pint until next October. Mr. Baldwin introduced his Budget this month, and Mr. Bonar Law, the Prime Minister, says it is a jolly good one.

The first tale in the Gem was the last story about Oliver Lynn, the schoolboy prizefighter. It has been a fine series, but it had rather a sad ending. In "Game to the Last," Lynn took the blame for the sins of his cousin, St. Leger of the Fifth, and was expelled. He went back to Hawley's Ring.

In "Frank Levison's Flight," Frank was accused of putting a firework into Mr. Selby's fireplace. He was sentenced to a flogging, but the worst bit for him was that his brother Ernest thought he had lied. So Frank ran away from St. Jim's. It was found out the real culprit was Piggott, but by that time Frank was in the sanny at Greyfriars. (The series continues in the Magnet.)

Two final tales of the month in the Gem were awful. "Glyn's Scareophone" was an invention which made terrifying noises. Racke and Crooke stole it, and used it to terrify the village.

I suppose somebody liked "St. Jim's at the Cup Final." (After all, somebody has written to the Gem editor and said that "The Pluck of Edgar Lawrence" was the "Rippingest" tale Martin Clifford ever wrote.) In the Cup Final at Wembley are Belmont Rovers against Loamshire County from Lancashire. Jimmy Renton who was once in a Gem serial comes into the tale, and Grundy tries to take a band to play at Wembley. I thought it all pretty awful.

At the pictures we have seen Wallace Reid in "The World's Champion;" Colleen Moore in "Darlin';" Constance Talmadge in "Polly of the Follies;" Marion Davies in "Beauty's Worth;" Betty Compson in

"The Green Temptation."

At New Cross Empire we saw a lovely show. It was called an electrical revue named "Radios." It featured George Clarke, the silly ass comedian, and a sweet little midget named Tiny Mite.

All the British railway system has been lumped together and divided into four parts. Our South Eastern & Chatham Railway is now part of the Southern Railway. All Southern Railway stock is to be painted green. I don't like these changes, but they say it will make the railways cheaper and more efficient. One thing, you can now get a cheap day return from any Southern station in London to the coast for five bob. Not so bad.

* *

CONTROVERSIAL ECHO — Geoffrey Wilde

The Secret Society series certainly contains some splendid stories, but I have always felt that those which introduced the free gifts the Magnet was then offering rather spoiled it. The sense of conviction was inevitably weakened, and it was particularly unfortunate that the gifts had to make up a Sheriff's kit - the cowboy touch was out of place, and it jarred.

One is bound to wonder whether Hamilton actively supported the idea of sales-promotion touches being worked into his stories, or simply gave it his passive acquiescence.

There is a curious instance about a year later in the second number of the Polpelly Christmas series. Two chapters describe the Greyfriars party enjoying a sing-song; the second of these is exclusively concerned with a song about Bunter, and supplies much of the lyric. The episode is not out of keeping in the series, but it does decidedly read like padding. I have the feeling that it was in fact virtually an advertisement: the Holiday Annuals of this period included some songs with lyrics by Hamilton and music by Jeff Lynton. I don't have the relevant Annuals by me at present to clear up this point, but I do know the Bunter song wasn't featured in the H.A. that was then on sale. If I am right in my suspicion and my memory isn't playing tricks, it seems odd that Hamilton should have gratuitously introduced into a Magnet story a 'plug' for a song that wasn't published till some time later. Had he perhaps been working on it at about the time he was writing the series, and had he perhaps hoped it would appear in the current Annual? No doubt some of our research experts will come up with the answer.

BLAKIANA

Conducted by

Josie Packman

TINKER by Martin Thomas

Tinker's boyhood as an early-Edwardian waif (Jan. C.D.) had an undeniable pathos, but it was only one of many appealing themes and situations (including the original version of Blake himself) which have been made unfeasible in contemporary fiction by time's social, technological and legal changes. In the early 1920's, Zenith could panic the stock market by having a false declaration of war printed in a batch of newspapers - a feat no longer feasible after the introduction of radio news bulletins. The condemned cell theme of even so recent a

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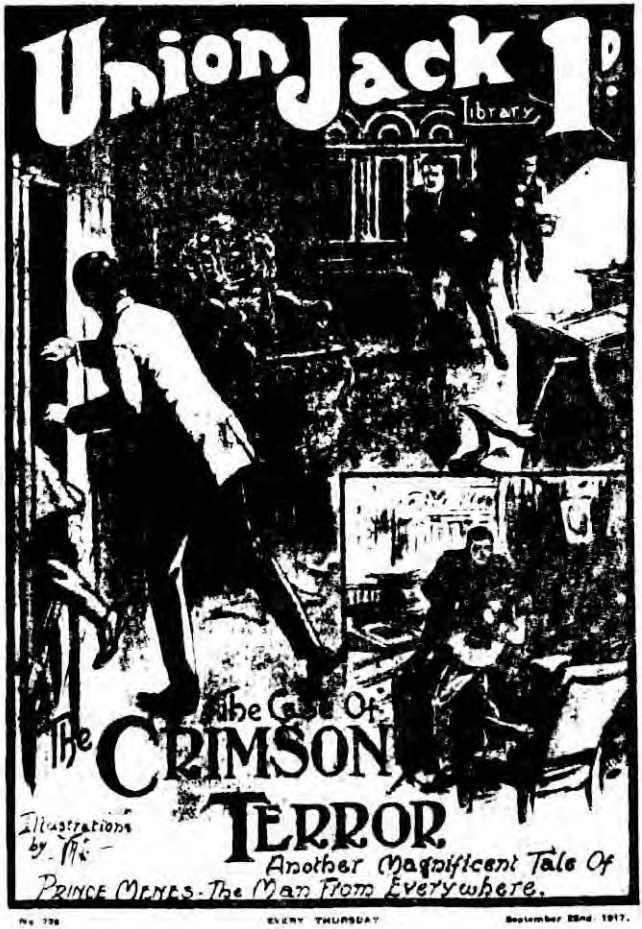

novel as "Nine O'Clock Shadow" of the Berkeley Square era would now be unusable because of the total abolition of capital punishment. From 1891, education up to the age of 13 was free and compulsory, from 1908 vagrant or destitute children were brought before special children's courts; and the Education Act of 1918 raised the school-leaving age from 13 to 14 and made it illegal for a child under 14 to engage in any kind of street trading, and in any kind of employment during school hours or after 8 p.m. So when was it last possible for a 10 year-old orphan to earn his own living - in public view - with a newspaper pitch? As I understand it, "author's licence" consists of indulging an appealing flight of fancy at the expense of feasibility, whereas author's integrity in detective fiction obliges one to keep invention within the bounds of feasibility - which is what I did in my 1960 version of Tinker's boyhood. E. S. Turner quotes an old version in which Tinker had been a regular soldier before meeting Blake, but in "Dead Man's Destiny" I retained as much as was feasible of the favourite 'image' of Tinker by keeping him an orphan newsboy, though necessarily with a sparetime delivery round and a home.

In that I showed considerably more deference to the 'original' Tinker than had been shown to the original (and therefore 'correct?') Sexton Blake - the Victorian detective with an adult French partner, Jules Gervaise, and an office and staff in Wych Street. To insist on retaining the original version of the Blake saga would eliminate Tinker altogether! As indeed would even an insistence on retaining Blake's original boy assistant. According to Turner, Blake had two boy assistants before Tinker - one Chinese, the other a waif named Griff. One has to recognise that as a waif Tinker was far from an original conception. The waif had long been a popular character in Victorian-Edwardian fiction. Holmes had his little gang of urchin assistants, the Baker Street Irregulars. And, again according to Turner, Nelson Lee had acquired his waif assistant, Nipper, in a Marvel of 1894 - ten years before Tinker's advent. And in the boys' fiction in which the fantastic was more important than feasibility, the theme persisted anachronistically, up to the time of Falcon Swift's assistant Chick Conway - "the London street urchin whom he had literally taken out of the gutter." It was not because of a brilliant originality in his

introduction as a waif that Tinker gained fame and affection, but because of his later adventures with Blake, which gave him an importance denied to Blake's original waif, Griff.

A quest for consistency in the Blake saga must be a futile one. The only consistent record would be one which ended with the Victorian Blake. Not only did the Baker Street era conflict with that original version, it also had many inconsistencies within its own context. Even regarding the colour of Blake's hair! And whereas his parents were said to have been murdered before Blake became a pupil at St. Anne's, the first issue of Detective Weekly claimed that his parents lived to disapprove when he forsook medicine for criminology, and that it was Sexton's brother Nigel who brought their "old father's grey hair in sorrow to the grave." Anyone who carps at my slight, necessary and overdue modification of Tinker's long outdated boyhood is really straining at a gnat while swallowing a camel of earlier, unnecessary inconsistencies! And even if one totally ignores the Elizabethan age of the last 21 years, it still would not be consistent to ally a Mk. II late-Georgian Blake with a Mk. I early-Edwardian Tinker. In a series which outlasts the normal span of human activity, anachronistic elements in the past must be rolled up and 'forgotten' as the present is unrolled. This was done with the original version of Blake - so why not with Tinker?

The modern author has lost even more than the reader by the passing of the ready-made pathos and atmosphere of the old days. Mystery was much easier to create in an age of gaslight and guttering candles. Exotic atmosphere more easily evoked when Africa was "Darkest," Majorca was "foreign parts" - and turbans and mosques belonged to the Mysterious East and not Bradford, Bristol or Birmingham. But surely the disappearance from fiction of the self-supporting little waif is not a matter for regret - when it results from the happy fact that he has vanished from real life?

ESCAPE

By Jack Overhill

In 1915, a tall, slim boy named Johnny Hinton sat beside me at school. One morning when the coast was clear, he played with two one-penny toy motors on his desk. Bumping one into another, he grinned and said: 'A collision.' I was surprised to hear him pronounce

the second syllable of the word with the diphthong 'I' and pointed out his mistake with the feeling that he was joking. He wasn't joking. He really thought that was the way to say the word. And what's more, he meant to keep on saying it that way. But what could you expect from anyone playing with kids things like penny toy motors. It was time he grew up!

But Johnny wasn't such a kid. He had the nerve to read 'bloods' under cover of his desk after I'd been copped reading the MAGNET, which had been taken from me by our teacher, torn up, and thrown into the wastepaper-basket with threats of what would happen to the next boy found doing it. (I retrieved the MAGNET from the wastepaper-basket after school. It had been torn straight down between the double columns and was still readable; but it wasn't a copy I could keep and I had to fork out a penny to buy another one.)

Johnny Hinton showed me what he was reading: a new penny weekly called THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. He took it regularly and said the detective stories in it were good. I wasn't tempted to buy it. Crooks and Crime weren't in my line. I liked school takes, especially those about Greyfriars, St. Jim's, and Rookwood. Tufty and Co., Kettle and Co., Fane and Co., at other schools were also favourites. But, sometimes, I came by detective stories as swops and when I had nothing else to read, I tried them. I never got through one. Usually, the first chapter was enough and when I went further, I skipped to find out what happened.

I liked to read in bed. Saturday morning - no school to creep in and bolt out - was the time for it. Snug between the sheets, I opened the coverless swop (many swops were coverless) to have a cut at reading what was to me a 'blood.' I didn't get far before I was skimming the pages. I came to a chapter that held me. Sexton Blake had fallen into the hands of crooks and was locked in a room at the top of a tall building while they decided upon the cruellest way to kill him. He looked round for means of escape. The room was no more than a bare cell. He was trapped.

He walked to the window, opened it and looked down from near skyscraper height into the street. No escape that way - that was why the window was not fastened. Below was a street gas-lamp, its ladder-

bar in direct line with him.

In a flash, he saw a means of escape. Crawling out on to the window-sill, he stood upright, and leapt into the air.

The cast-iron ladder-bar of the gas-lamp, nine feet above the ground, was twenty inches long and three-quarters of an inch in diameter. But one of four projecting supports to the lamp shortened the bar for Sexton Blake's purpose to fifteen inches.

Cool, calculating, he fell until level with the ladder-bar. Like a trained gymnast, with perfect timing his hands shot out and grasped it. His arms nearly jerked out of his body, he swung violently to and fro. Filled with agonizing pain, he grimly held on. His movements slackened, he dropped lightly to the ground - and scarpered.

Later, I read many daring escapes of Sexton Blake, but I awarded the palm to the author who thought of that one.

What did I think of it when I was twelve years old?

I swallowed it whole.

What do I think of it now?

Sexton Blake's arms were nearly jerked out of his body. I don't wonder!

* *

DO YOU REMEMBER? by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 107 - Schoolboys' Own Library No. 374 - "The Boy They Couldn't Trust"

It is a sad reflection on the Gem to note how short the St. Jim's stories were in the 1920's. Both the Magnet and the Gem were hit by paper restrictions during the first world war but, whereas the Magnet had a Greyfriars story of a good length as soon as paper became freely available once more, the Gem used the additional space for other items, keeping the St. Jim's stories down to about nine or ten chapters, and filling the issue with two serials instead of one, like the Magnet. It is difficult to see why different policies were pursued in respect of two similar publications under the same editorship, but one cannot help suspecting that the circulation of the Gem was on the decline.

One advantage that accrued from these shorter St. Jim's stories

was that they were far easier to reprint in the Schoolboys' Own Library. No. 374 was a reprint of a block of Gems (852, 853, 855 and 856), a run of stories not entirely unconnected: they all referred to an outbreak of influenza in the New House. (Incidentally, Gem 854 was a substitute story.) This enabled an almost complete reprint to be made, and this Schoolboys' Own can be regarded as one of the more successful issues, though the recapitulation of past events in Chapter 29 reveals how handicapped Charles Hamilton must have been in trying to cope with such a short St. Jim's story each week.

The first story recorded how Trimble blackmailed Cutts, but after that the main theme of Cardew and cricket was explored. The junior eleven was temporarily short of good cricketers, and Tom Merry was anxious to play Cardew, who gained a perverse pleasure in being reluctant to play. Later on, the positions were reversed, with Cardew wanting a place and Tom Merry suspicious. The plot continued to intrigue the reader with its satisfying twists and turns, bringing into play the unscrupulous Racke and Clarence Yorke Tompkins, the enthusiastic botanist.

In many ways Cardew was a potentially more useful character to Martin Clifford than Vernon-Smith ever was to Frank Richards. Both were good sportsmen, wealthy, inclined to be unscrupulous, erratic, and with shady habits that often made them unreliable. Cardew, however, had the supreme advantage of possessing a sense of humour and, though his airy persiflage often irritated Tom Merry, the reader could savour the situations to the full. Cardew never appeared in a sub-standard story, because his very presence in the Gem seemed to inspire Martin Clifford to greater heights. But certainly his character was well described in the title of the Schoolboys' Own Library he was indeed - The Boy They Couldn't Trust.

ROOKWOOD AND ST. JIM'S - A PERSONAL VIEWPOINT

by John Wallen

I am, and always shall be, a Greyfriars man. That is not to say I dislike St. Jim's and Rookwood. Only that Greyfriars has a more lasting appeal for me personally.

St. Jim's is memorable for one of the finest characters ever

created by Charles Hamilton - Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He, more than anyone, was the basis of the Gem's success over its thirty odd years. His "Yaas, wathah's" must have won over many new readers.

Another success of the Gem was Ralph Reckness Cardew. It is true that Cardew, when he first made his debut in 1917, seemed suspiciously like the Vernon-Smith of St. Jim's. His character however was subtly different. He possessed a superciliousness all of his own.

As far as I myself am concerned the coming of Cardew was one of the best things that ever happened to the Gem.

He was more than slightly reminiscent of the Caterpillar, but this only enhanced my regard for him. De Courcy has long been one of my favourite characters, and I find myself perpetually frustrated that he never appeared regularly in any weekly paper. Bearing this in mind, it was fairly inevitable that Cardew should become a favourite character of mine. The Caterpillar even possessed his blackguardly traits until Frank Courtenay arrived.

Rookwood only had one character of note. Arthur Edward Lovell. Even he, I was never very fond of - he always seemed so touchy.

Jimmy Silver I disregard. I do have a sentimental spot for him, but it seems obvious that he was little more than Tom Merry over again. The "Uncle James" I always found corny.

One may wonder why I make no mention of Valentine Mornington - who for many is the crowning piece of characterisation at Rookwood. My reason is simple. He is no more than an imitation of Vernon-Smith, perhaps a little more wild. The Bounder was Hamilton's masterpiece in this line. Mornington and the like are carbon copies.

The atmosphere of intimacy which prevailed at Greyfriars, was never evident at either St. Jim's or Rookwood. Did we ever know the Fifth at either of these Schools, as we knew them at Greyfriars? Was either Kildare or Bulkeley ever so outstanding a celebrity as Wingate? In my own mind the answer is clear.

The School House and New House feuding in both St. Jim's and Rookwood was always a constant source of irritation to me. No doubt, many enthusiasts look on this sideline, as an interesting addition to a story. I find it both boring and tedious.

Everything about Greyfriars is uncomplicated. No futile House feuds, and a wealth of rich characterisation, which neither St. Jim's or Rookwood can equal.

* *

LET'S BE CONTOVERSIAL

No. 180. WHITHER MONTEITH?

Mr. John Wallen, who contributes an interesting article this month, gives his personal views of the three great Hamilton schools. No doubt plenty of readers will agree with him.

As one who always had a soft spot for the Gem, I find myself in the opposite corner to Mr. Wallen on several points. Mr. Wallen is one of our newer contributors, and one does not know how far back goes his acquaintance with the three schools. He says, for instance, that the atmosphere of intimacy which prevailed at Greyfriars was never evident at St. Jim's. Surely that is a very sweeping statement. I fancy that the Magnet never published one holiday series with the same inconsequent intimacy that was evident throughout the Gem's Old Bus series. In my view the Magnet's Water Lily series, inspired by the Old Bus, was a poor echo in every way of the Gem's offering on the same theme, and lacked the very intimacy which made the Old Bus tales so charming.

So far as the senior forms are concerned, I could not agree that, overall, St. Jim's played second fiddle to Greyfriars. Quite the reverse. The trouble, of course, with series of stories which ran for over thirty years every week without a break, is that the great pearls of characterisation get lost among the mass of run-of-the-mill material. One of the greatest fifth-form tales ever written - a superb school story - was "The Housemaster's Mistake," in which Mr. Ratcliff believed that Cutts had robbed him, and was later compelled to apologise in public. It is a tale which stands alone.

Both Cutts and St. Leger featured in single stories and series, the plots of which were transferred later on to Greyfriars with not a whit more success.

Coker, obviously, starred in countless tales of Greyfriars, but Coker, an acquired taste, was mainly for light relief, and though he was

an asset to Frank Richards, it can hardly be said that Martin Clifford was any less successful for not having a Coker in his Fifth.

At St. Jim's, Kildare and Monteith starred in magnificent stories of seniors right from the very beginning of the series in Pluck, and off and on throughout the blue cover era of the Gem. And almost all of these tales were reprinted in the thirties.

Monteith was a magnificent piece of characterisation in so many tales. Moody, self-pitying, jealous, he was really far beyond the height of character work needed for a weekly story paper for boys. Actually Charles Hamilton was like that with so much of his character work. So often he aimed at the reader of above average intelligence. It cannot ever be said that he wasted his gifts, but they were far greater than was really necessary for the medium in which he worked. That is exactly why adults still remember and read him all these years later.

Kildare, of course, was only made slightly different from Wingate and Bulkeley by the fact that he was Irish. But Monteith was from a different drawer entirely. Where Loder was too bad to be true, Monteith invited close study as an individual.

I, personally, think it probable that, in creating Kildare and Monteith - his first seniors of note - Hamilton turned to Talbot Baines Reed's "The Willoughby Captains." It could well be that Willoughby also was in Hamilton's thoughts when he constructed St. Jim's. I might add that, for me, St. Jim's was always more real than Greyfriars.

One of the great mysteries of St. Jim's was why Hamilton dropped Monteith from his starring cast after the blue cover ended. It hardly seems likely that Hamilton felt that he had come to the end of the potentials offered by one like Monteith. But if, as I have suggested, Monteith was "lifted" from "The Willoughby Captains," then it is just possible that Hamilton felt averse to continuing to use this temperamental senior. Even authors see matters from a different viewpoint with the passing of time. In any case, the casting overboard of Monteith was a real loss to the Gem.

* *

WANTED: Magnet 1530; also any one copy of Young Folks' Tales.

M. HARLOW, 2 WOODLAWN CLOSE, NEW MILTON, HANTS.

Nelson Lee Column

"IF IT'S LAUGHTER YOU'RE AFTER" by William Lister

Edwy Searles Brooks was certainly good for coming up with a number of plots or themes to keep readers with their eyes glued to their weekly copy of the "Nelson Lee." Well! he had to be, with all us customers hanging on his very words, and a series of four - "The River House Raiders" was no exception. (Sept. 1928.)

The theme for the whole set of four was based on japes - or to quote the dictionary - jokes. The jokes being between the boys of St. Frank's and Hal Brewster and Co. of the "River House."

Now, let's be honest! I began to read with little enthusiasm; some plots I like and some plots I don't, and I couldn't see being "grabbed" (I think that's today's word) by this series, until Cyril Graham of River House appeared on the scene.

Cyril is a kind of Danny La Rue, before Danny La Rue was born, I should think, which goes to prove there is nothing new under the sun. Some of the jokes and wheezes conjured up between St. Frank's and River House were a bit thin, but our Cyril pulls the series through with flying colours. Son of a well-known comedian, Cyril specialises in female impersonation and when he turns up at St. Frank's, Brooks has this to say -

"The St. Frank's boys' saw a slim, graceful girl of about 15. Her skirt was fashionably short (1928 short, of course) revealing shapely silk-clad legs. Her high-heeled shoes were small, and her delicate fingers were adorned with one or two simple rings. Her frock was a light, flimsy, summer confection with a delightful little hat to match!"

At least this is what the St. Frank's boys thought they saw, but in reality it was Cyril Graham, and did he lead Handforth by the nose?

However, the high-spot of the series is the Sept. 1928, N.S. 126 "My Sainted Aunt." This time Cyril tries again and shades of "Charley's Aunt" he gives the St. Frank's boys a run for their money.

I first saw "Charley's Aunt" in the silent days, when Syd Chaplin

(brother of Charles Chaplin) took the lead. Since those days I have seen many stage and screen versions, including Arthur Askey and Danny La Rue in the role. It has always been good for a laugh.

To write humorous stories or scripts (we are told) is the hardest form of writing. If this is so, Edwy Searles Brooks emerges from this story with flying colours.

"My Sainted Aunt," no doubt based upon "Charley's Aunt" but with a slant of its own, and geared to suit St. Frank's, should raise a laugh even from the most sober of sobersides.

Cyril Graham posing as Aunt to Archie Glenthorne (the chappie with the monocle) and attempting to boss him around and Archie's butler - Phipps, too - provides the dual touch of "Charley's Aunt" and "My Man Jeeves."

I should think that if "Charley's Aunt" was ever produced again "My Sainted Aunt" would give it a helping hand with Handforth - Archie - Phipps - Clive Graham as "My Sainted Aunt" taking the stage would assure Brooks of a place among the laughter-makers. Brooks made me chuckle as a lad and I find he is still good for a laugh, even though he does have to compete with Talkies, Cinemascope, Hi-Fi and Television (I think I saw my first "Talkie" in 1928 - the year "My Sainted Aunt" was published).

At this stage I suppose my readers are expecting a "quote" from the story to illustrate my point.

Sorry chaps - I understand some among us object to quotes, so you will have to take my word for it, or you could borrow a copy or should I say copies, of this series from Mollie Allison or Bob Blythe.

AN ORAL QUIZ

by R. J. Godsave

A few years ago a member of the London Club, since resigned, conducted an oral quiz on the names of characters who had occupied the position of Headmaster at St. Frank's College during the life of the Nelson Lee Library. My own contribution was Mr. Hugh Trenton who was appointed as temporary Headmaster by the Board of Governors after the dismissal of Dr. Stafford and Nelson Lee in the Communist School series of 1921/22.

I was, on that occasion, told that Mr. Hugh Trenton was not

appointed to the position of Headmaster. On appealing to those present to confirm this only Mr. Trenton's appointment as Science Master was remembered. As I was unable to produce proof at that moment the character I submitted was dismissed as being inaccurate.

Although this is a trivial matter, one can only sit back and wonder how such a statement by the conductor of the quiz can be made with such authority.

The whole saga of the Nelson Lee and other papers consists of minor happenings of the moment. Names such as that of Mr. Rodney Briggs, Headmaster of Beechwood College, the school bought by the Hon. Douglas Singleton in "Singleton's Rival School" only appear in that series.

Obviously, one cannot remember all the minor characters which appeared in the Nelson Lee, but one should remember a character upon which a series was built and what happened to him. In the case of Hugh Trenton this was the first series in the enlarged Nelson Lee when the price was increased to 2d. at the end of 1921.

If readers just avoid the so-called 'Padding,' then only half the story is read and a cursory knowledge absorbed. In my opinion much of the interest and beauty of description is in the padding.

* *

The Postman Called

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

MARTIN THOMAS (London): I suppose I am in a better position than most of your readers to appreciate the amount of unflagging work and thought you put into the production of the Digest month after month, year after year, and the ingenuity necessary to fit in so many diverse contributions. I was quite surprised to read that the illustrations have not been appreciated as they deserve - though if they were left out they would certainly be missed even by those readers who have taken them for granted.

I have long thought that the Blake and Lee sections would benefit considerably from features like your "Let's Be Controversial" series - so much more stimulating than contributions which merely outline the plots of old stories and give nothing to people who have read the stories

concerned. "Danny's Diary" - surely unique - is another feature I find of immense interest. Though invariably I read every word in each issue!

G. BALLARD (Brighton): May I write a few lines of praise for your excellent little monthly mag. so full of interest to old fans of the Magnet, Gem, Nelson Lee, etc. - indeed a wealth of nostalgia!

I note the monthly arguments which continue regarding the merits of the different papers and authors. As far as I am concerned, I obtain much pleasure from reading the old stories once again after a gap of some forty years whether they be by Brooks or Hamilton! They still hold the interest each in their own way.

If anything I am inclined to think that Brooks work has a more adult 'flavour' than that of Hamilton - anyhow, be that as it may - let's have more of the reprints! It's a treat to read stories without sex and killings rearing their ugly heads!

J. WALLEN (Liverpool): Re "Let's Be Controversial" 179, do you not think it probably that the Magnet editor knew that the free gifts would mean nothing to the confirmed reader? They would, however, still be worthwhile, as they would attract younger children who did not take the Magnet as a rule, but who would be attracted by the gifts. The free gifts, however, certainly ruined the Magnet covers as a spectacle.

DAVID HOBBS (Seattle): I must agree heartily with others of your correspondents, that the Annual was truly outstanding. Of the 12 now on my shelf, received since first making contact with you, all have been wonderful - but how you are able to make each one better than the others, I'm unable to understand. But mighty glad you do!

Story Paper Collector's Digest is always full of good reading and reminiscence. I find now I can tolerate disagreements, no matter how boisterous they become, with calm detachment, conceding to everyone his preferences, and being glad there are chaps still around who care so much for any old papers.

Reading MAGNET reprint 1311 (All through Bunter) reminded me of something that has always surprised me. Why was Hurree Singh, though represented as being fabulously wealthy in his own country,

never (to my knowledge) able to come to the rescue when the Famous Five encountered financial problems ...?

G. BRUTON (Harrow): How I do look forward to the C.D. every month! Just what I would do if it ceased tomorrow I really don't know. I congratulate you and your staff of writers for your ever keeness and enthusiasm.

G. FISHMAN (New York): It is with great pleasure that I send this letter to you congratulating you on just wonderful, so perfect, thing as Collectors' Digest. Having just received it for the first time, I am that much more saddened that I was not aware of its existence before, but that is the price of living on this side of the Atlantic.

As an exiled Scot from Glasgow, I remember, as a boy, being utterly 'hooked' by the Thompson papers and Billy Bunter. Many a fond memory crosses my mind, especially when I look through my modest collection of old boys' papers, and let's not forget the giants of the novel world. I, like countless thousand other boys, travelled with Wolfe in Canada, courtesy of Mr. Henty, fought the Boer War with Capt. Brereton, and swam off the Coral Island with Mr. Ballantyne. And who could ever forget the pleasure given to us by the late great Richard Crompton, and that boy William ...

* *

News of the Clubs

CAMBRIDGE

A meeting was held at 3 Long Road, on 11th March. Reports were given on the London O.B.B.C. Jubilee Lunch, which four members of the Cambridge Club attended. Much interest was shown in the souvenir menu of the Lunch - and on the Club Exhibition in Messrs. Reffers' Gallery, which had aroused considerable interest. A letter was received from a History "Don" of St. John's College, expressing the view that it would be interesting to analyse papers such as those shown in the Exhibition with a view to ascertaining the political and social attitudes inculcated in the minds of the young in the 19th century.

The Club were interested in this project and it was agreed to follow it up.

The Secretary read a paper on "Robin Hood in fact and fiction," saying that while modern research had revealed a substrata of fact behind the Atlantis and Arthurian legends, no chronicler referred to Robin Hood as his contemporary. The earliest reliable reference to the Robin Hood tales was in Piers Plowman of 1377. He drew attention to possible Robin Hoods from the Robert Hood, Fugitivus, mentioned in the Pipe Roll of 1228, to the Wakefield Robert or Robin Hood of 1322-24, but concluded with Maurice Keen that whatever dim figure might lay behind the tales the hero of the Robin Hood ballads was a pure creation of the ballad muse. But the frustration of the historian was the opportunity of the novelist, and he referred to the versions of the tales through the ballad collections of Ritson and Childs, and Scott's "Ivanhoe" to modern children's tales and to films and T. V. An interesting discussion followed, in the course of which Chairman Danny Posner, asked whether the tales would continue to be viable in the future?

The Chairman promised a talk at the next meeting on boys' stories in the first and second world wars; and it was agreed to hold a "think tank" on the form of future programmes at that meeting.

The possibility of holding an open meeting on illustrators, especially of comics, was considered.

Next meeting will be held on 8 April, 3 p.m., at 3 Long Road. Members from other clubs, or unattached collectors, are cordially invited.

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LONDON

Combining both chairman and host, Don Webster organised another Richmond Community Centre meeting on Sunday, 18th March. Twenty-seven members attended. The first duplicator of the club's newsletter, John Geal, was present and heard Bob Blythe read extracts from an issue of March 1956. Brian Doyle won the quiz set by Larry Morley and obliged with a Magnet reading, "The Rise and Fall of William Gosling," from 1919.

Roger Jenkins rendered a masterly "Likes and Dislikes" discourse

and which was greatly acclaimed at its conclusion. Josie Packman's record of Sweeney Todd was another interesting item and then Don read passages from "The Willoughby Captains" by Talbot Baines Read. The final item was a debate on the facsimile publications of Howard Baker and it was generally agreed he had rendered a great service to all supporters of Hamilton, Edwy Searles Brookes and some of the Sexton Blake authors.

Attending a meeting for the first time was young David Aaronberg and his knowledge of the hobby was astounding and at times he had me nonplussed.

Don Webster conducted the election of officers for the ensuing year as this was the Annual General Meeting. Mary Cadogan was duly elected chairman and needless to say the rest of the old firm were re-elected enbloc.

Regrettably Charlie Wright was unable to be present and the good wishes were sent him for better health in the future.

Roger Jenkins proposed a hearty vote of thanks to the retiring chairman, Don Webster.

Next meeting at Friardale, Ruislip, on Sunday, 15th April. Kindly let host Bob Acraman know if intending to be present.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

* * *

NORTHERN

Meeting on Saturday, 10th February

Sixteen of us were present to take part in a programme slightly different from usual.

First of all a quiz on various portraits shown by Harry Barlow on his epidiascope (a most useful piece of technological equipment, an epidiascope!), in which Geoffrey Wilde came top with 27 correct guesses out of 28. A number of us were also-rans, with numerous fences still to go, so to speak.

After refreshments and chatter (always an interesting part of the evening) there was another quiz organised this time by Tom Roach. Tom played tape-recorder extracts of twenty different voices ranging

in period back to the first World War. Bill Billiamson came first with 11 out of 20.

As an off-shoot of the London Club (Len Packman was present at our inaugural meeting) we were distressed that through oversight we had omitted to send congratulations to them on their Silver Jubilee.

Perhaps through the media of these pages they would accept our apologies - and our (albeit belated) good wishes for the next 25 years!

* *

F O R S A L E : 8 of the post-war St. Jim's Goldhawk series: 20p each; John Finnemore books: "Teddy Lester, Captain of Cricket;" "Teddy Lester's Schooldays;" "Teddy Lester's Chums;" "Three School Chums;" "Teddy Lester in the Fifth;" "The Wolf Patrol;" 25p each. T. B. Reed's "Fifth Form at St. Dominic's" and "Cock House at Felsgarth:" 25p each. Post-war St. Jim's: "Tom Merry & Co. Caravanners;" "Trouble for Tom Merry;" 25p each. Tom Merry's Annual (main story "Tom Merry's Christmas Quest"); "Tom Merry's Own" (main story "Billy Bunter for Christmas"): 50p each. Holiday Annual 1927, £2. Holiday Annual 1925, £2. Holiday Annual 1922 (rough copy) £1. Autobiography of Frank Richards (original copy without supplement) 25p. S.B.L. No. 660 "The Case of the Missing Musician" (Rex Hardinge) 37½p; Brand new copy (uncut) of "William the Superman" (autographed by Richmal Crompton); 50p. Empire Library No. 16 (1910, lovely copy) 50p. Halfpenny blue-cover Gems Nos. 30, 35, 45: 75p each. 5 Marvels between 1907 and 1912, 60p for the 5. Magnet 1335 ("Spectre of Hoad Castle") 60p. Gems 1099 and 1100, 35p each. Original Mandeville "Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's" 25p. "Disappearance of Tom Merry" (post-war) 25p. Original post-war Bunters "Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School," "Billy Bunter & the Blue Mauritius," "Billy Bunter's Benfit," "Bunter Comes for Christmas," 25p each. Postage extra on all items.

S.a.e. first to ERIC FAYNE

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T.P.O.Y.C. (Take Pity On Young Collector): Champion, Triumph, Boys' Cinemas, Champion Library, Boys' Favourite Library, Boys' Friend Library, Sexton Blake Library, Boys' Realm, Heralds 1930-40-50, Film Fun, Radio Fun, Screen Stories 1931 & 35 Champion Annual, all the following Annuals:- Boys' Cinema, Triumph, Hotspur, Rover, Wizard, Adventureland and all Thomson Papers 1920-50.

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THEY HAD STYLE! by John Geal

Whilst running my eye over the magazine racks in "Smiths" recently, I was struck by the sameness of them all.

Not like the books in our youth!

Thinking back to the years between the Wars, and perhaps 20 or so various Boys' Books on sale. With this sort of competition, you had to be different! Every Book had a striking cover, printed in its own distinctive inks, often its own coloured paper, i.e. "Bullseye," "Boys' Mag," etc. They varied in size from diminutive "Nelson Lee," through "Union Jack," "Magnet," etc., to the wider format "Triller," "Triumph."

Those books had character. If you had taken off the Titles, we could unerringly have picked out the "Ranger" or "Boys' Realm" Even the Thompson 'Famous Five' - Adventure, Wizard, Rover, Hotspur and Skipper, although from the same stable, had their own individual make up. If you had removed the covers completely from a dozen books, we lads could, by one glance at the contents, have told you the name of them all. Today, with all the multi-coloured covers and glossy papers (or because of them) they are all the same!

The only field left for us to do a comparison would be in the many woman's magazines on the shelf. Their idea of competing today is to be as alike your competitor as possible and hope to pinch their circulation. This leads to a sterile, characterless format. Flat, uninspiring stories and articles. They could all be churned out by Computer! They give the impression that the staff work at, but don't love their product. Repeat the above experiment, tear off the covers and ask those who buy them to pick them out - and, like the famous "Stork" advert - four out of five wouldn't know the difference.

So much of the pleasure in handling the old Books of our youth, is to compare again their layout and their different appeal. Many who tried to copy a successful competitor and brought out a book in the same style, fell by the wayside. Look at the number who failed during that time, to prove the point, but on the whole the ones that were 'different,' survived. Each, with its own "individual character" appealed to a certain section, and so selling through a most difficult period, when money (to say the least), was tight. Boys didn't waste money on books that had no appeal.

Turn out that Collection again and look at your DIFFERENT magazines, rejoice in the fact that when we were young, our reading matter HAD STYLE!

* *

THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF TIGER TIM by W. O. G. Lofts

It was William Fisher, editor for so many years of THE RAINBOW, who gave me so much inside information about that delightful coloured comic. This finally closed on 28/4/1956, after a magnificent run of 1898 issues - and Mr. Fisher later passed on. I often wondered what had happened to those beautiful coloured originals of THE BRUIN BOYS that hung in his office in large picture frames. (They were mainly covers of THE RAINBOW.) During our several meetings, Mr. Fisher told me the very interesting history of the very first appearance of Tiger Tim & The Bruin Boys. Seemingly, they first appeared in a children's supplement given away with Arthur Mee's New Children's Encyclopaedia for 1910. In Arthur Mee's famous work was a section entitled 'The Play Hour.' Included in the first few issues, which had been bound to form the yearly volume, was a comic strip entitled Frolic Farm. A number of comic animals lived there, with names like Piggie-Wiggie, Johnny Bull, (not our Greyfriars one - though he could be stubborn as a mule), Nanny Goat, Dicky Duck, and Romping Rover. These animals had a series of adventures on a farm owned by a Mr. and Mrs. Bull. A few issues later Mrs. Hippo's Kindergarten appeared with Tiger Tim and his other playmates. Both the sets were drawn by Julius Stafford-Baker (J. S. BAKER), a well known artist of Victorian papers and the originator of Chips' famous Casey Court. Later the sets were amalgamated, and the Frolic Farm animals joined Mrs. Hippo's school - where they were gradually pushed more and more into the background until they disappeared altogether. The supplement 'The Playhour' was conducted by Aunt Molly, who also related the true story and history of her dear old friend Tiger Tim - telling of his days in the jungle before joining Mrs. Hippo's school, along with Joey the Parrot, Georgie the Giraffe, Jolly Jumbo, Fido and the rest.

Unfortunately, the Amalgamated Press don't seem to have known their exact history (the most classic case was when they asserted that Sexton Blake first appeared in 1894 in the Union Jack, when it was discovered by a collector as having appeared in the Halfpenny Marvel in 1893). It was only recently when visiting the Cambridge Club, that the Chairman showed me a volume of a publication entitled 'World & His Wife.' This was dated 1907, and inserted in its pages was a supplement entitled 'The Playbox' conducted by Aunt Molly and identical in appearance to the Arthur Mee 'Playhour' supplement. On the front page of the former publication was Tiger Tim in Mrs. Hippo's Kingergarten, and tracing back to the first issue I find that it actually started in November 1904, which must now be recorded as the very first appearance of Tiger Tim. After these supplements came of course his appearance in the Playbox Annuals, The Rainbow, Tiger Tim's Tales (weekly), Playbox (The Hippo Girls), Playbox Annual, Tiger Tim's Annual, The Bruin Boys Annual, Mrs. Hippo's Annual and Rainbow Annual. Since the end of The Rainbow they appeared in Tiny Tots and, with the closing of this paper, in Playhour. The mind boggles to think that next year they will celebrate 70 years of continuous run - which must be a record for any comic strip. These wonderful comic animals in terms of profit to the A.P. and now I.P.C. must be made of solid gold.

* *

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R. W. RICHARDSON

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THE GENESIS OF JACK, SAM & PETE

by W. T. Thurbon

When in 1893, Harmsworth founded his Boys' Paper the "Marvel" he chose as the author of the first story, "Dead Man's Gold," the cheerful, bearded S. Clark Hook, already an established author of boys' tales. According to an A. P. editor Clark Hook took more liberties with geography and the probabilities than almost any other author - it is said that he would have put lions and tigers in Iceland if he had wanted them for his story! Bill Lofts tells us that Clark Hook spoke Spanish fluently, which explains the Spanish-America setting of many of his early stories. But he could write a rattling, fine adventure yarn, and many of his tales appeared in the Halfpenny Marvel.

It was in No. 385 of the Halfpenny Marvel that he wrote a story, "The Eagle of Death," which introduced his most famous characters. The scene is a mining camp in Bolivia. Jack Owen, a former Oxford man, is in partnership with Sam Grant, an American, renowned as the best shot for many miles around, and Fred Wickham, a young ex-soldier. There is a weird superstition in the Diggings about a gigantic eagle which haunts the district. Anyone who shoots at it and misses will die within a short time. Fred Wickham shoots at it and misses the eagle. In a brawl with a Spaniard he is stabbed and killed. Sam Grant shoots the eagle, and in a duel with the Spaniard shoots off his ear. Attached to the talons of the eagle is a gold plate saying "Am starving amid untold wealth," giving the latitude and longitude, and the date 1801. Jack and Sam decide to search for the treasure, and are joined by Pete, a Negro, a former sailor and circus strong man. After many adventures, including fights with the Spaniard and a gang of his followers and with savages, the comrades find the treasure. In No. 387 a sequel, "The Death Sentence," followed up the adventures of the comrades in evading the Spaniard and in the Phillipine Islands. Then in No. 389 Jack, Sam and Pete were involved in adventures in South America in "The Black Horseman." Clark Hook had now found a winner, and he wrote in all 24 J.S. & P. tales in the "Halfpenny Marvel." He also wrote the opening story, "The Isle of Fire" in No. 1 of the Penny Marvel, dated 27 January, 1904. Herbert Leckenby used to recall purchasing this issue with part of his first week's wages (of 4/-!) as an

errand boy. J.S. & P. tales appeared in 12 of the first 20 numbers of the Penny Marvel and thereafter appeared regularly in the Marvel until the early 1920's. On the odd week when they were not published in the Marvel they appeared in "Pluck."

In their heyday J.S. & P. were among the most popular of A.P. characters, and Clark Hook wrote many fine adventure stories. The Boys' Friend Library was originally intended to be a Jack, Sam and Pete Library, and the first three tales were all J.S. & P's. Mainly re-writes of Marvel stories. No 1, "J.S. & P's Adventures in Africa" was a compilation of the last two Halfpenny Marvel and first two Penny Marvel Jack, Sam and Pete tales. When in the early numbers of the Penny Marvel, Clark Hook teamed up with J. Abney Cummings as illustrator, they made the Marvel for a time, a leading A.P. paper; until Charles Hamilton began the school tales with St. Jim's. Many of the tales from both Halfpenny and Penny Marvel were reprinted in the Penny Popular. The early J.S. & P. tales were somewhat crude and violent, but they were fine adventure tales and appealed not only to boys but also to adults in the early years of the century.

* *

POINT OF VIEW

GEOFFREY WILDE writes:

Dear Mr. Editor,

Mr. Acraman's reaction is so extreme that reasoned debate loses not only its savour, but much of its point. Nevertheless, there are some observations I feel entitled to make - whereafter, whatever others may choose to do, I undertake to hold my peace on this particular issue.

First, it must be emphasised that anyone who wants to see his opinions published should realise that he is offering them for public comment and discussion. Mr. Acraman exercised his public prerogative in January, when he commented on the views of Mr. Hopkinson. In February he had a go at Mr. Truscott. And in the same issue his own views, in their turn, were the subject of comment by other contributors. Nothing that anybody had written at that stage constituted a "personal attack," and I am at a loss to understand why Mr. Acraman should think otherwise. Nobody impugned his personal character, his honesty, integrity, or sincerity. But now Mr. Acraman is ready to come forward and accuse other contributors of being deliberately hurtful, spiteful and malicious - and that, surely, is a personal matter.

Few of us, I imagine, will share Mr. Acraman's experience of lawsuits. But few will have any doubt either that, in layman's terms, the kind of distortion we call libellous is most likely to result when a writer resorts to exaggerated language. Anyone can see for himself what I wrote in February, and he can see how Mr. Acraman describes what I wrote. The comparison is instructive. Readers will notice that I

said nothing which I did not substantiate; and I leave them to judge whether I ever descended to "vulgar abuse," whether my article was really a "vitriolic outburst" which the C.D. "should be ashamed" of, and whether I displayed spitefulness toward Mr. Acraman (a gentleman, incidentally, whom I have never met or had any dealings with).

Overstatement does nothing to further Mr. Acraman's case. He claims that he could "very easily" tear my article apart shred by shred, but I notice he refrains from making the attempt; he registers indignation instead. Surely the simple and appropriate thing is to go ahead and tear. I assure him I shan't mind. He might like to start, perhaps, by listing the factual errors in my article, since he chooses to describe it as "totally inaccurate." In the meantime I can cite one instance of his own inaccuracy. He blandly assumes that the heading to my article was an editorial choice, and criticises you, Sir, on the strength of it. In fact, the title was my own.

Finally, Mr. Editor, it is clear that you have been subjected to considerable pressures in conducting this correspondence. Mr. Acraman is beginning to couple his claims to an extended hearing with something very near to a demand that opposing views be suppressed. Such a demand - from whatever source it comes - must make the running of a magazine impossible and an Editor's position quite untenable. I hope you will never again encounter such an obstacle in carrying out your difficult and often thankless task, as you have always done, with dignity, courtesy, and distinction.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Clearly, it is only fair to Mr. Wilde to publish his letter, in view of what was printed in our columns last month. As stated in our Editorial this month, the subject is now closed.)

* *

HE WAS ALSO FAMOUS

by S. Gordon Swan

Another character appearing in the Sexton Blake Saga who had already earned fame for himself in his own sphere was Matthew Quin, the wild beast agent. One tends to believe that he was a favourite with his creator, W. Murray Graydon, for Quin was featured in many of his stories, with and without Blake.

In 1903, in The Boys' Champion Story Paper (published by James Henderson & Sons) appeared a series of stories entitled Matthew Quin, Wild-Beast Agent. Leaves from his Note-Book, by William Murray Graydon, author of "Over Africa in a Balloon," "The Underground River," etc., etc. These stories ranged all over the globe from the Achinese Coast to Arizona and India, for Quin roamed the world to supply Karl Hamrach of London with wild animals which were sold to menageries and circuses.

Some years later The Penny Pictorial published a further series of the exploits of this roving adventurer. In one of the old papers I have read that a book had been printed about Quin's adventures, so it will be seen that he was a popular character apart from his encounters with Sexton Blake.

He was described as a man of middle age, lean and wiry of build, with bright beady eyes, a bristly moustache and a complexion that was tanned to the hue of leather. When lost in Java and in deadly peril there, he had been sought for and rescued by his friend Blake. The detective, while in the clutches of an Indian tiger, had been saved by a shot from Quin's rifle, so that honours were even.

Blake was to have an unexpected meeting with Quin later, during the Great War, when the Baker Street man was engaged on a case that took him to France. At a cottage in the war zone Quin turned up in the uniform of a British captain. Temporarily he had abandoned wild beast hunting and donned khaki. In his own words:

"There was no demand for wild animals; nothing doing in my line. I realised that when I heard that Bill Kaiser was having elephant steaks and shoulders of lion from the Zoo at Berlin for his Sunday dinners, and was eating hyena chops through the week. So I cut out the jungle sport and went in for potting Germans. I raised a force of irregulars amongst my pals, the toughest riffraff I could find. Picked them up at Zanzibar and Durban, Calcutta and Madras, Singapore and Batavia, and so on. Licked them into shape, equipped them from my own purse, brought them to France, and offered them to the British commandant, who jumped at the chance, and got me a commission. Quin's own, they call my lot. Lord, man, you should see them! You'd think they were a bunch of desperadoes and gaol-birds. But fight? That isn't the word for it!"

Oddly enough, to me this sounds like Sir Richard Losely talking in one of Cecil Hayter's breezy stories. Incidentally, yarns about the deeds of Quin's own would have made good reading.

During this encounter in France, Quin was instrumental in helping Blake to solve the mystery which had brought him across the Channel. (See U.J. No. 783, dated 12th October, 1918, and entitled Behind the Lines; or the Clue of the Crystal Phial.)

Blake and Quin were destined to meet again several times in the years after the Great War, generally in foreign climes, and once or twice they found themselves in opposition to that prince of rogues, Basil Wicketshaw, who had crossed swords with Blake on many occasions.

One of the most interesting episodes of Quin's career - one in which Sexton Blake did not figure - was recorded in Boys' Friend Library (First Series) No. 120, In Wildest Africa. This yarn introduced no other than ex-President Roosevelt (Theodore, not Franklin D. - Teddy, as he was affectionately known, and after whom Teddy Bears are named) and Roosevelt's second son, Kermit. Teddy Roosevelt was a popular real-life figure in those days, and one or two stories of him are to be found in The Boys' Friend. In Wildest Africa also brought in a scoundrelly slave-trader named Tib Muhammed, and readers of Sexton Blake in the Congo will remember that the Baker Street detective was captured by the Arab in that narrative.

From the foregoing it may be gathered that Matthew Quin was featured prominently in a number of the old papers, notably The Boys' Champion Story Paper, The Penny Pictorial, The Union Jack and The Sexton Blake Library, and he appeared in a short Blake story in The Boys' Realm. In addition to these, there was a bound volume of his adventures published in the early years of the century, so his popularity becomes self-evident; and this intrepid little man duly takes his place of honour in the gallery of famous characters who met Sexton Blake.

Edited by Eric Fayne, Excelsior House, 113 Crookham Road, Crookham, Nr. Aldershot, Hants.
Litho-duplicated by York Duplicating Services, 12a The Shambles, York.