STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL. 28 Nº 329 MAY 1974

16p

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THE LADIES, GOD BLESS THEM!

I recently had the great pleasure and privilege of attending a club meeting at Wokingham. It was surprising, and, indeed, very gratifying, to find that the ladies were there in equal numbers to the men. A charming lady was the chairman, and she kept the proceedings lively and alert with a dainty iron hand in a velvet glove. Another equally charming lady talked with authority when the subject of the old comic papers was

up for discussion. Yet another charming lady entertained us with a masterful reading. And charm was no substitution for skill, for a lady with both came first in a game of hobby knowledge which fully taxed the mere males at the gathering.

Altogether, a delightful affair. I look forward to the day when we have a lady as Prime Minister of the country. We have a lady bus driver manipulating buses in the busy area around Excelsior House, and she is every bit as competent as the men, far more courteous, and decidedly prettier.

Oddly enough, as mentioned in recent editorials, the writer of my favourite novel turned out to be a lady, and last month I was sad to record the death of that famous lady authoress who wrote under the name of "Anthony Gilbert". And, of course, Agatha Christie has been the undisputed queen of crime for fifty years.

It is, perhaps, very curious that practically all the writers for the old papers which we love, were men, though many of them, for the girls' papers, wrote under feminine pen-names.

The girls' papers of early in the century are almost unobtainable today, for they were bought by the feminine persuasion and ladies, being unsentimental, never bothered to keep them. Later on, school story papers like School Friend and Schoolgirls' Own were bought by plenty of boys, and, luckily, the sentimental males retained the copies, otherwise they, too, would be almost non-existent now.

One of the most delightful pieces of characterisation in Sexton Blake lore is Mlle. Julie. Earlier, Yvonne had charmed the masculine heart, though not mine, for she was in her prime before I was reading Sexton Blake. I do not think I have ever read an Yvonne story.

I always had a soft spot for Cousin Ethel, perhaps because, to me, she always seemed to be portrayed as rather older than the junior boys. Ethel was at a kind of finishing school in the famous tale "Cousin Ethel's Schooldays", but generally she seemed to be rather beyond school age, when she dropped in at St. Jim's to add a bit of glamour to the old grey walls.

My own view has always been that Charles Hamilton was not at his happiest when writing of his feminine characters, and his few efforts at romantic tales are forgotten today.

The powers-that-be were wise when they took him off the Cliff House tales in the School Friend - he was not really in his element there. But the foundations which he laid were sound enough, and it is possible that he never intended to do more than lay the foundations. We have never known.

Bessie Bunter, probably, was a great mistake on his part. A gross feminine copy of brother Billy, even down to his ventriloquial gifts, was a sad error of judgment on the part of both the author and the editor. All the same, I don't suppose that, all these years later, any of us would will it to have been any different from what it was. We're a perverse lot.

ANY MORE FOR THE CLACTON BELLE?

I've had a heap of letters from readers whose memory buds were tickled by our item last month on old Southend. One, Mr. John Bush, asks how many remember the Belle steamers which used to go down the Thames to the seaside resorts.

I can't remember the Belles as such - I think they operated before the first world war - but I have often heard my father speak of them. In fact, he served on the seagoing vessels of the General Steam Navigation Co., before I was born, and was shipwrecked on one of them.

But I was well acquainted with the Queen steamers which operated every summer in the late twenties and throughout the thirties, and, I think, for a time after the war. There were about half a dozen Queen paddlers, and they may have included all the original Belle boats. The Essex Queen was a new name for the old Walton Belle. I recall also the Kentish Queen, and a larger, two-funnelled paddle steamer named "Queen of the Channel" which was used for day trips to Calais. There was also a newer but smaller paddler, the Medway Queen, which did two trips daily from the Medway to Southend. The others ran from Tower Bridge, one service to Clacton and Walton, calling at Southend, and another to Margate and Ramsgate, also calling at Southend.

The Medway Queen did great work at Dunkirk, saving hundreds of lives, and, after the war, carried a commemoration plaque. Some years back the Medway Queen was sold to a northern firm, and went, I believe, to the Clyde, though I am not certain of this.

The Golden Eagle, the Crested Eagle, and the Royal Sovereign, were still running as such during the thirties, and may have been in competition with the Queen Line.

The paddles were, of course, no sign of antiquity. They made for easy manoeuvrability in the shallow water near the piers.

Those lovely paddle-boats were a picturesque feature of the Thames, the Medway, and the coastal towns of the south-east. Presumably they fell before the great god - CAR. Doesn't everything?

SING A SONG OF 2½p

Did you watch the Eurovision Song Contest? Which one did you go to bed humming? The TV critic of the Daily Mail wrote of the contest: "The nicest range of tunes in a long time."

As Mr. Quelch would have said to that: "Bless my soul!" Or, in modern parlance: "Good grief!"

What's happened to the type of song that the barrel-organs used to play, and the errand boys used to whistle? Don't tell me. I know there aren't any barrel-organs or errand boys any longer. There aren't any real songs either.

THE EDITOR

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DANNY'S DIARY

MAY 1924

Another rattling good month at Rookwood in the Boys' Friend. The first of the month was "Tubby's Great Sell". Tubby Muffin buys a George the First guinea for three-pence from a stall at Latcham market. Gunner tells him that the guinea is worth £3. Later, Peele tries to sell it, with fearful results. The guinea is a dud.

Next week, in "A Dead Secret", Jimmy, Raby and Newcome, see Mr. Dalton go into the Bird-in-Hand, the grimy pub. They keep the secret, even from Lovell, who is angry that they should have a secret from him. It turned out that Mr. Dalton had gone to the pub in the course of his duty.

"Gunner's Triumph" is to win £20 for a story which he sends to a magazine. Unhappily for him, the prize was meant for another Mr. Gunner. In "The Crushing of Carthew", the prefect wrecks Hansom's study and some valuable books, intending to leave behind a letter from Jimmy Silver. But Tubby locks the study door - and Carthew is still in the wrecked study when Hansom arrives. So Carthew has to go to the Head - or bend over before Hansom. Carthew bends over.

Finally a great laugh - "Cuffy's Catch". To oblige Mr. Cuffy, Tommy Dodd plays Clarence in his cricket team. And very unexpectedly, Cuffy brings off the catch of the season.

There has been a lot of Royalty in London for the great Wembley Exhibition. The King and Queen of Rumania and the King and Queen of Italy, both visited our own King and Queen at Buckingham Palace, and they all visited Wembley.

"Why do you keep wasting your money on it, Danny?" asks Mum, when I grumble about the Magnet. But I do, for I keep on hoping - and I don't want to miss the occasional good story. It has been another grim month, with only one out of the month's five being by the good old writer. "The Secret of Shark's Tooth" told of the Famous Five aiding a suspected criminal - the brother of Grahame of Courtfield Council School. A mixed up bit about a haunted hut in a cave near Pegg, a chap getting in the quicksands, and somebody's honour getting cleared, thanks to Bunter.

The only good tale was "The Barring of Bunter". Bunter is sent to Coventry, for inviting his friends to somebody else's feed. In revenge, Bunter smokes a cigar in Study No. 1, having previously left an anonymous letter for Mr. Quelch to tell him that smoking goes on in No. 1. The cigar makes Bunter ill, and all is forgiven.

"Capped for Greyfriars" told of Wharton playing for the school First Eleven, and winning the game. I like cricket, but an extended account of it does not make a story. An old and almost forgotten character, Bulstrode, was "The Outcast of the Remove". He tries to become form captain, but is accused of a cowardly act. He runs away from school after leaving a heart-rending letter behind him, but is finally called "My brave boy" by the Head.

Last of the month "The Iron Hand at Greyfriars" was real piffle.

The Head goes away to recuperate, and is replaced by Dr. Sterndale who is a flogger of all and sundry. His real name is James Carker who was sought by the police because, when he was in charge at Burchester Reformatory, he badly injured a boy. It seems very easy for any criminal to become Head at Greyfriars. Only very simple readers could like this one, and I hope I'm not as simple as all that.

There is a new series of Ferrers Locke tales in the Magnet called "The Quest of the Purple Sandals". Not too bad.

In parliament a section has been trying to pass a bill for what they call "Proportional Representation". This is because there was a difference at the last election in the number of seats won and the number of votes cast, and we have a minority government under Mr. Ramsay Macdonald. The bill was defeated by 94 votes.

All the month there has been a circus series running in the Nelson Lee. It is a bright and breezy affair, very original, and full of action. It's far-fetched, but you can't help enjoying it all immensely. The circus is owned by Professor Onions, father of the two Onions boys. The circus is in trouble through the antics of the rascally manager, Simon Snayle. The artists go on strike, and the St. Frank's boys take it over, and even provide the turns. The circus pays its way, but Snayle, plus a terrific storm, wrecks it all. And to add to the trouble a rival circus, Casselli's Circus, comes to the Bannington district. All fast and furious, and good exciting fun. The series continues. Titles this month: "The St. Frank's Circus"; "Under the Canvas Dome"; "School and Circus"; "Queen of the Ring"; and "Circus Against Circus".

There is another new St. Frank's tale in the Boys' Friend Library. It is entitled "The New York Mystery" or "Nipper Among the Skyscrapers".

The newspapers have been full of a find at Victoria Station left-luggage office. A Mrs. Mahon found a left-luggage receipt in her husband's pocket, and she went to Victoria to claim what had been left. She informed the police of what she found, and her husband, Patrick Mahon, has been arrested - charged with the murder of Emily Kaye in a bungalow on the Crumbles, near Eastbourne. Mum doesn't like me to read such cases in the newspapers.

It has been a weak month in the Gem, though the first tale, "Seven on the Warpath", was a winner. It was a sequel to "Up Against Ratty"

in the previous week's Gem. Mr. Ratcliff gives Gussy a whacking. Blake & Co. try to get their own back unsuccessfully, and they get a Head's whacking. But the Terrible Three take a hand. By a trick telephone call, they make Ratty think that Mr. Railton is laying bets in Pepper's barn. Ratty goes to the barn, and he, in his turn, gets a whacking. Great!

"The Kidnapping of Kerruish" was a very full-plotted affair. Kerruish pretends to be kidnapped in order to get money out of his father, and manages to round up some criminals. "Figgins at Fault" was a boring boat-race story in which Figgins fell out with Tom Merry. "A Cowardly Hero" told of Crooke pretending to do a heroic deed when he hadn't done it, and the sequel "The Heroic Coward" told how he redeemed himself. A couple of third-raters. So, in both the Magnet and Gem, there was just one decent tale really in each paper, during May.

* *

Nelson Lee Column

A LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S

by Jim Cook

The express from Victoria arrived on time at Bannington in an aroma of diesel oil and fumes.

The 6.10 local to Caistowe, steaming contentedly, stood waiting for me across the other side of the lines.

I was soon bound for Bellton and St. Frank's. The new world had intruded the old.

The Bannington-Caistowe railway still ran its trains on steam, and there was something majestic in the way the local puffed out leaving the London express to its diesel effluvium.

Bellton station was looking as picturesque as ever as we clanked in. Old Wiggins, the ancient porter, was awaiting our arrival and Mr. Spence, the station-master, stood framed at his office door ready for any eventuality.

The evening was cloudy, but fine, with just that nip in the air to provoke the walking to St. Frank's.

I disdained the services of the ancient cab that plied for hire in

the station forecourt and made my way to Bellton High Street. There was Mr. Binks busy in his village tuck shop, and Mr. Sharpe, the village hardware merchant, standing in his shop doorway evidently looking for custom.

I noticed Lumpy Bill, Bellton's bully, with his stepfather, scanning a newspaper for the racing results.

And so I left Bellton and was soon in Bellton Lane. It was shrouded in gloom. The high trees on either side made a canopy of sudden darkness. Why does Bellton Lane always seem so sinister and mysterious? Perhaps its historical associations still linger for those who know St. Frank's and its record of events.

The juniors and seniors have often declared they have seen Ezra Quirke and Dr. Karnak in the shadows.

I paused outside the main gates at St. Frank's and wondered whether I should continue on and see Miss Bond, the headmistress of the Moor View School for Young Ladies which was a little way past St. Frank's.

Since the Moor View School had been converted into a college for girls I had never been inside it. I knew it only from the time Mr. Ridgeway, the novelist, had lived there with his wife. In those days it was called The Mount.

I had often met Miss Bond and her two undermistresses, Miss Perry and Miss Broome. And knowing Miss Bond I realised I would need an introductory permit to visit the school.

At that moment three girls on bicycles wheeled to a stop and approached me. I knew who they were. Joan Tarrant and her two chums from the Moor View. I would have sooner they had been Irene Manners and her friends.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, I am not like Handforth who pictures all girls as angels. I suppose Handy will improve on his assessment of human character as he gets older.

For Joan Tarrant and her two friends, Bessie Groves and Hilda Smith, have their counterparts in Bernard Forrest and Gore-Pearce of St. Frank's.

Joan was pretty in a flashy kind of way. Her companions were similarly adorned. But I wondered how they managed to escape the eagle eye of Miss Bond who would be horrified to see the paint and powder on

the faces of her pupils.

I suppose it was good of Joan to ask me if she could be of any assistance. I expect she wondered why I had passed St. Frank's. The March evening was drawing in and there was very little daylight left.

The girls went on their way to the Moor View School and I walked the little distance back and entered St. Frank's.

Unless there was something unusual to report I intended this time to visit all the places in and around St. Frank's that have been mentioned in the old school's history.

Because I have been asked so many questions whether such and such a place still exists I want to take this opportunity to go and see for myself. Also whether any of the juniors and seniors are still at St. Frank's.

One query I had was whether Walter Starke was still there. Another asked if John Willard remains. Evidently some people are not doing their homework.

I can understand an enquiry about the old mill.

In my next letter I will describe the places I went to see.

A NEGLECTED LANDMARK

by R. J. Godsave

Fellow Leeite William Lister in his interesting article on the old windmill on Bannington Moor asks what were the adventures the St. Frank's juniors had in connection with it prior to o.s. 494 "The Secret of the Mill" as mentioned by E. S. Brooks.

This old mill was first mentioned - although briefly - and adorned the front cover of the second St. Frank's Nelson Lee, o.s. 114 "The Boy from California" (No. 113 was a detective story entitled "The Abduction of Lady Marjorie"). The drawing shows Justin B. Farman being forced into a motor car standing near the mill by his kidnappers. Although the reader at that time did not know the kidnapper and his companion would turn out to be Farman's uncle aided by a Chinaman. Farmam's refusal to say whether he recognised his kidnappers caused the mystery which ran through the story.

Brooks only made use of the mill occasionally, and in the Jack Mason series, o.s. "The Ancient House Burglary" 182, Simon Grell and Jake Starkey spent the night in the mill after stealing the locket which

was in Nelson Lee's keeping. Here Reggie Pitt was instrumental in regaining the locket whilst the two men were asleep. This locket was to prove Jack Mason to be the son of Sir Crawford Grey and led, in due course, to that fine series relating to the treasure of El Safra.

Since windmills make a fine background to any drawing it was used on the occasion of the coming of Dick Goodwin to St. Frank's o.s. 257 "The Study of Mystery". In this drawing Nipper is seen clinging to one of the mill sails and peering in at a lighted window. This episode was not re-reprinted in the Monster Library.

The old ruined windmill does not appear to figure in any further adventures from this issue until "The Secret of the Mill", a space of just over four years.

* *

BLAKIANA

SEXTON BLAKE versus MARSTON HUME

by Cyril Rowe

Part 1

It is from the pages of the Penny Pictorial wherein some hundreds of Sexton Blake tales appeared (1908-1910) that this small saga is culled. A little gem from the pen of the rather obscure Michael Storm.

It comprises eight tales in sequence from Number 545 to 552 inclusive, with a brief mention in 553; followed around a year later with three tales in Nos. 604, 606 and 607 in the last of which Hume goes to his death.

In "Well Matched" Hume is introduced as an able criminal defence lawyer of some twenty-four years standing, but still comparatively young and well set up, well-dressed, scrupulously neat, masterful, strong-nosed, mobile mouth with thin lips. A keen man without a doubt. His eyes were steady, cold and introspective, a very cool customer indeed, a clubman of the select Baddely Club of which Blake is a member.

Suddenly for no ostensible reason, Hume gives up practicing. In the Club he is discussing the murder of an old woman - a locked door mystery - when Blake drops into the conversation and by inductive means describes how the crime was committed and discloses that the murdered

woman was Hume's Aunt and that he had prospered by £40,000. "£46,000" interjects Hume, coolly. Later, when Blake states that a certain type of knife with a serated end had been employed by the murderer, and pauses to light a cigar, Hume leans forward and offers a penknife to cut the end. "Pity to bite it and spoil a good end, use this" he said. A knife of exactly the type Blake had indicated. Yes, a cool customer indeed.

Later, Blake sees him saunter away and says to himself "That man is a born fighter and a born criminal - a criminal genius - but one day his way will be mine".

The second tale - "The Bara Diamond" is one of a jewel robbery in Amsterdam, including a fake camera, false hotel bookings and travel discrepancy, which Blake again works out to be confronted with the competent Hume at work on a wax model and a completely repaired Gladstone bag (which otherwise would have been strong proof for Blake). Blake is frustrated but lets Hume know that he is aware of his misdeed. "Knowledge and proof" said Hume coldly, "are very different things".

Later it transpires that the diamond has been delivered to an Indian Maharajah in the wax model and the tale closes with Hume taunting Blake by sending him a copy of it, "not because of its artistic merits, but in the hope that it may be of interest to you".

This cynical and sardonic manner Marston Hume conveys always; never more so than when he is hard pushed, and in the next tale when hard driven by Blake he only escapes by enthralling a theatrical acquaintance of his with a long discussion, and adroitly adjusting a clock in the course of it so that he has an alibi for the time when actually he had, as Blake well knows, murdered the sole witness against him, and picks up ten bob off Blake over a bet he made with him regarding this alibi.

The fourth tale "Quits" is really the first in which Blake shows to advantage, apart from his deductive awareness throughout, in that a stolen plan case, he confronts Hume with his knowledge, at revolver point, and Hume drops the plans in the fire saying "You know I have the plans and of course I know I possessed them, and if you had retrieved them from me, then everyone would know. On the whole the fire is the best place."

Blake fires at and smashes Hume's camera. He is well aware that Hume's manouvre is only a ruse. The plans had been photographed. "I think we will call this quits Mr. Hume. Good morning."

So the sequence goes on with Blake just a step behind in a murder case once again, where Hume has carefully destroyed the body by use of concentrated acid.

The end line is "You cannot prove murder without a body. Soames came here, but now there is no Soames and NO LAW THAT CAN TOUCH MARSTON HUME".

To be continued

O IMMORTAL BAND OF SLEUTHS

by Kenneth Bailey

Part 2

Murder at the Towers

There is a variation on the classic detective mystery story in which the large country house provides the stage.

The house may be in the home counties, the craggy Scottish Highlands, the Devon wilderness or in the misty Welsh hills. (For the U.S. version substitute any Eastern seaboard State.) Essential ingredients are the reading of a Will, a violent thunderstorm, the failure of the electricity suppy and/or sabotage to the telephone system, a shifty looking butler and clammy draughts for disturbing bedroom curtains. Optional extras include sliding oak panels, the howling of some fearful hound, a frightened maid and an escaped convict. Onto such a stage came Dr. Gideon Fell, though the stage had not so many traditional props as above listed. Fell's physical appearance as sketched by his creator, John Dickson Carr, suggests a great likeness to G. K. Chesterton, the bulky figure becloaked, wide brimmed hat, a walking stick to assist his clumsy steps. The face is flushed, the small eyes show childlike innocence, the great moustache suggests that of Hindenburg. So Fell stumbles along the trail puffing and blowing, cursing his own obtuseness until, aided by tankards of ale, the truth blinds into his mind. Mr. Carr, American by birth, has spent enough years in this country to have captured the essence of the English atmosphere of the mystery tale. He uses the weather to great advantage, particularly our prop the thunder-storm. He paints a picture of a great house in Sussex, the hot sultry

afternoon heralding the gathering storm. The first sullen mutter of thunder comes like the growl of a disturbed giant. So is the scene set for the last act of a Fell problem.

Mr. Carr's tales are remarkable for the seeming impossibility of the crimes committed. How can a man be murdered in a locked room, with no windows, no fireplace, no other means of access and the door itself bolted on the inside? Dr. Fell will tell us after much blowing like a Grampus, after several stumbling steps up blind alleys - and when that storm growls and lashes around the big house, in the unnatural darkness of the drawing room, the puzzle will be solved.

** ** **

A figure more graceful than that of Gideon Fell also moved through the halls of the great country house, but he was born to such a setting, this silver-spooned lord, Lord Peter Wimsey. Above the sartorially perfect figure is a somewhat vacuous face, but one which changes to that of the eager hunter when death has laid a trail. The figure's movements are normally lethargic unless it is performing on the cricket field or when the Killer is almost about to slip the net surrounding him.

Miss Sayers was, without doubt, one of our greatest crime writers. Her embellishment of the bare plot with the intricacies of bell-ringing, painting, advertising or whatever, ensures a fine story lavishly sprinkled with humour. Lord Peter glides in and out childishly dim on mundane affairs, but razor sharp on matters criminological. A rather lonely figure is Wimsey still enmeshed in the memories of the 1914-1918 holocaust, but a man of great compassion and ready to cheer up any old bean who might be feeling in the dumps.

These are but two of the characters who have viewed the body in the library, who have examined the soil under the drawing-room window or noted the unusual stain on the first floor landing. The country house murder remains the traditional classic. We look forward to it with pleasure as we might look forward to Gilbert and Sullivan, to Othello, even to an old Laurel and Hardy film or a well-loved, but corny pantomime. The shifty butler eavesdrops at the library door, the maid screams, the tray crashes from her nerveless hands and waiting in the wings to provide light relief from all things sinister is the young

silly ass or the bumbling rural constable.

* *

DO YOU REMEMBER? by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 118 - Boys' Friend Monthly Library No. 589 - "The South Seas Scallywag"

King of the Islands was the last of Charles Hamilton's memorable creations, a series written for the Modern Boy that was reprinted in the Boys' Friend monthly library and elsewhere. Published under the author's real name, the Ken King stories represent his last imaginative creation, one of a world he never personally experienced, the islands and coral reefs of the South Seas.

Ken King who captained his own trading ketch "The Dawn" was referred to as 'the boy skipper' and at one time his age was said to be not more than sixteen, which would have put him on a par with some of the juniors at Greyfriars and St. Jim's. When one considers the way he dealt with mutineers and rogues like Barney Hall, it is difficult to imagine him as anything younger than eighteen. Perhaps he was depicted as being unusually young in an attempt to enlist the sympathy of the Modern Boy readers by narrowing the age-gap so that they could associate themselves more easily with Ken King and his Australian mate, Kit Hudson.

"The South Seas Scallyway" was in fact Ray Paget, a young selfish discontented remittance man, who was forced to crew for Ken King at the wish of Paget's uncle, Mr. Belnap. The story was constructed around Paget's various attempts to escape from "The Dawn", and these landed him on a cannibal isle, on Barney Hall's lugger, and finally on Dandy Peters' cutter, "The Sea Cat". Dandy Peters was on a 'blackbirding' expedition, an attempt to enslave a number of remote islanders, and it was this episode that finally made Paget face the truth about Peters and himself.

There is a feeling of vitality and movement about all Ken King stories, and though many characters crop up again and again there is plenty of variety and no attempt is made to romanticise or idealise the picture that is drawn. The inertia of the Kanakas (only Koko had brains

STOP PRESS: We learn that Eric Parker, the Sexton Blake artist, has died

that could 'walk about' like a white man's), the cynicism and reckless opportunism of Barney Hall, and the ruthlessness of Dandy Peters are all related in a manner that rings true to human nature, even if the manners and customs were not factually correct for the 1930's. It seems likely that the King of the Islands stories were an off-shoot of the research Charles Hamilton had to undertake to write the 1927 South Seas series in the Magnet (a glance along his bookshelves reveals the source of most of his foreign holiday series backgrounds) and it is more than likely that the Modern Boy series about Ken King reflects an out-dated background. Nevertheless the whole series represent the final triumph of a writer who had created so many convincing worlds that he probably never realised that this was to be the last success of them all.

* *

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FOR SALE AND WANTED ALWAYS: Comics from 1870's to 1950's. Disposing of the following at present (sale or exchange): Ally Sloper's Half-Holiday (1880's); Snapshots (1880's); Penny Dreadfuls (1880's); Chums (1899-1907 and 1920's); Marvel (1907-08); Infants' Magazine (1913); Young England Annuals (1908-1935); Dick Merriwell and Nick Carter paperbacks (Street & Smith 1920's USA paperbacks); The Scout (1908-1910); Magnet (1930's); Gem (1930's); Film Fun (1939-40); Adventure Annuals (1927-1937); Rover Annual (c. 1935 & 1947); Modern Boy (1937); Tales for Little People (1935); Enid Blyton's Sunny Stories (1944-47); Hobbies Weekly (1920's); Girls' Crystal (1937); Champion, Rover, Wizard, Adventure, Hotspur, Micky Mouse, Radio Fun, Dandy, Lion, T. V. Comic (all 1940's to early 1950's); Turner's "Boys Will be Boys"; Skipper (1933-1934); Triumph (1939-1940); Dick Turpin (1905); Tiger Tim (1926); Sunbeam, Crackers, Mrs. Hippo, Sparkler, Jingles, Tip-Top Annuals (1939); Modern Boys' Annual (1931, 1932, 1941).
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ED. JONES

43 DUNDONALD ROAD
COLWYN BAY

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 191. OH, MR. HAMILTON!

Charles Hamilton stated that he wrote over two thousand tales for the Trapps, Holmes organisation, and one can well believe it.

At the turn of the century one can find his stories featuring regularly in "Funny Cuts", "World's Comic", "Larks", "Coloured Comic", and "Halfpenny Comic". Some weeks he would have a different story in all five of those papers, and from what I can see there was never a week when his pen had not been at work for at least three of them.

A young man then, in his early twenties, he was a very hard worker, and, though it may be impertinent to mention it, he was clearly earning a very handsome income indeed. And, at the same time, he was also writing for other publishers.

Like most of Hamilton's work as a young man, these were mainly adventure stories. Tales of the Boer War, of the Boxer Rebellion, and of heroic deeds in the Far East were churned out in profusion. It is odd that, all through his life, it was his adventure stories which were credited to his own name, as were his many tales of sport. His school tales, to which he owes his real fame, were, with very few exceptions, published under pen-names.

His main school for Trapps, Holmes, was St. Cecilia's. Most of the St. Cecilia's stories were published under the pen-name of Talbot Wynyard, though some appeared under his own name, whether intentionally or by accident it is impossible to say.

One wonders why nearly all the old writers, and Hamilton in particular, used so many pen-names. Was it merely an editorial ruse to make readers believe that the writing staff was larger than it really was? Or was it a bit of bluff on the part of the writers themselves, so that readers should not realise just how enormous was the output of some individual writer?

When I was a child, I often heard my sister say that she was sure that such-and-such a tale, published under the name of Mabel St. John, was not by that lady at all, for it would be impossible for one writer to write so much. Were pen-names used to avoid readers coming to just

such a conclusion?

It is true, of course, that the earliest St. Jim's tales in Pluck were published under the name of Charles Hamilton, and it was not until St. Jim's took over Clavering in the Gem that Martin Clifford was given the credit from that day on.

It was, in fact, because I luckily came on those very early Pluck tales when I was still very young, that I was always convinced that Charles Hamilton was the real name of Martin Clifford, Frank Richards and Owen Conquest. As a lad I had the cheek to write to the editor and ask him whether the real writer was Charles Hamilton, and the editor replied tersely: "Your assumption is correct."

How strange that Charles Hamilton was, for so long, not associated with great school tales. Just a very few appeared under his own name: "Rivals of St. Kit's", "Redfern Minor", "Arthur Redfern's Vow", and "School for Slackers", but, though the long tales were reasonably good, not one of them would have been remembered today but for St. Jim's. I mention St. Jim's alone, by the way, because had not that school caught the public fancy to a remarkable extent, there would never have been Greyfriars, even more famous some ten years on.

Charles Hamilton was the backbone of Modern Boy throughout its heyday, with his lengthy and outstandingly excellent tales of Ken King, plus those of Bunny who was a fairly novel character, Len Lex, whose adventures were somewhat hackneyed if very readable, and the School for Slackers which failed because the new, live wire Headmaster, never really succeeded.

For a decade, Hamilton was rarely absent from Modern Boy. The paper was fading when he turned up as Ralph Redway to bring back a couple of new series of the Rio Kid which were far inferior to the original Kid yarns in the Popular. Then, when the paper was struggling to justify its existence, he turned up as Hedley Owen to contribute a series of short tales based on Will Hay's "Oh, Mr. Porter" film.

I feel that these little tales were carefully written, in that the author, to some extent, masked his normal style. I am doubtful whether, had I read them before I knew who wrote them, I would have credited them to Hamilton.

I have often wondered why Hamilton embarked on a farcical series

(there were about ten separate tales) of this type. I imagine that the editor arranged with Will Hay for his name to be used, and then sought a writer to invent the stories. Hamilton got the job, but why or how we do not know. They were far off his normal track, and one can only assume that all was grist that came to the mill at a time when his services were less in demand.

It was one of the rare occasions when Hamilton introduced a living person into his stories. One other such occasion was when King George the Fifth met and talked with Harry Wharton; yet another time saw real life cricketers introduced into "King Cricket"; and, much later, there was that commercially inspired trifle "Billy Bunter at Butlin's".

In closing, a switch back to the Spring. Another prolific writer for Trapps, Holmes, working side by side with Hamilton, was H. Clarke Hook. The two men are known to have been close friends, a friendship which probably began with the Trapps, Holmes firm. Probably Hamilton knew and was friendly with the entire Hook family, for we know that Hamilton referred warmly in early Magnets to S. Clarke Hook, and introduced Jack, Sam and Pete very cleverly into one Gem tale. H. Clarke Hook wrote St. Jim's stories for the Gem, and it can be assumed that he did it with the Hamilton blessing.

* *

THE LADY'S LAST WORD

by Mary Cadogan

When Marjorie read Harry's telling reply in the April C. D. her response was a suspicious moistening of limpid eyes, accompanied by the fervent exclamation "OH HARRY!"

Clara, however, threated to storm across to Greyfriars immediately and drag Bob out of the box-room and down to practice - "Only a boy would let such piffling rot interefere with games!" At the same time she was looking forward with relish to blacking Skinner's other eye, and banging a few heads together.

* * *

But actually Miss Primrose has The Last Word.

cont'd over ...

CLIFF HOUSE SCHOOL,
KENT.

1st April, 1974.

To The Editor,
Story Paper Collectors' Digest.

Sir,

Miss Connie Jackson, one of my prefects, has drawn my attention to some correspondence which you have published, concerning one of my pupils, Miss Hazeldene, in your magazine. This magazine was in the possession of one of my junior girls named Marcia Loftus, who, quite rightly, passed it on to the prefect concerned.

To say that I am horrified and astounded is to put it mildly. I presume that you are a man of years, which should have brought you common sense, but I am amazed at the lack of good taste which has allowed you to pillory one of my young ladies in this way. I may add that Dr. Locke, the Headmaster of Greyfriars, is horrified, too. So we are all horrified.

I am asking a member of my staff, Miss Bullivant, to call upon you to seek assurance that this shocking matter is now at an end.

Yours faithfully,

PENELOPE PRIMROSE (Headmistress)

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: We regret that we have distressed Miss Primrose. We would not like to trouble Miss Bullivant, and we assure Miss Primrose that the matter is now closed.)

* *

The Postman Called

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

JOHN BUSH (Herne Bay): I very much enjoyed the Editor's Chat about Southend-on-Sea. I wonder how many remember the lovely trips there by the General Steam Navigation paddle boats, Golden Eagle, Crested Eagle, Royal Sovereign, Clacton Belle, etc., all for I believe 3/6 a day return, from Greenwich? If my memory is correct, in 1938, I went by train from North Woolwich, an evening trip for 1/9 return, I think that this must have been by the London Tilbury & Southend Railway. As recently as 1969 there was still a steamer service between Herne Bay and the Isle of Sheppey, and, although I am not certain of this, I believe it also called at Southend. Now there are no longer any steamer trips, and our beautiful pier will soon be a thing of the past, because the local council say they cannot afford the maintenance, although they are prepared to spend £500,000 on a new Sports Complex, (whatever that means) that none of the residents want.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: North Woolwich used to be known as the only piece of Kent north of the Thames. It is many years since I was there, in the days when the Free Ferry was running. North Woolwich station was, I believe, a terminus, but it was not on the

L.T.S.R. It was the L.N.E.R. (formerly the Great Eastern), and the railway compartments had bars across the windows, as was normal on G.E.R. suburban stock. I fancy the line did not run to Liverpool St., but, possibly, to Broad Street. Anyone know?)

E. S. HOLMAN (Leigh-on-Sea): Your item about Southend was most interesting. At the moment, the district is in a state of 'suspended animation.' Large plans for a ring road has stopped with one portion only completed - the Kursaal, as you remark, is 'due for the chop' - and the Pier is still 'hanging in the balance.' Southend has changed quite a bit in the last decade or so, but one wonders about some of the so-called planning. There is a huge new Shopping Precinct, with many vacant shops - mostly served by open-air escalators that stop every time it rains! The old Library - the only part of old Southend left in the centre is being preserved as a Museum, with a ghastly-looking new Library alongside.

BILL LOFTS (London): It was H. A. Hinton who made the absurd announcement in 1916 that over half-a-million readers had written to him, confirming that they would support a Greyfriars Herald. This was almost double the Magnet's circulation alone, assuming that every single reader had written. It was not a commercial success, and closed through this, more than the reputed paper shortage. They started The Sexton Blake & Nelson Lee Libraries in this period, and there was no paper shortage difficulties here! Probably the revived Greyfriars Herald was an attempt based on the old formula that with Hamilton writing the stories (not in the old format as 'boys') in a more serious vein, it could not be other than a success. But apart from the stories gradually losing their appeal, the rest of the contents were poor and uninteresting.

J. E. MILLER (Brighton): Unadulterated gratitude for the piece in C.D. on the history and fate of The Greyfriars Herald, a masterly and valuable account.

I must say how much I agreed with your comments on Hamilton's devaluation of Bunter through his tiresome creation of so many other 'fatties' - Trimble, Muffin, et al. As a juvenile reader, I was always irritated by this.

LEONARD M. ALLEN (Bournemouth): May interest Mr. T. Sherrard (Potters Bar) that Lucille Love, Girl of Mystery, was actually the title of the first serial film made by Universal in 1914. It was originally issued as a two reeler, but extended to fifteen reels for the firm to 'cash in' on the serial boom of the period. The same two stars of the Broken Coin, Grace Cunard and Francis Ford, had the leading roles.

JACK COOK (Newcastle-on-Tyne): Richard Talmadge's real name was Richard Metzetti. Victor Metzetti was his elder brother who appeared in stunt sequences. Among the Richard Talmadge films I remember were "Get That Girl", "Through the Flames", and "The New Reporter", the last named appearing in story form in Boys' Cinema. Talmadge doubled for Douglas Fairbanks. He twice broke his neck, but after resetting was able to continue. I would like to see his films today.

T. JOHNSON (Neston): The stars of "The Green Archer" were Alleyne Ray (Pathe's successor to Pearl White), Walter Miller, and Burr McIntosh. In "Scotty of the Scouts" were Ben Alexander and Happy Paddy O'Flynn. "The Indians are Coming" had both silent and talking versions.

MRS. J. PACKMAN (East Dulwich): I have a copy of the Sexton Blake record and some two years ago I wrote to the E.M.I. Company who took over the company of the "His Master's Voice" records, asking if it would be possible for a modern recording to be made from this old copy. They replied that it would not be a commercial proposition and in any case they did not have the original print. Several tape recordings have been made by some of our Blake fans with great success. Amateurs can do better than the professionals eh?

The Sexton Blake play was issued as a story in the Union Jack, No. 1422, dated 17 January, 1931. The cover picture is Arthur Wontner as Sexton Blake, the colours being pinky grey and natural with red lettering. This U.J. is available from the Sexton Blake section of the London Old Boys' Book Club Library.

* *

WANTED - C.D. Anniversary No. 300.

HOLMAN, 10 GLENBERVIE DRIVE, LEIGH-ON-SEA, ESSEX.

BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 2. OUR EARLY FEATURES

Our school cinema started in the summer term - not the best time of year, really, for indoor entertainment. Our early programmes occupied the last hour of Friday afternoons.

But by mid-June I was yearning to play features - and, particularly, to screen "Shore Leave". The star, Richard Barthelmess, was a favourite of mine. Thinking the chances of success were most unlikely, I approached First National who released the Barthelmess films. I was lucky at once, much to my surprise. First National (then at 35 Oxford Street) was a delightful firm. They sent me their current release list, and told me they would forward contracts for any features I selected.

My first booking was "Shore Leave" which starred Richard Barthelmess and Dorothy Mackaill, an English actress. We ran this on a Sunday, and with the coming of the much longer programmes, a new system of screening came into effect. Friday bookings were shown twice - a show in the afternoon and another in the evening. An entirely different programme was now to be shown on most Sunday evenings.

For the closing weeks of that term I also booked, from First National, Anna Q. Nilsson in "The Splendid Road", Ben Lyon and Blanche Sweet in "Bluebeard's Seven Wives", and Clara Bow in "The Scarlet West". I also booked "The Beautiful City", the very latest Richard Barthelmess release, also starring Dorothy Mackaill. The latter would seem to have been the most important part of our first double-feature programmes, for I note that, with "The Beautiful City", we also played Violet Hopson in "Her Son". I have no record of who was the renter of the latter film, but I think it was probably an old one from Leytonstone. Violet Hopson had been a popular British star in her time (I have a feeling that she was rather a majestic type of beauty, probably nearing middle-age, though I may be doing her an injustice), but by the time that I was booking films I fancy that Miss Hopson's day was long passed. "Her Son" was the only Violet Hopson film I ever played. I wonder what became of majestic Violet.

I asked First National to let me know of any earlier Barthelmess titles which might be available from past release lists, and in consequence I booked such earlier vehicles for the star as "Soul Fire", "Winning Through" (released in the States as "West Point"), and "New Toys".

In those days, in advance of the film booking date, the renters sent along a suggested musical programme, carefully set out for the guidance of the theatre's musical director. Our own musical programme was provided by a gramophone, operated by someone seated in a curtained recess near the screen. It was great fun to plan out a musical programme in advance, with the aid of the renter's list of suggested music, and, as many new records were purchased for each film show, our stock of records grew and grew.

Towards the end of the summer vacation I went to a cinema in Gravesend and saw "The Fifth Form at St. Dominic's". This was a splendid production, the best film of school life I have ever seen to this day. Ralph Forbes played "Oliver Greenfield", and Micky Brantford played his young brother, Stephen. I enjoyed it, and decided that it would be an ideal subject for the school cinema. I approached the management of the Gravesend theatre to enquire as to the renter. They told me that it was released by Hayward Productions of Wardour St. I contacted Hayward, and "The Fifth Form of St. Dominic's" became our opening film for the autumn term.

During the first ten years of our cinema I booked films from every renter in London. If I saw a film which

especially appealed to me (usually at the Kennington Theatre or, later, at the Troc, Elephant & Castle) I would contact the renters the next day and book it. It was not a particularly good system, though it had its satisfying moments. If it happened to be a renter with whom I did not normally deal, the firm would often ask me to book a film or two I did not want in order to get the one I did want. For instance, years later when I booked the George Formby films from A.B.F.D., they landed me also with an appalling picture - the worst I ever played - named "Atlantic City Romance".

I notice that some weeks after "St. Dominic's" we played another Hayward Productions release entitled "The Foolish Wager". My mind is a blank about that one, but I think it likely that I had to book it in order to get "St. Dominic's".

Years later I concentrated on Warner Brothers and M.G.M., plus the occasional release from Universal. It was much the better plan, as it made our custom more worth while, so that I booked what I wanted and ignored what I didn't.

One had to pay carriage charges on films in both directions, and they were a big item, for films were heavy in their fire-proof boxes. With the coming of the war, all the renters moved their dispatch departments out of London. M.G.M. went to Rickmansworth. But Warner's went to Teddington (in what is now the Thames TV studio). It was convenient, and cheaper, to pop by car over the mile or two to Teddington to pick up or return films. That was one reason why we played such a great deal of Warner product in the later years. Another reason, of course, was that so many Warner films were truly great.

In the next article in this series I shall look at the full-length films which Harry Langdon made for First National, and at two of them - "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp" and "The Strong Man" - which we played in our second cinema term. And I shall muse for a few moments on that superb comedian, Harry Langdon.

* *

News of the Clubs

MIDLAND

The March meeting attained two-figure status (ten) including three visitors from the North: Randolf Setford, Warwick Setford and an old friend of the Midland Club - John Tomlinson. The members were regaled with a reading of two chapters from a Coker-Potter-Green saga, written and read by Warwick Setford, who also provided a first-class wallow into nostalgia - the sweet sounds of Al Bowlly, Flanagan and Allen and the Henry Hall Orchestra.

Tom Porter, as if by magic, slipped from his sleeve anniversary number Gem 685 'Gore's Great Conquest', 26.3.21, and collectors item Pluck 106 'Jack Blake of St. Jim's' - the first ever St. Jim's story.

Meetings last Tuesday of month at Dr. Johnson House, Colmore

Circus, Birmingham, 7.30 p.m.

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

A successful meeting was held at the usual restaurant on 28th March. The Ron Brockmans were unable to attend, as Ron has undertaken a research programme which will keep him from all meetings for some time.

However, we had two special guests - Ken and Doug Bruce, who were warmly welcomed.

A tape recording gave us an excellent rendering of Sherlock Holmes's "Affair of the Noble Bachelor". All parts were taken by Stanley Nicholls and Max Taylor, and it was a professional production. We hope to do more of this type of thing, on other themes, in the future.

Cigarette cards of rare vintage were produced, and a complete set of the original Greyfriars Herald, a first sight of this small paper for most of us. Ken Bruce gave a talk on English Public Schools.

Next meeting will be on the last Thursday in May - same place.

SYD SMYTH

CAMBRIDGE

The theme on 7th April was crime and detective stories. Neville Wood talked on the golden era of the detective tale from early in the century to the 1930's. He circulated a list of eighty authors and their creations.

Bill Lofts mused on Dixon Hawke and Nick Carter. The Secretary spoke on Peter Hainings "Sherlock Holmes Scrapbook" with some photostats of an article on Sherlock Holmes he had written for "The Scout" in 1955. Vic Hearn talked of Colwyn Dane, with readings from the Champion.

The Secretary gave random thoughts on crime fiction and its antiquity, suggesting the Serpent in Eden was the first confidence trickster, and that the story of Susanna and the Elders in the Apocrypha

was the prototype of Perry Mason. He asked whether Robin Hood was a criminal or a socialist politician. He commented on off-beat tec tales such as Agatha Christie's story set in Ancient Egypt, and mentioned lesser-known detectives who had featured in the early Marvels.

Derek Harvey drew attention to a number of new American comic books, and records. At the end of the meeting it was realised that Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee had mostly been omitted. A subject, maybe, for a future meeting.

Next meeting 12th May - subject "Adventure Tales". Meeting closed with a vote of thanks to Danny and Ollie Posner for their hospitality.

o O o

NORTHERN

Saturday, 13 April, 1974

This was our 288th Meeting and 24th AGM. After customary thanks had been made for their services throughout the year the officers of the Club (Chairman - Geoffrey Wilde, Vice-Chairman - Harry Barlow, Minutes and CD Secretary - Geoffrey Good, Treasurer/Librarian - Mollie Allison, Programme MC - Jack Allison, Auditors - Keith Balmforth and Ron Hodgson) were re-elected en bloc.

Mollie read to us an article contained in the Eastern Daily Press dated 7 February, 1974, which referred to our president P. G. Wodehouse's links with Hunstanton and to possible real life models for Bertie Wooster and Jeeves.

After refreshments a debate took place on the motion 'That the substitute writers in the Magnet and Gem have been unjustifiably condemned'. The motion was proposed by Ron Rhodes and seconded by Jack Allison, the opposers being Geoffrey Wilde, seconded by June Arden.

Some lengthy and lively exchanges ensued and the motion was finally carried by a single vote, although to judge by conversations afterwards it was generally agreed that any blame which had to be apportioned lay not with the writers at all, but with the publishers for insisting that no matter who actually wrote the stories they were to be presented as by 'Frank Richards' or 'Martin Clifford'.

LONDON

Sunday, 21st April, 1974

There was a very fine gathering at the East Barnet home of Adam Bradford. A meeting to remember for everyone who was there. Large stacks of books were on sale for the benefit of the big attendance.

Brian Doyle gave a talk on Mr. Dennett, Hylton Cleaver's schoolmaster of the Greyminster tales. Some years ago Mr. Cleaver attended a meeting held at the Clapham (at that time) home of Brian Doyle.

Josie Packman gave a fascinating address concerning the Hess Collection of 76,000 books which have been collected at the University of Minnesota between 1860 and 1930, and regarding which Mrs. Packman has had correspondence. A Dime Novel Round-Up, containing an article "On the Track of Popular Culture", was on display, as well as two copies of Nick Carter papers. Tom Wright provoked some amusing discussions with his talk on "Ideal Mauly and Political Coker". Bob Blythe read of Nipper's origin in the Halfpenny Marvel, and also a nostalgic report of one of our meetings held in 1952.

At the close, chairman Josie Packman expressed the thanks of everyone to our charming hostess, Mrs. Bradford, who had provided us with such a very pleasant venue and splendid hospitality. Thanks, too, to Mrs. Bradford's three daughters, and, of course, to son Adam.

Next meeting at the home of Sam Thurbon, 29 Strawberry Hill Road, Twickenham. Tel. 01-892-5314. If attending, please bring a mug or cup with you.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

* *

FOR SALE: Red Magnets without covers: 121 "The First Eleven" £1; 117 "Wun Lung Minor" 85p; 49 "The New Sixth-Former" £1; 52 "The Hero of Greyfriars" (rather rough) 80p. Magnets: 1337, 1338, 1339, 1392, 1402, 1422, 1442, 1443, 1444, 1448, 1451, 1456, 1457, 1459 (mainly very good copies) 75p each. Boys' Magazine 297, 45p; BFL 666 "Pete's Partner" (good copy without covers) 15p. 4 halfpenny Marvels, very good copies considering age, 25p each. 2nd hand hardbacks: "A Sixth Form Feud" by Harold Avery, 20p; 2 different editions of Strang's Big Book for Boys (nineteen-twenties) 20p each. Golden Annual for Girls 1925, 15p. Chatterbox 1927, 10p. Warne's Pleasure Book for Boys (mid-thirties) 10p. BFL No. 194 "Everybody's Favourite" (music hall tale by Atherley Daunt) very good copy, 40p.
P. & P. extra on all items.

S.a.e. to ERIC FAYNE

World's Greatest Rupert Bear Collectors are still searching for many early volumes and various associated items. Top collectors prices paid. Also wanted: Dandy, Beano, Radio Fun, Film Fun, and many more. Will swop or buy. All letters answered.

ALAN & LAUREL CLARK,

1 LOWER CHURCH STREET, CUDDINGTON (Near AYLESBURY), BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

* *

CAPTAIN HANDYMAN

by S. Gordon Swan

Relative to the interesting articles on Duncan Storm by Messrs. Lofts and Rowe, there is a note in an early Boys' Herald which, while it does not throw any light on the true identity of the author of the Captain Handyman stories, may prove of interest to readers of the Collectors' Digest.

The extract quoted below is to be found in a Christmas Double Number of The Boys' Herald, being No. 175, dated 24th November, 1906, and it is on the page headed "Your Editor's Advice", which bears "The Latest Portrait of YOUR EDITOR (H. E.)".

The Return of Captain Handyman

It is four years ago since the last of that remarkable series of stories, "The Adventures of Captain Handyman", made its appearance in our companion paper, "The Boys' Realm", and for four years my chums who are readers of "The Boys' Realm", as well as of "The Boys' Herald", have been asking for a revival of this remarkable character in the pages of one of my papers.

Greatly to my sorrow, I have been unable to comply with this desire, as the author of the Handyman series, after publishing sixty of these splendid stories in "The Boys' Realm", was appointed to the command of a large steamship, where his duties as captain left him no time or opportunity for writing up anything but his log-book and his reports.

I am now happy to inform my readers that he has returned from sea for a long spell ashore, and that I have been able to persuade him to take up his pen once more and give us some more of the adventures of Captain Handyman, and of his friends, Chief Engineer McStaggers and Jack Fenton (who, by the way, in real life as well as in fiction, is now the youngest captain in one of our greatest lines of mail steamers).

The first of this great new series of Handyman stories, 30,000 words in length, will appear in the Christmas Number of "Pluck", which will be now on sale, and I would advise all my friends who learned to love and admire the character of Captain Handyman to get a copy at once.

In passing, it may be noted that Hamilton Edwards never lost an opportunity to boost the circulation of a companion paper. How true is the reference to the writer of the Handyman tales being the captain of a ship is a matter for conjecture.

As Mr. Rowe says, there was a serial in "Pluck" some years later. This was entitled "The Stirring Adventures of Captain Handyman", and it ran from No. 202 (New Series) dated 12.9.1908, to No. 241, dated 12.6.1909. It was so episodic in character that it was undoubtedly a series of short stories strung together.

Regarding the author, I have never been able to fathom why John Grenfell became Duncan Storm. A serial in "The Boys' Friend" called "Jack Careless Afloat", was later reprinted in "The Boys' Friend Library"; while, as a serial, it was by John Grenfell, in complete form the author's name was shown as Duncan Storm.

* *

"MEMORIES" by Jack Overhill

When I was young, Cambridge Midsummer Fair was the big event of the year: something to look forward to and to save up for. Sixpence was what I wanted for it. A lot of money for a boy to come by at odd jobs, sixty years ago. A ha'penny was as much as you could expect for an errand that took you a mile across the town; so it was for holding a horse outside a pub for an hour while its owner went inside for a drink that approached a booze-up; but helped by a copper or two within the family circle I usually managed to save up sixpence for the royal bust-up it would give me.

There were always novelties to enjoy at the Fair: the Joywheel, Cakewalk, Mat (later called the Helter-skelter), were some of them that came along to take my pennies. The Joywheel was as sensational as the Wall of Death was later - especially, when a young woman sat alone on it, her skirts pressed close about her while the wheel revolved faster and faster until - like others who had dared it - she was tossed off, showing the drawers she was wearing. The men cheered. No wonder! It was exciting to see a woman's ankles in those days, let alone her underclothes.

In 1914, when I was eleven years old, I had reached an age when value for money at the Fair was as important as entertainment, and that year I planned how to spend my sixpence in order to get it:-

A shy at the coconuts	1d	
A go at the bottles or darts	1d	
Quarter-pound of rock	1d	
An ice-cream cornet (hoky-poky)	½d	
A ride on a roundabout (big horses)	1½d	
A sideshow	1d	
Some other attraction	1d	Total 6d

To knock down a coconut wasn't almost beyond human endeavour in those days. Children were allowed to stand half-way in shying at them and the ball - bigger than a cricket ball - was a heavy one. (Recently, my son, six feet four inches tall, thirteen-and-a-half stone in weight, as strong as an ox, hit a coconut solidly at the Fair, the ball rebounded thirty yards into the crowd - fortunately without hitting anyone - but the coconut didn't budge.) A moderate score at the darts would win a prize and knocking down the bottles wasn't beyond the strength of a youngster.

At the Fair, I went on the Joywheel, on a roundabout, in a sideshow, and had an icecream cornet. I returned home with a ½lb. of rock, a coconut, and a prize I'd won at the darts (an ornamental dog, made of chalk, about ten inches high, it sat on the shelf in my shoemaker-father's workshop for years).

The following year, I pursued the policy of getting value for money. I went on the Mat, on a roundabout, in a sideshow, and had an icecream cornet. I returned home with a ½lb. of rock, a coconut, and an ornament I'd won at the bottles. (The ornament was a gold-gilt, six-inch high, mounted medieval knight - to me a beautiful creation and one I took pride in during the many years it stood on the front-room shelf.)

1916 came. Again, I went to the Fair with the intention of getting value for money. I returned home without coconut, ornament, and rock; I hadn't had an icecream cornet; I hadn't been on a roundabout, in a sideshow, or enjoyed any other fun of the Fair. Luck against me I had tried without success at the coconuts, darts, and bottles till I was broke.

Dejected, I went into the workshop and told my father a tale of woe. He knew what it was to let your feelings run away with you, but his manner implied that I'd learn in time and that added to my chagrin.

I sat down in the high-backed wooden armchair that had been my gradfather's. Stretching out in it, I could put my feet on the mantelshelf - a comfortable position for reading. On a cupboard beside me was evidence of what I read - piles of Magnets, Gems, Boys' Friends, Dreadnoughts, Populars, Dick Turpins, Robin Hoods and other weeklies and monthlies together with comics: Chips, Comic Cuts, Funny Wonder, Chuckles. One of the piles nearly touched the ceiling.

Moodily, I glanced at them. Near at hand was a coverless Union Jack that I'd come by in a swop. The Union Jack wasn't in my line - detective stories didn't appeal to me until I was fifteen - but anything to keep at bay the harrowing thoughts of my folly in spending sixpence at the Fair and getting nothing for it. I picked up the copy and started to read.

The story opened with Sexton Blake and Tinker dining with a wealthy big-wig. I hadn't got far when I came to a vital passage: Tinker was unable to eat one more strawberry though the strawberries had cost their host (Sir Somebody) half a crown each to grow in his own hothouses.

I paused and reflected.

Tinker couldn't eat a strawberry that had cost half a crown and I was worrying over a tanner. Folly couldn't go further!

My gloom vanished. Magically, I became my carefree self again.

I never finished reading that Union Jack, published before the 22nd June, 1916. Sometimes, I wonder what the story was called and what it was about.

Perhaps, Josie, will be able to tell me?

* *

W A N T E D : Good loose copies or volumes containing one or more of the following: GEMS 817, 826, 828, 832. BOYS' FRIENDS Issues between Nos. 1182 and 1256 (inclusive). Good copies essential.

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