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Vol. 29 No. 347

November 1975

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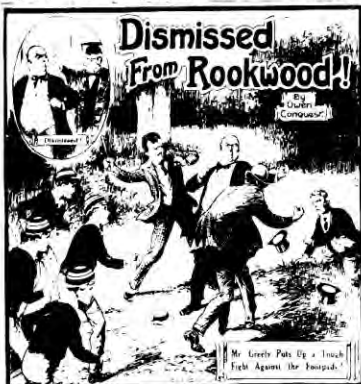
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FASHIONS CHANGE

We have already mentioned that our popular contributor, Roger Jenkins, is in reminiscent mood in the forthcoming Annual. In one part of his article he relates, in his usual entertaining style, how he was "had" by a couple of swindlers, in the early days of the hobby. True, he was not actually swindled out of cash, but he did make two very long taxi journeys as the result of the activities of two shoddy twisters with their multiplicity of aristocratic aliases.

That type of crook seems largely to be non-existent today. Nobody knows just how many innocent people they swindled, but they, and others like them, banked on the intense yearning that existed, thirty years ago, among a group of enthusiasts who desired, above everything,

to obtain copies of old papers containing Hamilton's earlier work, recalled often from youthful days. The diddlers found their dupes mainly among hopeful collectors who advertised in "Exchange & Mart". A suggestion of a large collection at a bargain price, and the gullible were hooked. It must be admitted that the swindled, very often, had only themselves to blame, tripping over their own avidity with their tongues hanging out.

Those desperately-earnest collectors have long been a thing of the past, possibly because today's prices make the assembling of a large, complete collection just a pipe dream for all but the wealthy. And the cruel swindlers died out with them, as there were no pigeons left to pluck.

The late Herbert Leckeny played a big part in putting behind bars the cheats to which Mr. Jenkins refers in his article. But during the Sixties there were a few petty thieves, out to cheat and defraud the innocents among us. Some of the tricks one or two of them got up to would make quite a startling article. In that decade there were some dealers of very questionable activities. They got a bad name for those who were straight as a die. Down the years I have had hundreds of reports from readers. I don't take every single letter as gospel, for I am well aware that there are shifty customers as well as rummy dealers. But when one name crops up in letters from different readers, then it is clear where the wind lies.

In the past fifteen years I have thrown out from our subscription list quite a few dealers who were nothing but out-and-out thieves. And when I told them that C.D. would no longer be coming to them, they changed from shallow excuses to pathetic pleading, sheer abuse, and threats. But out they went. It is some years now since I was last informed of a bit of sharp practice or trickery on the part of a shady dealer.

As far as I am able, I will not supply our magazine to anyone of dubious reputation, and I also avoid, if I can, those whose interests are merely professional.

So far as I can see, dealers today, and especially those who advertise in this magazine, have high reputations. One thing we no longer see, a curse for a time, was the dealer who stamped his own

advertising over the covers and interiors of the old papers. I have, in my collection, plenty of copies which were permanently scarred by the advertising methods of the late Bill Martin. But Mr. Martin was by no means the only one. "From the collection of Granville Wayne" one finds as an unwelcome announcement on hundreds of periodicals, and even the late dedicated John Medcraft was not above trying to perpetuate his own name in this way. And there were others.

No dealer would get away with that sort of thing for long now. At least, we hope not.

WE ONLY ARSK!

In an Address, written by C. D. reader Raymond Lister for the Private Libraries Association - an address which is reprinted in a recent Howard Baker publication - the author states that Charles Hamilton attended Thorne House School, Ealing, as a pupil. Mr. Lister got it from an article which appeared a good many years back, so he tells us, so he does not write from first-hand knowledge.

Can we accept it as gospel that the author was at Thorne House, or it is a bit of assumption which decides that, as there was such a school, Hamilton may have attended it? Merely as a point of interest we asked it before - and we ask it again. I would like to know whether there is any proof. It is going on for 90 years since Hamilton was at school, and it seems most unlikely that any of his contemporaries there can have been about for a long, long time past. It seems improbable that registers, nearly a century old, from some small private school, are still available for reference. And, even in a closely-knit family, people are usually surprisingly ignorant of where and how their elderly relatives went to school.

There seems no reason why Hamilton should not have mentioned that he once attended a worthy establishment - we assume that it was worthy! - like Thorne House School, but he never ever mentioned it. Maybe he thought it was none of our business.

THE ANNUAL

Along with Roger Jenkins in this year's Annual you will find Harold Truscott thinking over "adult" school stories; Mary Cadogan

lets us spend some pleasant time with her favourite tomboys; Les Rowley reminiscences in his own inimitable style; John Bridgwater reflects over his Sexton Blake scrapbook; Jim Cook lets us join him at St. Frank's, and Bill Lofts has a look at one of editor Hinton's papers after he left the A. P. Any amount of readers are kind enough to like our old friend, Mr. Buddle, and he is back this year in an adventure entitled "The Boy With a Lantern". That wonderful artist, Henry Webb, has drawn our lovely cover. And, of course, there are other items too numerous to list. Have you ordered your Annual yet?

THE EDITOR

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THE WORLD OF FRANK RICHARDS

By agreement with all concerned, the following sticker is being placed in unsold copies of this book:

"The authors wish to acknowledge their indebtedness to Roger Jenkins' articles published in Collectors' Digest and elsewhere, particularly those concerned with details of Charles Hamilton's domestic affairs."

WANTED for binding, good copies of Magnet numbers: 1553, 1536, 1535, 1481, 1467, 1464, 1463, 1462, 1455, 1453, 1450, 1446, 1444, 1443, 1442, 1441, 1440, 1438, 1426, 1422, 1395, 1394, 1393, 1392, 1391, 1390, 1323, 1320, 1296, 1290, 1287, 1286, 1281, 1065. Many post-1934 copies for exchange or will buy. Can anyone help? Write to:-

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Danny's Diary

NOVEMBER 1925

Much-loved Queen Alexandra has died. She was suddenly taken ill with a heart attack at Sandringham on 19th November, and died early the next day. Her funeral took place on the 27th, and all London theatres were closed as a mark of respect. Queen Alexandra leaves a lasting memory of herself in the Alexandra Rose Day for hospitals in May. She worked hard for charities, and especially for the hospitals.

Not much in the Schoolboys' Own Library this month. "Football Heroes" is a sports story about yet another Cup at Greyfriars, and "Rebellion at St. Biddy's" is by Michael Poole, an author that some of our chaps like but I don't.

Fairly good Rookwood month in the Boys' Friend. "The Fifth at Rookwood" is entertaining but quite familiar in a way. The Classic juniors make a guy of Mr. Manders, and the Moderns, though they detest Manders, leap to their master's defence.

Then a series about the arrival of Marcus Manders, the nephew of Mr. Manders. It is so completely a copy of the Bartholomew Ratcliff series in the Gem that a reader feels he has been through it all before. Titles so far in the series: "The Sneak", "Sent to Coventry", and "Too Much Manders".

A submarine has been lost out in the Atlantic. The M.I. disappeared at sea and all 68 men on board have been lost.

Superstitious fear has crept through St. Frank's, as the result of the coming of Ezra Quirke, a boy who seems to have occult powers. Quirke has won a large following, but those who distrust him have formed themselves into a society which they call "The Thirteen Club" in the opening tale of the month. But strange things happen to those who oppose Quirke.

In "The Unknown Hand", several strange things occur - a settee floats in the air and Quirke disappears from a cabinet. These may be clever illusions, but the mystery deepens over the old school.

More remarkable things happen next week in "The Haunted Form-Room", and the reader, as well as the boys of St. Frank's, wonders what

is behind it all. Very weird and exciting.

Nipper, Pitt and some others have formed themselves into a Compact of Ten, and they set out to expose Quirke as a cheat. Napoléon Browne is a rival magician, but he admits that his tricks are done by ordinary illusions and are not due to anything supernatural. But at the end of this tale, "The Cellar of Secrets", Quirke is still on top.

A new book has come out, priced One Shilling. It is to be a monthly and it is called the Monster Library. It deals with the early St. Frank's adventures, in book form, and No. 1 is "The Schoolboy Treasure Seekers".

At the pictures this month we have seen Conan Doyle's "The Lost World" starring Wallace Beery, Bessie Love and Lloyd Srone; Bebe Daniels in "Miss Bluebeard"; Rudolph Valentino in "A Sainted Devil"; Jackie Coogan in "The Ragman"; Buster Keaton in "Seven Chances"; and John Gilbert and Norma Shearer in "The Snob".

The excellent series concerning the feud between Wingate and Loder (with Wingate handicapped owing to the bad behaviour of his minor) continues in the Magnet. In "The Captain's Election", Loder becomes the Head Prefect of Greyfriars. But he got the job through trickery. The next story "The Whip Hand" shows power going to Loder's head, his animosity against some of the juniors increases, and his feud with Wingate becomes even more bitter.

In "Captain and Tyrant", Wingate had to bend over and take six from Loder's cane. And in the last of the month, "The Worst Form at Greyfriars" Loder comes up against the Remove with a vengeance. And, despite his lofty position, Loder does not get things all his own way.

A new extension of the London Underground Railway has opened. It runs from Baker Street to Watford.

The Gem's opening tale is "Cardew's Big Bluff". A weird and wonderful mix-up which only a mother could love. But then came a couple of real winners, "Trimble Tells the Truth" and "Too Good for St. Jim's". Tom Merry & Co. have tried, for a long time, to reform Trimble, and at last they succeed. But they find, to their cost, that Trimble telling the truth and being pious is much, much worse than the old Trimble. Two stories which are a real joy from start to finish.

Final of the month, "Gussy the Motorist" in which Gussy, by

accident at an auction sale, buys a car for forty bob. And Gussy drives like the wind and crashes into the car of some thieves who are getting away with the swag stolen from a Major Slammer. Takes some swallowing, even if you can get it down at all.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 19 "Football Heroes" seems to have appeared only in the library. It tells of various games for the Public Schools Cup, and is as tedious as all such tales. It seems probable that the sub writer concerned came up with this one for the Magnet, and as masses of such yarns had appeared in recent years, it was felt that Magnet readers could not stand another dose, so it was switched direct into the S.O.L. Actually, there were lots of old tales of this type in the Magnet, had the editor wanted to reprint one, and there was also the grim B.F.L. "Football Champions" of 1919, which might have been used in a sadistic moment. But No. 19 was advertised as "new", and apparently it was. No. 20 was "Rebellion at St. Biddy's", starring a schoolboy scientist nicknamed Giglamps, by Michael Poole, who had his fans.)

BLAKIANA

conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

This month sees not only the return of one of our earlier contributors - Vic Colby, but also that of a new one. Terry has been interested in Sexton Blake for some time now and this is his first contribution to Blakiana. I hope it won't be the last. It gives me great pleasure to introduce a new writer so perhaps I can expect a small contribution from some other Blake fans who have not so far written anything about their favourite detective. So make this effort a resolution for the coming year.

THE SECRET

by Terry Beenham

You are ensconced in a low easy chair in front of a bright fire on a winter's evening. You have before you G. H. Teed's latest mystery thriller "The Secret" (U J. No. 1482 and available from the O. B. B. C. Library). If you are a lover of top-class detective stories you are in for a treat. G. H. Teed had the real life experience and gift of expression in writing that is unique. He is acknowledged by many as the master.

The front cover is eye catching and when first on the bookstalls

must have stimulated interest. Blake is shown as an unseen observer to a hold up at the end of a shadowy tunnel. The colours are red and various shades of blue.

So now into the story which after a suitable introductory chapter or two is set in and around the grounds of a picturesque Suffolk manor house. The new heir to the estate meets trouble in trying to take up residence and Sexton Blake is called in to take up the case.

The action that takes place increases in tempo and culminates in a pitched gun battle. Although the crooks are brought to book Sexton Blake still has to discover the Secret. The knowledge that a secret existed or was believed to exist had been with the family for generations; in fact a notebook was available recording the research carried out. This was examined and added to by each succeeding generation.

Sexton Blake reads the notes and sets out to solve the puzzle. Is "The Secret" to be found behind a secret panel in the library or in the vicinity of the old fireplace or somewhere else? What is "The Secret"?

If you are interested in finding out then why not obtain a copy of the Union Jack and let the pen of G. H. Teed entertain you and finally reveal "The Secret".

OH! JOLLY GOOD SHOW, SIR:

by Vic Colby

During the first World War, an issue of the Boys' Friend Library (No. 433) appeared, containing sixty pages, and although the size was similar to the S.B. L's of that period, this issue was hinged at the short end. The title of the story was "In the Hands of the Head Hunters" by Cecil Hayter. It was stated to be a magnificent story of adventure, introducing Sexton Blake, Tinker, Sir Richard Losely and Lobangu. The whole action of story was played out in the rugged mountainous country of New Guinea. It was the fact that at that time, the interior of New Guinea was unknown that acted as a challenge to Sir Richard Losely to remedy this situation.

When he first appeared in this story, Richard, known as "Spots" Losely, was clad only in a flannel singlet, an old pair of flannel shorts and a pair of nail-studded boots from which most of the nails were missing. He was soaking wet through and chilled to the bone. He was also extremely unkempt and unshaven.

Arrived at last back at his camp, Spots was amazed to see a smallish built man, seated on a store-box, rifle across his knees, smoking one of a number of Spots Losely's cigarettes, to which he had helped himself. He was dressed in well worn, but clean duck, with a scarf, the colours of which seemed familiar to Spots, knotted loosely round his neck. He rose leisurely.

"Morning" he said, "I must apologise, Sir Richard, saw your name on your boxes. Most infernal cheek on my part. After smoking nothing else but native trash for a couple of years, I couldn't resist helping myself to your cigarettes. My name is Errol by the way." "An old Radleian, by those colours" said Sir Richard, "I knew that scarf was familiar somehow." "By jove! Do you know the old place?" "Been over there once or twice. I was at Eton myself. We used to row you on the Ladies at Henley." Errol grinned "You were too big a proposition, but we made you hustle at times." "Turned out some jolly smart crews. I say, what about some tiffin? Old Lobangu here, is a top hole cook and this is an occasion. By rummaging around we might find a stray bottle of Fizzy wine among the stores."

"Champagne, ye gods! What a sybarite! I never expected to taste such things again. Chuck me another of those cigarettes and I'll believe I am in Paradise!"

Errol explained that he and a partner had had a biggish plantation nearby, but during his absence recruiting labour, the head-hunting Doriri natives had stamped the place flat, murdered his partner and a score or so of his native boys, the rest having fled into the bush. Errol had lost everything except for his cash box and his cache of guns and ammunition which were stored in a cellar under the house, and some other odds and ends. He then established himself in an old cave high up on the mountains hunting for the pot, determined to remain there until he had squared accounts with the Doriri by killing 100 of them. His score was then 79.

Errol took Spots to his cave home, and then regaled him with a yarn of which he wanted to test the truth with Spots' assistance.

It was a yarn about a long-forgotten, highly civilised people, who at one time bossed the whole inside of the island, back before the Pyramids were thought of. They were supposed to have been a sallow-

skinned race. Some held that they were an off-shoot of the Chinese, some that they came from Borneoway, and others that they had their origin in the Incas of Peru. The yarn goes on to say that somewhere amongst these big mountains these people had built themselves a great white stone city with a great Temple in the midst packed with treasure. Errol's partner had glimpsed the city during his furthest wanderings but was unable to go on and explore it. Misfortune had dogged Errol's heels whenever he had attempted to follow up his dead partner's discovery.

Spots was full of enthusiasm for the project, wanting to start before sun-up. Meanwhile he would send a note by native boy to the coast to meet Sexton Blake and Tinker who had been in Australia and had agreed to catch up with Spots later in New Guinea.

Well, the expedition began. They crossed the swamps with difficulty, having to pull each other out whenever a false step was taken. Flies, mosquitoes and a venomous breed of horsefly attacked them in battalions and drove them frantic. They were set upon by the Doriri and a savage fight ensued with loss of life amongst Errol's bearers, as well as among the Doriri, the latter being put to flight. The routed Doriri sent up a smoke signal for assistance, so Spots and Co. had to move on smartly while time remained.

To be continued

GOOD OLD SEXTON BLAKE:

by J. E. M.

The request from correspondents for something controversial in Blakiana was granted with a vengeance in September's C.D. Mr. Martin Thomas's sizzling polemic on the decline and fall of Sexton Blake is bound to raise a few hackles, though its facts seem undeniable and its opinions, for the most part, hard to refute.

It is, for instance, valuable to be reminded that the rot probably set in many years before the 'New Look' Blake - several years indeed before World War Two - and, of course, one can speculate endlessly on the reasons for this. On Mr. Thomas's evidence, Blake first began to lose his appeal during the world economic crisis of 1929-32. Perhaps this is significant, for it was a period which affected more than the finances of Europe and America. Fiction took many new turns at this time, and we certainly saw a new style of crime writing in the tough,

realistic, 'socially aware' novels of Dashiell Hammett and his many imitators.

In the older forms of detective story, especially in the 'classic' tales of Sherlock Holmes and Sexton Blake, social issues were usually simple. Morality and justice were served not only by our heroes but, in general, by an incorruptible state and its laws. This picture of crime-fighting was torn to shreds by the Hammett school of writers who depicted a world in which the official guardians of order - even 'order' itself - were not always what they seemed. Corruption often embraced both sides in the crime battle. Whatever the merits of this approach, it dealt a hefty blow to the simple good-versus-evil contest represented by the Holmes and Blake type of story.

Mr. Thomas suggests that Conan Doyle, had he survived, would have kept his hero up to date. But even Doyle could hardly have turned Holmes into a Sam Spade or a Philip Marlowe (still less a Mike Hammer!). Like Sexton Blake, Holmes was tied to the ambience of an age which, by the late 1920's, had gone for good. If the Holmes saga is still popular, it is surely because its readers are making a conscious escape into a cosy (if somewhat unreal) past. No true Holmes enthusiast would want to read about a jet-propelled Sherlock or a space-age Watson!

I believe it is the same with most Blake fans. Those of us who prefer the 'old' Blake to the 'new' (and in this regard, I very much share Mrs. Packman's taste) have just got to face the simple truth that our enjoyment is largely an exercise in pure nostalgia. And what's wrong with that? We want to return to that fog-bound Baker Street, to a Mrs. Bardell in bombazine, to that brass fender Mr. Thomas mentions. We don't really want a Blake who would be at home in the world of Mike Hammer or James Bond and - let's admit it - if the 'New Look' Blake of the Fifties had become a great success, we would probably have grown to hate or least to reject him.

To repeat Mr. Thomas's metaphor, Sexton Blake was a doomed patient whose life was artificially prolonged for many years. It looks as if the date of Blake's 'natural' death was soon after 1930 and it is in the memory of an epoch which ended then that many Blakians continue to find 'their' 'real' hero.

Nelson Lee Column

THE DOWNFALL OF NIPPER

by William Lister

A peep inside the covers of the "Concise Oxford Dictionary" reveals that the word "downfall" could apply to a "great fall of rain" or "a fall from prosperity" or simply "ruin".

The meaning of the word, in the case of Nipper's downfall, I have no doubt is "ruin". There is always the possibility that to fall from prosperity could mean that you are ruined. However if you have not been particularly prosperous it would appear that you could still be ruined. The ruin in this case referring to the ruin of your good name. It is important that you grasp this. The whole force of this article depends on it.

Now, one could speak of the downfall of Hitler or Mussolini or of Stalin and as these gentlemen had no particular morals to speak of, their downfall must have meant a fall from prosperity,

Turn with me to the pages of "The Sneak's Paradise" by Edwy Searles Brooks, (April 1929). You will read of a downfall that could have led to the ruin of a young man's life. The young man was no other but Nipper of St. Frank's Remove. Though this is a series of four under the heading "The Sneak's Paradise", the third in the series has the title "The Downfall of Nipper". It is this sneaking business that leads to Nipper's downfall.

Dr. Morrison Nicholls, temporary head of St. Frank's, is the cause of it all. Dr. Nicholls has a policy that is nasty. He encourages sneaks. A policy that in after years was adopted by nations like Russia and countries like Albania. He got the boys of St. Frank's to "tell" on their fellows,

Chaps like Gore-Pearce, Gulliver and Bell were in their element. They were sneaks and St. Frank's became a "paradise" for them. Decent chaps like Nipper and Handforth were looked down on if they refused to "split" on anybody.

Compare this, if you will, with the system of the Hitler regime, how the Nazi youth betrayed their own parents to the party. Consider the Communist countries where the same thing applies to this day. To

"sneak" on your parents, workmates, teachers or religious instructors or even your children is to gain the "well-done" of your society. The whole Communist movement is a sneak's paradise. I don't see how a Nipper or a Handforth could ever belong to it, though it would appeal to the Gore-Pearces, the Gullivers, the Bells.

In my schooldays, sneaks were "out". If anyone sneaked we used to stand around and sing "Teil-tale tit, teil-tale tit, cut out your tongue and let every little dog in town have a bit", or words to that effect. When you get to sixty, memory gets thinner.

Today whole nations are oppressed by those who sneak to their Communist political masters. It works, at least for a time. Sooner or later the system will come unstuck. It will back-fire. It is totally false to all human standards. Sneaking - splitting and betraying - have in them the seeds of death. You ask Doctor Morrison Nicholls, late head of St. Frank's.

For a little while Dr. Morrison basked in the sunshine of the power the sneak system gave him over the boys. Everything came back to him on the "tittle-tattle" line. When there was nothing to sneak about somebody could always be "framed".

It was this "framing" business that led to the downfall of Nipper. Splashed with whiskey and thrown out of the lowest pub in the St. Frank's district, and found in that condition by the headmaster of St. Frank's, what chance had Nipper? Especially when he wouldn't sneak on the one responsible - Gore-Pearce. In those days to be drunk was a disgrace. Today it is just an excuse for any type of crime. As if the fact of being drunk explains everything.

However, back to Nipper, to be drunk in those days was a disgrace, and not an honour.

Nipper was nearly expelled. The School was stunned. The sneaks paraded on effigy of him in a wheel-barrow round the Triangle, a straw stuck in its hair, a vinegar bottle, marked "Whiskey" in its hand.

However "all's well that ends well". To give our Headmaster his due, when he realised where his policy was leading, he clamped down. The sneak's paradise was disbanded.

Nipper was vindicated. St. Frank's breathed again. It couldn't

be otherwise. That's why sooner or later the sneak's paradises of today will crash.

I know it - you know it - and Edwy Searles Brooks knew it.

OPEN UNIVERSITY?

by R. J. Godsave

It says much for the quality of the various adventure and school stories which were for sale on the bookstalls in the years before the commencement of World War II that they were read and collected in the years after.

In common with other contemporary papers the Nelson Lee Library is still read and collected by a generation who were not born when the original Lees were published, which speaks highly for the quality and interest of E. S. Brooks' stories.

Although a reader might think that Brooks wrote for the immediate weeks ahead it was quite often that a sequel of a series written in the winter months would happen in the following summer, which very often took the form of a trip abroad in Lord Dorriemore's yacht. These exciting stories in their very nature were a combination of instruction and pleasure. A case of learning without effort.

A fertile imagination is essential in the make-up of an author, and no-one can accuse Brooks of lacking in that ingredient. A civilization of countless years ago was still to be found flourishing in the 20th century. Such a series was one of the descendants of Ancient Rome still living as did the Romans at the height of their power in a spot hidden and practically inaccessible in the Sahara Desert, hemmed in by cliff with a soil as fertile as Brooks' imagination.

Not all stories by Brooks were of an imaginative and exciting nature. A series of the domestic type introducing Handforth's brother-in-law - Mr. Clement Heath - who for a period was form-master of the Remove at St. Frank's. This series made extremely pleasant reading and also introduced Handforth's elder sister Edith.

The Dr. Karnak and Ezra Quirke series takes the reader into the realm of the supernatural, and must have mystified and given the original readers of tender years some sleepless nights, such was the dramatic style of the author. It must be remembered that the original reader had to wait a week before the next Nelson Lee in the series was published.

The value of the Nelson Lee and other papers of that period was from the educational point of view extremely high, and gave the readers an advantage over others in knowledge that was not necessarily obtained at school.

* * * * *

DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 130 - GEM 805 - "RUSHDEN'S FOLLY"

I have always had a strong liking for the Gem stories of the early 'twenties despite all their drawbacks. Of course, it must be admitted at once that they could not aspire to the grandeur of the days of the blue cover, and after the war the St. Jim's stories were only half the length of those in early days. Nevertheless, I would be prepared to argue the proposition that the Gems from the summer of 1921 to the summer of 1923 constituted the finest two-year run in the history of the paper. Nearly every tale was by Charles Hamilton, and this was the last occasion when he worked so long and consistently at the St. Jim's stories. The result was a glittering display of famous series and individual masterpieces, and the whole galaxy of characters, including Grundy, Trimble, and Cardew, were handled with consummate skill. Some years later Charles Hamilton discovered that, though the early St. Jim's characters were still at his command, he lacked the ability to portray some of his later creations. I cannot help looking over the Gems of 1921-23 with a certain wistfulness.

Gem 805 came towards the end of this run, and it would be idle to claim that it was a masterpiece, but it was certainly dramatic and entertaining. I cannot recall another story starring Philip Rushden, the sixth-form prefect. On this occasion he was frequenting the Tontine Club to lay bets with Banks, and Kildare was watching out for the senior who had been seen frequenting the club. Baggy Trimble got hold of a letter from Rushden's married sister, from which it transpired that her husband was still suffering from shell-shock and they were in urgent need of money. This inspired Trimble to show the letter around in order to raise a subscription for Rushden, and he had the bright idea of keeping some fifty per cent, or even seventy-five per cent, as expenses.

("The labourer is worthy of his hire, you know. Rushden can't expect us to raise money for him for nothing.") No wonder Gussy babbled!

Rushden refused to give his word to Kildare that he would not continue to visit the club, and it seemed that a deadlock had been reached. In order to resolve the matter, a deus ex machina was required, and Lord Conway arrived to fill the bill. It still seems strange to me that Kildare should have turned to Lord Conway for advice, but he did, and it was Gussy's elder brother who resolved the situation to everyone's satisfaction.

The St. Jim's story in No. 805 lasted a mere ten chapters, and a good part of this issue of the Gem was occupied by the two serials running each week at that time, but even if the story about Rushden was on the short side, it was devoid of frills and unnecessary conversations, and it constituted a tense dramatic story relieved by a few humorous touches. It might not have been an outstanding story at the time but a few years later Gem readers would have been mightily pleased if Charles Hamilton would have provided them with some more tales of this modest calibre.

* * * * *

A FAREWELL TO GREATNESS

by Les Rowley

(Conclusion of Leslie Rowley's nostalgic article.)

"You are too modest, my dear Quelch, but by all means take your time in your deciding. There is, I fear, a long wait ahead before the School opens its doors to its staff and pupils again. But the night grows colder and we are nearly at my house. Join me, my dear fellow, in a nightcap if only to drink a toast to an uncertain future."

The Head led the way across the green and through his private garden to the house beyond. Quelch seldom drank anything more exciting than tonic water but this was an exceptional occasion and any way he had heard good reports on the Madiera that Dr. Locke dispensed! For a long hour he sipped the golden liquid slowly as he chatted pleasantly with Dr. and Mrs. Locke, but the moment for leaving came and, refusing a refill for his glass he made his farewells.

It was now past midnight but the Remove master felt in no hurry. What the Headmaster had said about Quelch succeeding him was very much in the mind. It wasn't as though Quelch had any doubts regarding his own ability, nor were there any doubts about the rewards that would accrue. The Headmastership of a school such as Greyfriars was definitely one of the plums of the teaching profession and any ordinary aspirant for the appointment would have jumped at the chance - rather as Prout and Hacker had in the past! Quelch permitted himself

a wry smile as he recalled Prout's battle with the Secret Seven and Hacker's miserable performance with the tuckshop rebellion. Quelch rather fancied he could have done better - much better.

Yes, any ordinary aspirant, and some extraordinary ones too, would have had no hesitation in accepting what was now offered the master of the Remove. But Quelch of course was extra extraordinary! Even the members of his form recognised Quelch as a being unique. Probably they thought so because, being the best form in the School they must of necessity have the best master. Quelch, long regarded as a 'downy bird', knew very well what his boys thought of him. It was meet and right that they should regard him as the best - Quelch was human enough to admit! Between himself and his form there had often been many areas of disagreement but on this point, at least, Quelch and the Remove were in full accord.

Quelch had never considered the possibility of becoming Headmaster of Greyfriars. The Remove had given him little enough time to consider anything - except the Remove! Even on an uneventful day there had been class to take, papers to mark, discipline to enforce. Nor that there had been many uneventful days to call to mind. Infractions of the School rules were almost as numerous as the sands on the sea shore - or so it seemed to Quelch. Even R. Cherry (whom he rather liked) had to have a licking for sliding down the bannisters, whilst H. Skinner (whom he liked not at all) had to be persuaded that smoking could be painful, very painful, if the gimlet eye was upon him.

Life with the Remove was often eventful, certainly more eventful than life was with other forms. Wharton, his Head Boy, had twice rebelled against authority in the shape of Henry Samuel Quelch to such an extent that both the judgement and the justice of the Form master had been in doubt. Herbert Vernon-Smith, whose cool and studied insolence covered a whole gamut of offences (regardless of the many and sundry visits to the Cross Keys and the 'Three Fishers about which Mr. Quelch was in blissful ignorance), had been up for the 'sack' more times than most other miscreants put together.

There had been times when the lives and security of his boys had been threatened. When the kidnapping industry had crossed the Atlantic to involve Fish; when the power of the Tong had crossed the Seven Seas to threaten Wun Lung; and when Kalizelos came for Mauleverer and got Bunter instead! Quelch was the right man to protect his boys whether from the villainous wretches who made their way to the school or from the irritating interference of other masters. He had dealt fearlessly with the former and had left the latter in no doubt as to where they stood. Prout and Hacker had more than once been informed, in tones of biting sarcasm, that when Quelch needed advice on how to control his form Quelch would ask for it. Quelch never had!

Even Quelch was prepared to admit to flaws in the Remove. He had not succeeded in converting the idle ways of Mauleverer, the slovenly habits of Bunter or the profiteering activities of Fish. He had tried of course, and the trying had added considerable muscle to his right arm. And Quelch was not going to give up trying. His form would be very much on trial at St. Hilary's and he hoped that the prime selection of canes that he had packed that morning would ensure that the Remove came through the trial with flying colours.

He had slackened his pace on the way back from the Head's house as if he was reluctant to reach the shelter of his own room. Over head the throbbing of heavy aircraft intruded upon his thoughts and the appearance of the searchlights as they criss-crossed in pattern from the batteries at Wapshot and Lantham brought him sharply back to the present. He let himself in by the Master's lobby, his footsteps echoing along the deserted passages and corridors. The Head had told him that there was plenty of time in which he could consider the headmastership. But Quelch did not want that time. Suddenly and irrevocably his mind was made up.

The way ahead was uncertain, the future fraught with danger and doubt. In an uncertain world Quelch felt little welcome for change. The years that had passed - and there had been many of them - had been pleasing to recall. One doesn't sensibly spoil a picture that has given one pleasure by getting it a new frame.

At the end of his deliberations had come the realisation that he and his form were inseparable. One might as well think of David without Jonathan or Gilbert without Sullivan as to think of the Remove without Quelch. As fixed and immutable as the laws of the Swedes and Nasturtions as W. G. Bunter would have put it. Quelch frowned as he thought of that member of his form, but now was not the time for wavering. After all a schoolmaster's life was one of challenge and if Bunter wasn't a challenge to any schoolmaster's sanity Quelch would like to know what was!

The Remove master had reached the door of his study and pushed open the door and switched on the light. The blackout screens thrust the harsh glare back at him and he found himself recalling the old days when one had to fumble with matches with which to light the gas. But little else had changed. Blazers and flannels had replaced frocks and there had been some modifications in his own attire, it was true. But a cane was still a cane and boys, still being boys, were in need of correction now as they had been of yore. He would look forward to returning to his study when the time came. He hoped that it would not be long.

Mr. Quelch had had his chance for greatness. Now he said his farewell to that greatness not realising, perhaps, that greatness was already his - a greatness that endured far beyond the confines of Greyfriars and the county of Kent in which the School stood. A greatness that had found its way to many corners of a troubled world.

* * * * *

REVIEWS

BILLY BUNTER'S LUCKY DAY

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker Press: £3.90)

This volume contains two of the best of the shorter series of the Magnet's autumn years. Four stories make up the series in which Bunter plays tricks with Mr. Quelch's gold watch-chain, Ponsonby steps into the picture, and there is strife between Greyfriars and Highcliffe. Stories introducing Highcliffe were usually of high quality, and this one

is no exception. A clever and entertaining series.

The second half of the book contains the 4-story Seahill Park series which ensured a happy Easter for boys and girls in 1937. The opening story provides the overall title for the volume. The Bounder has his old cronies of Highcliffe as his guests at Seahill Park, and Bunker makes every effort to have himself included as a guest of the millionaire and his son. There is plenty of excitement and humour, and there is an interesting link with the Kenya series of six years earlier for those with long memories. Altogether a delightful pot-pourri of fun and games.

These happy volumes continue to have the same charm and attraction as when they started, quite a long time ago now. But the publishers might change the advertising excerpts which seem to appear on the back of the jackets for book after book after book. And, I must admit, I get a bit tired of that old introduction, about Richards, as well.

PENNY COMICS OF THE THIRTIES

New English Library: 40p

Here we have a collection, gathered together in one interesting wrapper, of four of the comic-papers of the Thirties. The first of these, Merry Midget No. 1, is so rare that it is lacking even in the files at the British Museum. This is followed by a copy of the Sparkler for 1932, one of the Rattler for 1935, and finally a sample copy of Target from 1936.

Of particular interest to the student of this type of paper is that these four were published by a firm at Bath. The wrapper is filled with information from the pen of Denis Gifford, from whose collection of rare items the originals of these facsimiles were taken.

One of the main points of interest is to decide whether they compared in quality of content with the Amalgamated Press comics, with which they obviously came into competition.

This collection is clearly a "must" for every comic collector. It can be obtained to order from any newsagent, and one excellent point is that, at the price, it comes within the reach of most youngsters.

GREYFRIARS HOLIDAY ANNUAL 1976

(Howard Baker, £3.90)

This is, possibly, the best so far of this new series of Holiday Annuals, modern style. Like any good Christmas stocking, it is packed

with fascinating things. "The House on the Heath", with the coloured cover authentically reproduced, is the Christmas Double Number for 1916. The story itself is a period piece, telling how the chums caught a German spy around Christmas time.

Penny Popular No. 1 (new series) came out originally in 1919. The cover has had cosmetic attention, so that it has a golden glow, which it never had in its youth. The story of Billy Bunter's postal-order - maybe his first - is there, and there is a pruned version of the first Jimmy Silver tale. Two stories from the Magnet summer of 1933 tell of the Bounder expelled, and how his father became a detective to clear his son's name. Typically competent Greyfriars tales of the period.

In 1936, the famous Gem yarn "Mystery of the Painted Room" was reprinted in the Gem, fortunately spread over two issues to avoid mutilation. A delight for the Gem fan, and probably the Gem's best Yuletide tale. A paper by Raymond Lister, giving his views on Charles Hamilton, is well-written and entertaining. Mr. Lister wrote for the uninitiated, so there is little new for C.D. readers, but the appraisal is well-done. Over-lengthy extracts from some stories might be looked upon as the sort of padding for which Mr. Lister criticises his subject.

Finally, a Rookwood tale from the Holiday Annual, which in its turn was taken from the autumnal Boys' Friend, in which a new master, Mr. Skinforth, turns out to be distributing counterfeit money.

A treat for Christmas for all Hamilton addicts.

* * * * *

The Postman Called

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

JOHN WALLEN (Liverpool): Many thanks for the continuing excellence of C.D. The production of the magazine leaves nothing to be desired, and belies its amateur status.

I see that Mr. Cook's letter in the September edition, is written in his most forthright vein, and demonstrates his enthusiasm admirably. I do, however, feel that such a knowledgeable and long-standing stalwart as Mr. Cook could show a little more tolerance towards the efforts of those with whom he is in disagreement. After all any interest shown in

the magazine so close to his heart must be a good thing and Mr. Cook's genial intolerance can do his own cause no good at all.

S. PERRY (Maidstone): Postal charges like everything else have gone up in price, but so have wages and indeed, old age pensions. Postage is not so bad as many other things - the cost of a hair-cut for example. The price of new publications at 45p and 35p for very scanty monthly parts.

Our little magazine is surely worth as much as any of these? Problems are set to make us think, not to make us worry!

Please don't make the C.D. quarterly. It will only start to fade away. Let us pay whatever becomes necessary - out of our £6 increase if need be (!). If it's worth having, it must be worth paying for.

ERNEST HOILMAN (Leigh-on-Sea): I find your footnotes each month to Danny's Diary regarding the S.O.L. stories very informative - having read a few recently, the gaps and deletions are very obvious in places, and it is always interesting to know their various origins.

The Small Cinema series is now reaching the time when I became a very regular Filmgoer, and the early talkies mentioned recall them very vividly. 'Sporting Blood' with Clark Gable and Madge Evans, with (I believe) Lionel Barrymore was a stirring story of horse-racing and a very interesting remake was made about 1940 with Robert Young and Maureen O'Sullivan.

W. T. THURBON (Cambridge): With reference to Mr. Perry's letter about the "Eagle of Death", although I have never seen the B.F.L. to which he refers; I think this must be in the third series, I am pretty sure it is an adaption of the original "Eagle of Death".

Bill Lofts, writing in the Digest, No. 196, for April 1963, says that Clark Hook retired in 1922. This agrees with my recollection that the J.S. & P. tales ceased around 1920 in the Marvel. The final series were a long number of tales of Pete running a football team (I wonder if they were by Clark Hook), and the final appearance was the revival of a long and boring tale as a serial of Pete running a circus - a favourite knock-a-bout idea of Clark Hooks. Attempts were made to revive the characters in the Boys' Realm around 1927. The author called himself Gordon Maxwell. Bill says "Maxwell" was Walter Shute. Bill thinks

Shute revived some of the old tales, but the one or two I have seen bear no resemblance to Clark Hook's work - they were short stories, mainly featuring Pere, with Jack and Sam as minor characters. Bill also says the stories reappeared in the 1930's in "The Ranger", revised by Percy A. Clark, with the names changed to "Jim, Buck and Rastus".

BEN WHITER (London): The magnificent October issue of Collectors' Digest arrived this morning. What a wonderful coloured cover, - the Schoolgirls' Own Library cover and the thirteenth Artist on the back cover. The latter feature has been a real treat and I, for one, will look forward to more of Alf Hanson's work.

Your editorial entitled "The Awkward Wives" proved very interesting, but students and scholars of the Holmes canon will tell you that Watson was supposed to have been married three times, thus three wives. The first, as is generally known, was Miss Mary Morstan, who Watson met in "The Sign of Four". She died early in the 1890's. Thereafter, scholars of the canon reckon to have traced or surmised that he had two more wives. Mary Morstan called him by his name of John but another wife called him James.

Miss M. RUDD (Montreal): I notice my father avidly devouring the "Water Lily" series yet again - this must be his tenth shot at it! It's his favourite travel series; although the hiking series with everybody after Bob Cherry's Holiday Annual ranks a close second place. For me, I still get a lot of enjoyment and excitement from the South Seas adventures. Not only did the Greyfriars chaps have to fight off cannibals, they had to match wits with Soames. He was my favourite arch-villain. For the tales at school, Dad and I prefer the Prout headmaster series - although the ending is admittedly a little trite and melodramatic. And that tremendous series where the entire Remove rally around Bunter and camp out on Popper's Island.

Charles Hamilton was tremendous!

Mrs. MARY CADOGAN (Beckenham): I certainly do not agree with your correspondent who feels that a quarterly C. D. may be more appropriate if postages continue to rise. Whatever the cost, I hope we shall long be able to look forward to our monthly tonic. There were lots of interesting features in October. Les Rowley is courageous in

attempting to take the Greyfriars saga into evacuation - but I enjoyed the Quelch/Locke dialogue on the future Headship of the school.

BILL LOFTS (London): I never thought that Charles Hamilton overdid the brothers theme, and only wish he had enlarged the sisters theme. Bessie Bunter, and Marjorie Hazeldene I always liked in the introduction to stories. (Archie Howell and Phyllis Howell were of course substitute characters - though the latter was far better drawn than the brother.)

What I do think Mr. Hamilton overdid was the 'Doubles' theme. One editor that I used to meet, had almost an obsession about it, and used to always bring this up in conversation. As he also drank 'doubles' it is possible this was an obsession in more ways than one!

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BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 20. ON WITH THE DANCE IN SOUND

No doubt, by the time our second term with sound opened, the novelty had worn off to some extent and we could hardly imagine life without it. Our opening film, for this second term, was James Cagney in "The Crowd Roars", which, I think, was a motor-racing story. With it, along with a number of other shorts, I see that we played the first of a series entitled "Believe It Or Not", devoted to real-life novelties. An English newspaper, the Daily Express if my memory isn't playing tricks, ran picture strips on the same things for many years. I believe they were of American origin, by a man named Ripley.

Next, a delightful film - Barbara Stanwyck in "So Big". This was the kind of story, which, so far as I can see, one never gets in today's cinema. Some months ago, I noted that Danny saw a silent picture of "So Big" with Colleen

Moore starring. I do not recall the silent one, but the new talking version was splendid. This one came from Warner Bros., as did "The Crowd Roars".

Then from M.G.M., Ramon Novarro & Madge Evans in "The Impossible Lover". Next, from Universal, Victor Varconi in "The Doomed Battalion". Next week brought William Powell and Kay Francis in "Jewel Robbery", from Warner's, followed by a double-feature programme, Robert Armstrong and Lila Lee in "Radio Patrol" from Universal, plus "Ubangi", a full-length documentary of a "mighty African expedition" from Filmotone, one of the smaller renters.

Then, from Universal, Tom Mix in "My Pal the King", which may have been a western. Supporting this we had a Hal Roach comedy entitled "Show Business" which featured Zasu Pitts and Thelma Todd. These two gifted comedienues made many Hal Roach two-reelers, until Zasu was

replaced in the duo by Patsy Kelly, and the series went on until the lovely Thelma Todd died in I seem to recall tragic circumstances.

Next Marilyn Miller and Ben Lyon in a Musical Comedy, "Her Majesty Love". This was a First National film, released by Warner's, the once powerful F.N., having been swallowed by the little firm which had risen to meteoric greatness by making the first talking films for the screen. Marilyn Miller, a famous American musical comedy actress, had once been married to the late Jack Pickford.

Then, from M.G.M., Warren William in "Skyscraper Souls", followed by "Speakeasily", also from M.G.M., starring Buster Keaton and Jimmy Durante. The great "Schnozzle" went on to real fame, making one or two more films with Keaton who, I think, was less happy in tallies.

Next, from Universal, Hoot Gibson in "The Cowboy Counsellor", followed by a double-feature programme from Universal: Tom Brown and Richard Cromwell in "Tom Brown of Culver", plus Basil Gill and Donald Calthrop in "The Night-Watchman's Story". Then, from M.G.M., Lawrence Tibbett (I think a very famous singer of the period) in "The Cuban Love Song". Followed by Laurel & Hardy in a much-liked full-length feature "Pack Up Your Troubles".

Marion Davies and Clark Gable came next in "Polly of the Circus". Marion Davies was a favourite of mine. Since the war she has been somewhat denigrated by those who get a kick (and lots of money) out of smearing other people's reputations. Marion Davies, for a great many years, was the mistress of the tycoon, William Randolph Hearst. She was a fine comedy

actress, and very attractive, and she was cruelly libelled in the film "Citizen Kane". Her pictures were released by M.G.M., who claimed the Davies films always lost money, because, on the insistence of Hearst, the cost of their production was colossal. Later on, Hearst wanted her to play the lead in M.G.M.'s "Barretts of Wimpole Street" (which we showed), but the part went to Norma Shearer. So Miss Davies went to Warners for the then few remaining years of her career. I forget everything about "Polly of the Circus", but it is curious to see Clark Gable as the leading man in the film. But Miss Davies always had strong supporting casts (no doubt due to the influence of Hearst). In a later one, Gary Cooper played the male lead.

Next, William Haines in "Are You Listening?" (M.G.M.), followed by Hoot Gibson in "The Boiling Point". Then, from Warner, Margaret Schilling (who the dickens was she?) in a musical romance "Children of Dreams".

Next Jack Perrin in "The Apache Kid's Escape" released by Butcher's. Then, from M.G.M., Warner Baxter in "The White Man", and finally, the term's bookings closed with The Duncan Sisters in a M.G.M. musical, "It's a Great Life".

In the supporting programmes I find plenty of Hal Roach two-reelers, including Charley Chase and Our Gang, Rambling Reporter items, Pathe Pictorial, Pathetone Weekly, and Krazy Kat cartoons, whatever they were.

(ANOTHER ARTICLE IN
THIS SERIES SOON)

REVIEWTHE MAKING OF HARRY WHARTON

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker: £10)

This is another volume in the well-bound and exceptionally attractive Special Editions, and it will enhance the book-shelf of any collecting connoisseur. It contains the first ten issues of the halfpenny Red Magnet. The ubiquitous Magnet Number One is there, and will not excite anyone these days, but No. 2, telling of the arrival of Bob Cherry, will be warmly welcomed.

Knowledgeable critics have always agreed that after 1 and 2, which were both rich in character work, the quality of the Magnet stories declined for quite a long time. All the same, No. 3 is a famous story - the one in which Wharton had a habit of fumbling with a jacket-button, and, when Hazeldene snipped it off, the breaking of a habit caused Wharton to lose a Latin examination. It is a neat psychological study.

Hazeldene, inspiredly nicknamed Vaseline in those days, plays a large part in most of these early tales. It has always been a mystery as to why Hamilton dropped the name Vaseline, but it was almost certainly due to the fact that Vaseline was a proprietary word, and the manufacturers may have brought pressure to bear.

Marjorie Hazeldene turns up in No. 5 (though she had been mentioned earlier) and she is kidnapped by Hamilton's long-running gipsies, Barengro and Melchior. Herr Rosenblau's aliens (the Beechwood boys) feature in a couple of tales which could be tedious except that they introduce Hurree Singh to Greyfriars and he soon decides that, unlike the other aliens, he is there to stay.

Final story features cricket, and tells how the rather unpopular Wharton becomes captain of cricket.

Hutton Mitchell's artistry is strikingly good, and his Bunter is a delight. The tint for the red covers must have presented something of a problem, but the resulting shade is near enough and most creditable. A lovely period-piece of a volume to take us back to a world that most of us never knew even remotely.

* * * * *

ORDER YOUR C.D. ANNUAL NOW

News of the Clubs

CAMBRIDGE

A meeting was held at 5 All Saints' Passage, on 12th October.

Members saw some items from Bill Thurbon's collection, including a copy of Henty's first boys' story, "Out on the Pampas", and some "Marvels" and "Chuckles". Also a recent poster of John Edson's "Bunduki", and the Franz Rottensteiner 'Science Fiction Book'.

The Secretary reported that he had sent a copy of the Club report on Mr. Barlow's talk on "Dick Turpin and the Gregory Gang" to Mr. Barlow.

The Secretary gave a talk on "The Looters", showing how much borrowing and copying had occurred by the writers for boys' papers from authors like Scott and Kingsley, Rider Haggard and Conan Doyle and tricks like publishing well known tales under a different title.

Bill Lofts talked about the many centenaries and anniversaries which would occur during the next few years, including the jubilees of the Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee Libraries - the opinion was expressed in discussion that E. S. Brooks had switched Nelson Lee from straight detection to school/detective stories to avoid the clash of two similar detective libraries.

Next meeting 9 November at Jack Overhill's home, 99 Shelford Road, Trumpington.

MIDLAND

The new term commenced on the last Tuesday of September with ten members signing the register. After news of the club's country members, the anniversary number and collectors item was passed around for perusal. It was Nelson Lee Library (old series) No. 60, 'Mystery of Barron Hall' of 29.9.16.

The programme continued with a discussion on the gloomy, thorny subject of club finance, alleviated only by the timely arrival of coffee, topped off by a cheery game of Greyfriars Bingo. Meetings, usually last Tuesday of the month, as soon after 7 p.m. as possible, at Dr. Johnson House, Birmingham.

NORTHERN

Saturday, 11 October, 1975

Chairman Geoffrey Wilde opened the Meeting by alluding to the death of Elizabeth Taylor, for so many years one of our most enthusiastic supporters. Elizabeth had always been reluctant to speak at meetings, but when she did so it was with great vigour - as on the occasion when she defended the Hobby against those who accused its adherents of escapism. He trusted the escape she had now found would not be far along the corridor from Study No. 1.

A talk given by Ron Rhodes on Highcliffe School, had a break in the middle for him to conduct two quizzes on Highcliffe. In the first quiz Harold Truscott came first with Geoffrey Wilde second, and in the second Geoffrey Good came first with Geoffrey Wilde second.

Whilst the Secretary was delighted to be on the roll of honour for once, he felt he should confess to having something of an unfair advantage. He and Ron had been discussing Highcliffe on the way to the Meeting! How else would he have known that Highcliffe was first mentioned in Magnet 109??!

Ron gave excellent sketches on the Highcliffe characters, from the weak, snobbish headmaster, the Reverend Patrick Rhodes Voysey, DD, MA, through Albert Hicks Mobbs - a masterpiece of characterization and down to Judson, the school porter.

Ron called attention to that part of the Lamb series which had been read to us last month in which a terror-struck Ponsonby grovels for admittance to the air-raid shelter. This scene was not realistic, said Ron, for Pon was not a coward. The character should have been Vavasour!

There were interesting questions about Highcliffe, said Ron. In 1915 The Boy without a Name and Rivals and Chums were published. Hamilton regarded these stories as his best work. Why were there no more stories about this school? Was it because Pentelow had cornered the market?

Hamilton had written the stories within the Greyfriars ambit - he didn't want them to be confused with the rubbish that Pentelow and Samways produced in the Magnet and Gem.

In the discussion that followed Geoffrey Wilde suggested that Highcliffe, by its very nature, did not lend itself to the development of a saga. Logic would demand that such rogues as existed at Highcliffe, chief of whom was Ponsonby, couldn't really be allowed to carry on!

Jack Allison presented us with a giant Greyfriars crossword which he draughted on the blackboard and for which we arranged ourselves into two teams. The excitement led to a later break-up than usual. None of us seemed anxious to go home!

LONDON

The Diamond Jubilee of the Sexton Blake Library, Rookwood School and St. Frank's College of the Nelson Lee Library was duly celebrated by a luncheon party at the Rembrandt Hotel, Kensington.

Supporting the president, John Wernham, was the lady chairman, Winifred Morss, Eric Fayne and Madam, the three librarians, Roger Jenkins, Robert Blythe and Josie Packman.

An excellent repast was enjoyed and it was William Lofts who elucidated on the Sexton Blake Library and proposed the toast for this famous periodical. Roger Jenkins followed with the toast for Rookwood School and related some funny anecdotes that showed truth and fiction sometimes went hand in hand. In absentia of Jim Cook, unfortunately unable to make the luncheon owing to late recovery of an indisposition, it was Reuben Godsave that spoke of St. Frank's and Nelson Lee Library. Then he proposed the toast.

The souvenir menu cards were kindly supplied by the president.

At the conclusion of the luncheon the party adjourned to the lounge and here it was conversation time and the usual get togethers prior to tea being served. Young David Baddiel played some Beethoven on the grand piano in an adjoining room, a few Frank Richards' centenary plates were distributed and it was very pleasing to see the guest of honour, Olive Wright.

An announcement by the president to the company of thirty was that volume two of the Charles Hamilton Companion would probably be ready for Christmas. Mary Cadogan took the names of probable attendance at her meeting at 46 Overbury Avenue, Beckenham, Kent, phone 650 1458 on Sunday, 16th November.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

WANTED URGENTLY: C D. No. 339 (March 1975). Can anyone help?

MRS. W. MORSS

48 ERSKINE RD., WALTHAMSTOW, LONDON E.17.

AVAILABLE 1st December: GOLDEN FUN No. 3: Teddy Tail, Chuckles, Inspector Stanley, Jimmy and His Magic Patch, and more. Send 21p in stamps for postage to

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WANTED Bullseye 12 to 18, 20, 22, 26, 41, 89, 150, 152, Surprise, early issues: Film Fun 571 and issue 5/8/33, Magnet 1402, 1403. Various exchanges.

SUTTON, 41 SWALECLIFFE AVENUE, MANCHESTER 23.

URGENTLY REQUIRED FOR PRIVATE COLLECTION - Adventure 1348, Hotspur 750, Rover 1328, 1330, Wizard 1073, 1263, 1264, 1269, 1271, 1275, 1373, 1376, 1377, 1380, Buffalo Bill Annual, No. 6 (1954), Comets, Suns (large format).

GUY SMITH, 87 BROWNS LANE, TAMWORTH, STAFFS.

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RUCTIONS ON THE ROAD

by Ernest Holman

"It had been a blazing afternoon; the sun was now setting over the Downs, but it was still hot. The western sky was a mass of gold and crimson; against it, in masses of dark green, rose the wooded landscape."

A typical scene from any of the 'Road' series.

Long before Crosby, Hope and Lamour adopted this description, Charles Hamilton had commenced what was to be a continuous series of the adventures of Tom, Jim and Harry during many vacations spent on the road.

"Whatever we do, it's got to be in the open air", a member of one of the Co's would remark - and off they would go, by bike, caravan or on foot, along the dusty roads of England.

They were cosy stories, all of them; perhaps because of this current year's blazing days and picturesque sunsets, memories have come flooding back of these past adventures - together with the various ructions that were an inevitable part of all the series. Comfortable stories, - leisurely stories; - the pleasant feeling of lying on one's back in the sun, popping into the nearest farmhouse for eggs, etc.; when simple pleasures - and skirmishes - made up weeks of schoolboy holidays.

It wouldn't be Hamilton, of course, without plenty of repetition - the same things always happened to the different sets of holiday makers, but, spread out over the years, they were always fresh and very readable.

Unauthorised permission to camp - that was, probably, the most frequent of events that usually lead to ructions. An idler lounging on a fence would assure the travellers that it was all

right to pitch camp - our lads were always taken in (usually at a price!) - and before long, the Farmer who really owned the land would arrive, with indignation, a whip, farmhands and a dog. These inevitable happenings even continued into the post war stories - Cardew pulled the stunt on Greyfriars; Bunter did the same thing on St. Jim's.

Whether you were with Rookwood, Greyfriars or St. Jim's, you were almost certain to hear a sound of argument in the distance - "I know that voice", somebody would remark, and there, of course, were Coker, Potter and Greene. Tom Merry and Co. commandeered the fifth-formers' caravan during a hiking tour, and Harry Wharton and Co. were always bumping into the trio. Jimmy Silver & Co. were not immune from the Chump, either.

A Farmer's little son or daughter would sometimes fall into a stream; unseen by any of the holiday makers except one, there would be a sudden spectacle of a member of the party apparently taking leave of his senses. This individual would tear away without a word in one mad rush and dive fully clothed into the water. Putty Grace, one of the Rookwooders on tramp, performed this act - and in the post war Hikers, Bob Cherry followed suit.

Caravanning was, perhaps, the earliest of such escapades. Tom Merry and Co. were soon off, after the end of the first World war; Gussy has trouble about 'seeing a man regarding a horse'; meets a food hoarder left over from the war; falls for a young lady on the land; and is bewildered when, endeavouring to obtain village supplies, is greeted by locals and yokels asked about the availability of goods, by the cryptic single word - "Thursday". Skimpole in the midst of a General Election and meetings with Figgins & Co. cause a few more ructions. Rivalry with the New House trio cropped up in the post war Caravanning series, as did the incident of Gussy's horse.

A year later, Greyfriars followed St. Jim's example of a Caravan holiday - Harry Wharton acknowledges the fact that the idea of a Caravan holiday taken last year by Tom Merry was a good wheeze - and here, after meeting up with Mauly and Jack Drake, they take their wheels across to France. This brings us to the famous scene in a French tea rooms, when Bunter asks for sugar but insists that the appropriate word is *clafoutis*. He is most indignant at the ignorance of foreigners when his request is granted. As in many subsequent Greyfriars holiday yarns, the Nuts of Highcliffe are featured.

Rookwood caravanning took the form of a series of yarns about rival gipsies in the guise of The Fistical Four and Tommy Dodd and Co. Some 'assistance' is provided from time to time by Clarence Cuffy.

When the 'Happy When I'm Hiking' era dawned, then it was off again - this time on tramp. Bob's famous trike presented a short but amusing series, including a meeting with Gunner of Rookwood, who was one of many to make off with this contraption. The later and longer series revolving around the mystery of the Holiday Annual introduced a varied collection of personalities and ructions. Coker, of course - Ponsonby & Co. - Smithy - a haunted castle - a tithe war: all were interwoven into a typical holiday series. St. Jim's became tramps and managed to 'commandeer' Coker's Caravan. Rookwood met up with the expelled Morningson and had a set of skirmishes with the Dandy's relatives - eventually they were instrumental in recovering the stolen bikes of Grundy & Co. of St. Jim's.

Only a brief look back at a few of the many incidents from the many 'Road' stories - incidents that cropped up in other stories, perhaps only broadly described as 'Road' stories. The Old Bus and Water Lily series followed the usual pattern, with Bunter and Coker to the fore in both series - Figgins and Co. again popping up in the St. Jim's stories. A post war story of Greyfriars on an Easter vacation introduced a mysterious valet who was eventually unmasked by another holiday maker - Mr. Quelch. Whenever a series was over - with the sun setting over the horizon, one knew it was not the end. Before long one of the Co's would again be off into the open air - with the usual Ructions on the Road.