VOLUME 33
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APRIL 1979

STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS DIGEST

"Keep that basket shut, Bessie!" called out Clara Trevlyn, as she pulled at the oars. "I'm only counting the tarts!" said Bessie Bunter. "Think I was eating one behind this sunshade?" "I believe you'd eat the sunshade, if there wasn't anything else to eat!" replied Miss Trevlyn.

26p

Many large collections bought this year, lots of items to tempt the palates of the collectors! A "wants list" always appreciated. Stock bigger than ever!

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Boys' Friend Library, bound vols and also sub-standard copies, 50p each. Adventure, School, etc. (my selection) if particular wants stated (not numbers).

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W. G. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST
Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

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ENQUIRE WITHIN

As we have observed before, nostalgia is big business these days. We have also observed that nostalgia and trendiness do not mix well. Plenty of professional writers try to touch our nostalgic hearts, and then spoil it all with the use of vogue words of the seventies, and talk of soap operas, and of dichotomy, and of things being camp, and so on. A safer way to make sure of touching the heart strings is, perhaps, a reproduction of an old book, especially if it is well done like the Howard Baker reproductions.

Just before Christmas I came on an "Enquire Within", newly

re-issued, in a bookshop. "Enquire Within Upon Everything" is the full title, and I believe that it was not much of an exaggeration. You could find information on most subjects in its hundreds of pages.

I remember that my mother had a copy in her personal library, along with "East Lynne", "The Woman Though Gavest Me", "The Scarlet Letter" and the like.

I recall my mother's "Enquire Within" for one reason only. At the top of each page in the book was a different proverb. "Old Sins Cast Long Shadows", "Still Water Run Deep", and so on. Hundreds of them, all different. Some of my readers may remember Christmases before television destroyed all initiative. In those Christmas evenings, we played various games, and one of the oldest was called "Proverbs". I recall it as great fun. That was the time when my mother's "Enquire Within" came into its own, when we leafed its pages to select proverbs which were not too difficult for the purpose of the game.

I suppose my mother's edition cost two or three bob. I wish I had paused to find the price of the facsimile, all these years later.

JUST IMAGINE!

I like browsing over the old papers from early in the century. Some of those writers had vivid imaginations. In a Boys' Realm of about 1910, I came on a historical tale. King William Rufus lost his life from being shot by an arrow which came from the bow of some unknown bowman.

The author suggested that the bowman was a peasant whose cottage had been pulled down in a kind of re-development scheme to allow for the planting of trees so that the king and his friends could hunt in the New Forest. I must say that it seems unlikely to me that, with all the space available in those days, the king would have bothered to pull down a cottage to provide space to plant trees.

In these days they do it in reverse. The trees come down (and the cottages) to make way for supermarkets and motorways. I'm glad I shan't be around in fifty years time.

But the Oscar for imagination must go to the writers of the tales in "Fun & Fiction", just before the first world war. In one tale of the "Woman with a Black Heart", a millionaire was told that a crowd of starving people were begging for bread at the doors of his mansion. So

he arranged for loaves to be suspended on the end of fishing lines over the heads of the crowds. As the starving people leaped for the bread, the loaves were continually jerked out of their reach.

Whether it brought tears to the eyes of readers in 1912 I don't know, but it gave me a chuckle these days. We nearly reprinted that one in our last Christmas Number, with its accompanying picture. Of course, the Woman with a Black Heart stepped in, she managed to reform the millionaire, and he became a friend ever after to every Weary Willie and Tired Tim.

In another story in the same series, the woman leaps from a Thames bridge, to fall down the funnel of a passing steamer. I fancy it was a secret way of escape, and she landed on cushions.

In a detective story in the same paper, an express train leaps the metals and crashes through the dome of a packed theatre. The front page picture shows the engine, belching steam and smoke, coming through over the heads of the patrons in the pit stalls.

It is hard to imagine any theatre being built so that a runaway train could fall on its audience.

All the same, the famous Canterbury Music Hall, which once stood in Westminster Bridge Road (I assume that it has gone now, alas!) was not far from the trains leaving Waterloo, and the long, long foyer passed under the railway tracks. Anyone remember the Canterbury?

PRESENT TENSE FINALE

Last month, one of our contributors to the Nelson Lee Column referred to the propensity of some of the older generation of Blake/Lee detective story writers to change into the present tense in the final chapter. It was something which Talbot Baines Reed did in some of his stories, and one comes across the same thing in some of Charles Hamilton's work before 1914. The only story I know which is written entirely in the present tense is the famous "Coming Through the Rye". Does anyone know of any others? I must say that I find it difficult to read.

Of course, tastes change as the years go by. At one time I hated stories written in the first person, but, nowadays, I find that I enjoy them very much. It always seems to me, though, that writing in the

first person (and even in the present tense, perhaps) is very much a specialised art.

THE PRINCESS SNOWEE'S CORNER

Tom Merry had a double; Billy Bunter had a double; Vernon-Smith had a double; Harry Wharton had a double; and even the Princess Snowee has a double. But she must be different, so she has two doubles.

I am getting a lovely art gallery of cats in the editor's den. I gaze at them for inspiration when I can't think what to write in the month's chat. And the pictures, which you have sent me, of your pets, usually bring something to mind.

Mr. James Hodge's "Skip", another Senior Catizen, going on 12, is uncannily like the Princess. And "Whiskas", who allows Mr. and Mrs. Colin Partis to live with him, is also very much in the same mould as the furry puss of Excelsior House. "Whiskas" is "soft as grease", according to Mr. Partis. But the Princess is a strict disciplinarian.

THE EDITOR

* *

Danny's Diary

APRIL 1929

Over Easter I spent a few days with my Aunt and Uncle and my cousin Robin, who live in Aldershot which is an army town in Hampshire. On the Saturday we went to the Hippodrome which is a lovely music hall and saw the Macdonald & Young production of the naval musical comedy "Hit the Deck". I saw it with Doug when it was on at the London Hippodrome, but I liked this touring version just as well. I bought a record to take back to my brother Doug. It had Ivy Tresmand and Stanley Holloway on one side singing "Fancy our Meeting" and on the other side "Sometimes I'm Happy".

On the Monday, Robin and I went to another theatre, the Theatre Royal, and saw a thriller called "The Monster". It was written by Crane Wilbur, but it was very much like an Edgar Wallace story. The star was

Philip Yale Drew, and according to the programme he is a famous American film star, though I don't remember ever seeing him on the pictures. In "The Monster" he plays the part of Red Mackenzie, a tramp detective. We enjoyed it all.

The Modern Boy has been good this month, with plenty of good features and stories, though Ken King is by far the best. The first story is "The Luck of the Lugger". Ken is seeking the man who sold him false pearls, but the Pacific is a big place to seek the man's lugger. In "Pirates of the Pacific", pirates hold up the Dawn, and steal a cargo of copra. At the end of the tale, Ken falls overboard.

In "Ken King's Ordeal", the boy skipper is cast up on a lonely island in the Pacific. Finally, in "The Secret of the Island", Ken is attacked on the island by a wicked Dutchman named Krell.

In real life, Major Segrave, who broke all records last month with his car, Golden Arrow, has been awarded a knighthood.

Two splendid tales in the Schoolboys' Own Library this month. "The Greyfriars Clown" is all about Alonzo Todd. In the first half of the tale, Tomsonio's Circus, with Jack Talbot and Joey Pye, comes near Greyfriars, and Alonzo becomes a clown. In the second part of the story, Alonzo is nearly killed, accidentally, by Bulstrode.

The second story is "Tom Merry & Co. in Monte Carlo", and tells of a trip to the Festival of Flowers and the carnival in the South of France.

In the Cup Final at Wembley, Bolton Wanderers have beaten Portsmouth by two goals to one.

There is nothing by the real Martin Clifford these days, but I still have the Gem for old times' sake. The first story had a few funny moments. Entitled "Grundy Goes to Law", it tells how the great George Alfred sets out to bring an action for slander and assault against Mr. Ratcliff. Grundy's solicitor is Mr. Grabbe. But the Head takes a hand. Next week "George's Aunt". Figgins makes fun of Miss Priscilla, so Figgins's Aunt Sophy turns up and gives him a dreadful time. The aunt is really Lowther. Very over-done.

Next week "Vote for Tom Merry". Kildare resigns as school captain after falling foul of the Head, and Tom Merry is elected. Last of the month is "Captain Tom Merry" which carries on with the theme.

At the pictures this month we have seen Norma Shearer and Ralph Forbes in "The Latest from Paris"; Jack Buchanan in "Confetti"; the Duncan Sisters in "Topsy & Eva"; Douglas Fairbanks in "The Three Musketeers"; Charlie Chaplin in "The Gold Rush"; and Harold Lloyd in "Speedy".

The clocks went on an hour on 21st April. It always seems to be cold in the evenings when summer time begins.

The gorgeous series about the Greyfriars chums in Hollywood has gone on in the Magnet. First tale of the month is "The Schoolboy Sheik". Myron Polk is paid riches untold to act for the films, but he doesn't want to risk his neck. So Harry Wharton takes his place. The next week brought us "Harry Wharton's Peril". Myron Polk is jealous of Wharton, and that jealousy turns into a terrible hatred.

In the next story "A Film-Star's Vengeance", Polk plans revenge on his schoolboy rival, and it is Billy Bunter who is the means of averting what would have been a tragedy.

Final of the month is "All Through Bunter". The party has reason to be glad that Bunter went to Hollywood with them.

It looks as though this marvellous series is going to end next month, and I don't like the idea a bit. There has been such a variety of adventures and characters all the way through, and I shall be so sorry when it ends.

Sir James Barrie has given all rights in his play "Peter Pan" to the Hospital for Children in Great Ormond St., London. So, for years to come, if "Peter Pan" goes on being popular, the hospital will benefit.

The opening Rio Kid story this month in the Popular is "Friend or Foe?" In Gunsight, a villain, pretending to be the Rio Kid, is terrorising the district, and the Kid is determined to put paid to whoever it may be. In this story the Kid saves a Mexican, Don Felipe, from the raider. Next week brought "The Raider's Last Trail", in which the Kid exposed the raider as the respected rancher Poindexter. A grand series.

Then came "The Rio Kid in Mexico", in which our cowboy pal is up against a band of brigands. Final of the month is "Cornered by Brigands" in which the Kid helps a Mexican officer who has fallen over a cliff, and the officer helps the Kid in return. These western tales, written by a man named Ralph Redway, are just fine.

Warner Bros., the film-makers, say that they will make all their future films in colour. By this time next year, black and white films will be a rarity. They also say that the wide screen is coming.

An unusual new series is running in the Nelson Lee Library. The opening tale is "The Sneaks' Paradise". A new temporary Head at St. Frank's is Dr. Morrison Nicholls. He is popular except for the fact that he encourages tale-bearing. Gore-Pearce and his lot think its a chance for them to topple Nipper off his perch and take over what Nipper has built up. Next week brought "Boss of the Remove" in which Gore-Pearce starts off on his campaign to oust Nipper.

Then "The Downfall of Nipper". He is seen entering a frowsy inn in Belton, and is later discovered helpless and incapable by the roadside. He swears he is innocent, but disgrace is looming. Final of the month is "Scorned by the School". St. Frank's turns against its former popular junior skipper. Even the fags pelt him with mud, and poor Nipper has a very hard time. It's all very exciting, and I look forward to continuing this new series next month.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 97, "The Greyfriars Clown" comprised a red Magnet of the same name from the Spring of 1911, together with another red Magnet story of several weeks later entitled "The Bully's Remorse". Though both stories starred Alonzo Todd, they did not go too well together as a single story, owing to the fact that the first part was a circus tale, a link-up with a circus series in "Pluck", while the second part was contrasting near-tragedy. S.O.L. No. 98, "Tom Merry & Co. in Monte Carlo" comprised two consecutive blue Gems of Easter time 1910, originally entitled "Tom Merry's Carnival" and "Tom Merry at Monte Carlo". The two tales were reprinted in the Gem in the summer of 1934 under the titles "Tom Merry & Co. Go Gay" and "The Black Domino".

The statement from Warner Bros. in 1929, as mentioned by Danny, is quite remarkable. Even twenty years later, not more than 25% of Warner films were in colour. The wide screen was tried out in the mid-thirties at the Trocadero, Elephant & Castle, the screen opening out to giant proportions during certain sections of the screening of features. The draw-back was the diffusion of light over the wide screen, which caused a less brilliant picture.

Many years earlier, in the Spring of 1914, the genuine Martin Clifford had written a series in which Tom Merry became Captain of the School. It would be interesting to compare that series with the one in 1929, by a sub writer, noted this month by Danny.)

* *

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BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

Once again we are indebted to two of our overseas friends for the articles in Blakiana this month. Both writers have depicted the brutality and cruelty of some very bad men, but Sexton Blake eventually caught up with them and they got their just deserts. The story of Rogues of the Desert is S.B.L. 2nd series, No. 106, and may be borrowed from my lending library as may also be the Moonslayer stories. Our thanks go to Gordon Swan and Don Harkness for their articles about unusual characters.

JANSSEN - FOE OF SEXTON BLAKE

by Don Harkness

Many characters were created for the Union Jack and made frequent appearances, both as friends of Sexton Blake and as sworn enemies. Some of the latter, such as Wu Ling, George Marsden Plummer and Dr. Huxton Rymer, continued at regular intervals for many years and became well known to readers. Not so well known to readers of the Union Jack in its latter years was a character created by S. G. Shaw in 1921 which only appeared occasionally. This was Janssen the Moonslayer. The first three or four stories were set in Canada, the author having lived there in the early part of his life. Upon coming to England he took up writing and drew upon his experiences in Canada as a background for his stories. Whether he actually met a person like Janssen is hard to say with any accuracy, but as many authors base a character on someone they have met then it is quite likely that such a man as Janssen existed.

Janssen was described as being huge in stature, with strength equalling that of Waldo the Wonder Man. He had neither conscience nor pity for his victims, but despite appearances to the contrary possessed a highly educated brain.

This was evidenced when some Indians refused to give him food when he asked for it, as they were preparing to go on a night-time moose hunt. Because of this he threatened to stay the moon but the Redskins laughed in disbelief. They laughed again when they saw him making mystic signs but soon stopped when the moon seemed to go out. Also because of the ensuing darkness, the Indians were unable to find the

moose, so they bestowed upon Janssen the title of Moonslayer. The cunning educated mind of the man knew there was to be an eclipse of the moon that night so he took advantage of the fact. (This fact was obviously copied from H. Rider Haggard's story of King Solomon's Mines. J.P.)

Sexton Blake first met the Moonslayer in U.J. No. 950, dated 24th December, 1921, in which he was called upon to recover valuable fur pelts which were being stolen from the Hudson Bay Co. The culprit of course, was Janssen the Moonslayer. The next encounter between these two took place in U.J. No. 968, dated 29th April, 1922 and further adventures were recorded in U.J. No. 1032, No. 1051, 1088 and the final Union Jack story in No. 1106, dated 20th December, 1924.

N.B. I discovered that one more story of the Moonslayer appeared in the Sexton Blake Library 2nd series, No. 132, dated 29th February, 1928, entitled "The Secret of the Monastery". Janssen was cheating the monks in his usual brutal way. Not a nice character, probably the reason he was dropped. J.P.

LOST ILLUSIONS

by S. Gordon Swan

"The Sheik", E. M. Hull's bestseller of the nineteen-twenties, and the Sexton Blake Saga -- surely there could be no connection between the two? Yet this article will set out to demonstrate that there is a link.

I had never read this story until recently, when I came across a paperback re-issue of it, condensed by Barbara Cartland. Yet I remember the furore when the book was published in 1921. It appeared that a majority of women yearned to be carried off into the desert by a sheik and wooed by caveman tactics. And when the late Rudolph Valentino played the title role in the film of that name, the females in the audience saw themselves in the part of Diana Mayo (played by the late Agnes Ayres) and envied her for the predicament in which she found herself.

A story published on 31/8/1927 -- the year after Valentino's death -- set out to debunk the glamorous image of the sheik as presented by E. M. Hull and other imitators. The author of this novel, "Rogues of the Desert", was, rather unexpectedly, W. Murray Graydon.

The heroine was Flora Dalkeith, a Scottish girl in Constantinople with her father, Sir Kenneth Dalkeith, her brother, Sholto, her cousin,

Malcolm Lorne -- who had travelled extensively in Turkestan -- and a young man named Angus Ferguson whom Flora had rejected as a lover. Sexton Blake and Tinker were also present, on their way to Armenia. Flora had made the acquaintance of a young Emir from Turkestan, one Saayd Zorab, who painted roseate pictures of life in the desert which enthralled the impressionable girl.

Her male relatives frowned on this friendship, but the wilful Flora ignored their warnings and eloped with the Emir. Blake and Tinker had taken their departure, but the four other men set off in pursuit of the runaways. When Saayd Zorab sighted the pursuing party he gave Flora a draught of drugged wine which put her to sleep, and his men fired upon the Britishers. Sholto was killed and the others were forced to abandon the chase.

Flora knew nothing of her brother's death at the time. When she arrived at the Emir's encampment she was disillusioned by what she saw. The glowing accounts which Saayd Zorab had given her, his glamorous descriptions of desert life, were nullified by the sordid reality of her surroundings. She refused the Emir's offer of marriage and begged to be taken back to Constantinople, whereupon Saayd Zorab showed himself in his true colours and flogged her with a whip, telling her that her brother was dead.

In the Turkish city, Sir Kenneth Dalkeith could get no help from the authorities or the British Embassy, since the girl appeared to have gone of her own free will. But presently came a messenger from Saayd Zorab demanding a ransom for the girl's return. The money must be put in his possession before he would hand Flora over. Sir Kenneth paid the money, but after the messenger left Sir Kenneth was stricken with a sudden illness. A doctor suspected ptomaine poisoning but Malcolm Lorne declared that Saayd Zorab's messenger must have poisoned his uncle.

When Blake returned to Constantinople he found Sir Kenneth recovering from his illness. He begged Blake to find his daughter and the detective managed to secure from the Minister of Justice, who was under an obligation to him, the offer of twelve mounted soldiers under an officer, Captain Abdulla. Angus Ferguson accompanied Blake, but Malcolm Lorne had been recalled to England.

Two attacks by some unknown enemies were made upon the rescue party on their way to Saayd Zorab. They attributed these attacks to the Emir, but when they reached his camp he disclaimed all knowledge of them. Moreover, Flora was no longer with him. A rival tribesman, Timor the Terrible, had raided the camp and carried her off.

Blake and his friends set off for Timor's village, but on the way encountered a sandstorm. In the confusion Tinker's horse bolted and he became separated from his companions. He was surprised to meet Flora Dalkeith, who had escaped from Timor's clutches. She was not to be free for long, however; Timor re-captured her and took Tinker along as well. In Timor's village they were confined in separate buildings.

A further complication ensued when Timor's village was raided by a local bandit, Turkhan, who was accompanied by a mysterious man in a blue cloak, presumably a Turk. The brigan abducted Flora after killing many of Timor's men, so the girl was once more a captive in enemy hands. When Blake and his party arrived on the scene the detective made a pact with Timor, who agreed to join forces with Blake's party in an attempt to storm Turkhan's stronghold.

Events led Blake to believe that it was Turkhan and his men, at the instigation of the man in the blue cloak, who had made the initial attempts on the rescue party's lives before they contacted Saayd Zorab. The raid on Turkhan's stronghold was partly successful but Turkhan and his mysterious companion got away with the girl. Turkhan himself had taken a fancy to the girl, but this did not suit the plans of the man in the blue cloak, who stole Flora away from his accomplice. When Turkhan and two of his men followed the fugitives, Blue Cloak, who gave his name to Flora as Jemel Bey, shot and killed all three.

Blake and his party were hard on the heels of Jemel Bey while Timor's band went in pursuit of the remainder of Turkhan's brigands. The detective and his friends were surprised to encounter a group of tribesmen under the leadership of Saayd Zorab. The latter had been to visit a kinsman who had supplied him with reinforcements to exact vengeance upon Timor. Flora Dalkeith was in the camp, having escaped from Jemel Bey, who had come in search of her. Saayd Zorab was demanding a further ransom for the girl when Flora emerged from a tent

and ran towards her would-be rescuers. At the same time Jemel Bey appeared and Blake identified him as Malcolm Lorne in disguise.

Lorne had not gone home, as supposed. The girl's cousin, after Sholto's death, had realised that only Sir Kenneth and Flora stood between him and a substantial inheritance. It was he who had made the unsuccessful attempt to poison his uncle and now he intended to kill Flora or abandon her in the desert, which amounted to the same thing.

Malcolm Lorne, unmasked, snatched a revolver from Saayd Zorab's belt and seeing the young Emir reach for a sword, shot him dead. Then he mounted a horse and rode away, but the animal threw him and broke his neck. With the Emir dead, Blake was able to persuade his people to release Flora, who was remorseful for all the trouble she had caused.

The plot of "Rogues of the Desert" was much more complicated than "The Sheik", although those who have read the latter will recall that Diana Mayo was also abducted by a rival tribesman. Where Diana was kidnapped, Flora went willingly. The let-down in "The Sheik" was that he was not an Arab at all but the son of an Englishman and a Spanish woman, thus the story skirted racial problems.

Unlike Helen of Troy, Flora Dalkeith's face did not launch a thousand ships, but her escapade undoubtedly caused hundreds of deaths, which surely puts her in the category of a femme fatale.

* *

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Nelson Lee Column

A LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S

by Jim Cook

There was a time, very early in the recorded history of St. Frank's College, that the fate of this old seat of learning was very much in the balance as far as its future chronicles was concerned.

It happened when a St. Frank's holiday party was returning from an exciting adventure in the Pacific that Nelson Lee was deciding to return his old calling, that of private investigation. Lee and Nipper had sought refuge at St. Frank's from the enmity of a Chinese secret society, but the time had elapsed for the order to be carried out and Nelson Lee and Nipper were free to resume working from Gray's Inn Road, London.

Lee had been the most popular Housemaster at St. Frank's - especially for the Ancient House over which he had ruled from the time of his arrival - and the news that he was about to go back to London for good was received very badly. And since it was to be expected that Nipper, his assistant, would also leave the school, the account that has been recorded under the title, BY GENERAL REQUEST, gives only a half picture of the scene that followed this startling news.

Dr. Malcolm Stafford, the Head, and his staff, the School Governors, the servants, Dr. Brett, in fact, the whole school expressed its deepest sympathy when they learnt that the famous schoolmaster-detective was not coming back.

And such was the feeling in the Remove that it was decided to meet Mr. Lee when he arrived at Bellton station, and an open landau was waiting in the station yard specially borrowed for the occasion. The landau was horseless, but long ropes had been fitted, and a score of fellows ready to drive Nelson Lee to the school.

And as the famous detective was borne through Bellton High Street the villagers looked on agape. Such a commotion had not been heard in the old High Street for years.

Although Mr. Lee had ruled over the destinies of the Ancient House, half the College House were waiting to see the arrival of the landau - such was the popularity of the guv'nor even with the rival House.

Later on, when Lee was on his way to have a little chat with Dr. Brett, he was attacked by three unknown assailants and carried into Bellton Wood. Coupled with this attack and the school's consternation at his leaving I am sure this had the compelling reason to keep Nelson Lee at St. Frank's. But though the chronicler may have preferred to have recorded the private detective's further adventures from Gray's Inn Road, it is now quite certain that events that followed at St. Frank's and elsewhere would never outshine any that may have occurred had they originated from private investigations by Nelson Lee at his London home.

The fact that Nipper was to remain at St. Frank's when Lee decided to leave and return to London was not altogether true though that was the idea in Lee's mind. For one thing, Nipper had proved such a worthy Remove captain, that this arrangement wouldn't have worked out since Nipper would never have remained without his beloved guv'nor.

Those of us who love St. Frank's are very grateful Nelson Lee and Nipper decided to stay on at the old College. With the benefit of hindsight life without these famous characters would have been unthinkable.

They are still here at St. Frank's, righting the wrongs. Would that we had a few more of their kind to straighten out the creases of our every-day lives.

GOLDEN YEARS? ... by N. Gayle

It is difficult to pinpoint with any degree of accuracy the 'golden years' of E. S. Brooks as the creator of the St. Frank's saga. Of course no such problems exists in the writings of Charles Hamilton, as his creative development as an artist was clear cut and well defined viz, that the golden years of the Magnet were from 1928 to 1933, give or take a year or two. But Brooks is more of a puzzle in this respect, as can be seen from a study of his output. I used to have as a mental guideline for the golden years, roughly from the start of the Dr. Karnak series in 1924 up to the arrival of Jimmy Potts, a character who for me sounded the slow death-knell of the paper. But in practical terms this just doesn't work, and if that cuts across the grain of some readers' long cherished notions, then they should ask themselves a simple probing question, like, for example, how do you then explain the year 1919? ...

This was a year in which St. Frank's was still very young, in fact

not quite one and a half years old at the start of it. Not, one would suppose, suitable hunting ground in which to look for evidence of the author's best work. But the extraordinary thing is that Brooks gave us from the beginning of that year right into the summer, a hat-trick of famous series, (the Col. Clinton, the Mysterious X/Bullies league, and the wonderful Nipper expelled series) that, despite the obvious handicap at this early stage of lack of intimate detail of character and environs, compare very favourably with even the best of the stories from the period 1924-1928. And this is ignoring the fact that at the end of this year Brooks gave us one of the most famous school barring-out stories of all time, the Howard Martin series, which you can, if you so wish, still order from any bookshop in the land, sixty years after it first appeared, thanks to Mr. Howard Baker.

So we must, I think, tread carefully in trying to assess the respective value of different periods of an author's work. The dangers of pigeon-holing and categorizing everything for the convenience of quick and easy reference are (or at least should be) all too obvious for the seeker-out of literary truth. Of course in this case the actual situation is even more complicated than I have depicted above - the year 1919 is by no means a solitary early blossom in the Nelson Lee. For instance, in 1921 we were given the lovely Jerry Dodd series, which shares with the Old Bus series from the Gem that magic quality of breathing the very spirit of an English summer into cold print, but of course in a completely different - and, let it be said, far more exciting way. Then, in that same year, we were offered before Christmas one of the most famous stories of all from any of the Old Boys' papers, the only one, incidentally, which is accorded the dignity of a full plot outline and analysis in E. S. Turner's chapter on school stories in his excellent 'Boys Will be Boys'. This of course is the communist school series.

We are further confounded by the quality of writing in Brooks' tales which is far more variable than I think many of us are willing to admit. It is a curious thing that some of his stories that are badly written, that is bearing the signs of haste, extemporisation and bad English, do not necessarily make the worst reading, and are, in some cases, very exciting tales. 1922 is a year particularly notable for this; the quality of English in such stories as the Arrival of Archie series,

the New Anglians series and that fascinating string of single tales that followed them is not good by any standard, but all these stories work for the simple reason that the substance of them is often fascinating, clever, and downright intriguing. Thus the paradox that is Brooks.

But that said, there is a defineable purple patch. You cannot read through the years 1924 - 1927 in the Nelson Lee and not be aware of this. The point is though, to reach the stories of these years was not an uphill climb to Olympian heights like the effortless flow of a graph at an angle of 45 degrees. The creative path to true artistic worth was the same for Brooks as for many fine authors, that is strewn with glorious successes and irritating failures. Only in the case of E. S. Brooks, the interesting fact for us to dwell on is that his particular road held successes that were irritating, and failures that were glorious as well. Such are the vagaries of talent.

* *

A HAPPY BIRTHDAY, BESSIE!!

Readers may like to know that Bessie Bunter celebrates a special birthday on 5th April. Sixty years ago she made her first appearance in the Magnet: a cartoon version of her is still going strong in I.P.C's Tammy today. Our plump heroine has asked me to pass on the following message to the Editor and readers of Collectors' Digest: (Mary Cadogan)

"Itt's orlrite to mayk a fus abowt my birthday, butt I want to knoe if you're goeing to sennd me any grub! Birthday kards and greatings are orl verry wel, but I've gott to keap upp my figger, and even I kan't eat paper! So - if you're goeing to rubb itt in abowt me being 60 and orl that, pleez also sennd me some

bigg hammpers and postal orders. Everywunn admires a girll with a good figger - but I do have to gett plenty of tuk to keap in trimm. Bye the way, I doan't approv of thiss fashun for jogging; I gett orl the exercyz I nead through chewing!

Luve to you orl,
BESSIE

* *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 227. SIXTY YEARS OF BESSIE

Exactly sixty year ago a stout young lady made her appearance in the Magnet. That memorable occurrence is celebrated by a delightful new book which we review elsewhere in this issue of the Digest. The stout young lady was Bessie Bunter, the only daughter of a plump couple who, it seems, lived in Reigate in Surrey.

In April 1929 Bessie arrived as a new girl at Cliff House School; not because she was needed in the Magnet cast, but in readiness, and as an advertisement, for a new paper called the School Friend, which was to feature stories of the girls of Cliff House School.

Charles Hamilton, as we all know, was the creator of Cliff House from its beginning in the Magnet. He gathered the cast for the School Friend. He created a new leader, Barbara Redfern, using one of his favourite names; he created a new staff; he wrote the first four stories for the School Friend - and then he disappeared from that paper, never to write for it again. It was a remarkable affair, and it has never been satisfactorily explained.

We have been told, vaguely, that he proved unsuitable as a writer of stories for girls, so he was suddenly given the sack from his new job. But surely it was astonishing that such a discovery should have been made after only four stories had been written, and, actually, before the paper was on the market and the tastes of its readers had been ascertained.

Those four tales were all light, and full of fun and games, but Hamilton was no new, untried writer. He had been turning out winners - comedy, drama, thrillers, adventure - for the Amalgamated Press for nearly twenty years. Nobody knew Hamilton's capabilities better than the editors of 1919. He had been the A.P. star author for a decade. They

did not need four stories, untested by the juvenile public, to decide for them whether or not Hamilton was able to write attractively for the new paper.

(To be quite truthful, I never considered that Hamilton was anything like at his best when writing of the ladies. I preferred the Magnet without the Cliff House characters, and I found many of his ladies cardboard in character and stilted in speech. But my opinions are quite beside the point. The A.P. knew Hamilton's strength and also his limitations, as an author.)

Is it not possible that Hamilton was paid to create the framework for the new paper, and to write the opening four stories? It is quite possible. It is even likely, for he never suggested anything else. But there is still one big obstacle in accepting that explanation. Would Hamilton have created Bessie Bunter - a feminine replica of his most successful character - had he known in advance that he was creating that character for rival writers to take over. That seems very unlikely indeed.

Finally, was Hamilton wise to create Bessie Bunter at all? In my view, it was most unwise. Except that Bessie wore a frock and Billy wore trousers, the characters were identical - the obesity, the cackle, the greediness, the non-arriving postal orders, the boasting about "Bunter Court", even the gift of ventriloquism (especially as in the early Magnet, Billy took lessons to acquire the "gift"). It is astounding that Hamilton never realised that with every replica of Bunter he created, he was lessening the value of Bunter himself. All these years later, it does not matter a lot, but it mattered in the heyday of the Magnet.

And if there was to be no link with Greyfriars in the Cliff House stories, what on earth was the point in creating Bessie Bunter at all?

* *

WISH TO PURCHASE: Magnets between 702 to 881 for my collection. Have complete set of Champion 1932, many Modern Boys, Boys' Magazines. Also have about fifty Magnets to exchange or sell.

OLYMPUS, SANDFORD MILL ROAD

CHELMSFORD, ESSEX.

REVIEW

THE SCHOOLGIRLS' ALBUM

(Mary Cadogan & John Wernham
(Museum Press, Maidstone: £1

It is seventy years since Cliff House School was created, and sixty years, this month of April, since Bessie Bunter first came on the scene. Both momentous events took place within the pages of the Magnet.

This charming little book traces - rather skimpily, inevitably, when one considers that seventy years are covered - the history of Cliff House from the time when it first came into the spotlight in the Magnet. It goes on with the birth of the School Friend, with Hamilton as the midwife in 1919. It continues with an appraisal of how things went at the school after Horace Phillips took over the writing, to be succeeded by R. J. Kirkham and L. E. Ransome, until the School Friend for some reason became the Schoolgirl and John Wheway became the regular "Hilda Richards".

For any reader who actually lived through a major part of the whole story of Cliff House, a fascinating aspect of this new work is that it brings to mind, delightfully, I find, a number of questions which the authors do not answer in the book itself.

The artists, who turned our mind pictures into brush pictures are not forgotten, with one omission. Arthur Clarke first drew Cliff House. He was old-fashioned even in 1909, and he did some lovely drawings of the girls and their mistresses. Chapman and Shields get a mention, as do the School Friend artist, Dodshon, and the Schoolgirl ditto, Laidler.

There is not much doubt that Laidler was the better of these two in putting feminine charm on paper, but Dodshon had his moments. Dodshon was good on portraits, as some of the reproductions in the book show, and one could add that the School Friend, for years, was noteworthy in the ever-varying "patterns" of its covers - something I do not recall in any other story paper.

Especially for the Cliff House fan this book is a little treasure, and if there happen to be any at all who are not Cliff House fans, it is still more than worth while. The pictures are fine.

The book cannot be ordered from any shop, nor should orders for it be sent to the Museum Press. It can be obtained from Mrs. M. Cadogan of 46 Overbury Avenue, Beckenham, Kent, in exchange for a remittance for £1.15 which includes postage.

* *

WANTED: most of the Bunter hardbacks, in fair or better condition, with or without dust-jackets. Also required to complete a long-run Magnet No. 1131, in good condition and S.O.L. No. 27.

W. SETFORD

155 BURTON ROAD, DERBY.

OUR CLASSIC SERIAL from the early years of the Century.

THE MISADVENTURES OF MARMADUKE

Blake and Herries were away at the gym when Marmaduke came into Study No. 6 after his interview with the Head. Marmaduke's luggage had arrived, and he had been enabled to change his clothes, so his appearance was much improved. His temper, however, was in a very bad state.

The Fourth Form was to be honoured with his presence, and a share of Study No. 6 had been assigned to him. He had been told to take his personal belongings there, and he had obeyed sullenly.

He entered the study and found it unoccupied. The fire was burning brightly in the grate, and the room, though small enough for its usual four occupants, looked cosy and cheerful. Marmaduke was tired by his experiences of that afternoon, and he swung the only easy-chair up to the fire and sat down. He soon went off to sleep with his feet on the fender. He slept soundly, an occasional musical snore breaking from him, and he did not wake at the sound of whispering voices in the room. As the chair was close to the fender, and he was lying back in it, the high back concealed him from view, and the intruders evidently did not know that there was anyone in the study.

"We've caught those School House bounders on the hop", said the voice of Figgins. The long-limbed chief of the New House juniors looked round the study with satisfaction. "Do you remember the time Blake raided our study, and messed things up for us? This is our first chance to get a bit of our own back."

"Right-ho!" said Kerr.

Fatty Wynn was looking into the cupboard.

"There's some tarts and a pie here," he exclaimed. "It's a jolly good idea to spoil the Egyptians - eh, what?"

"Always thinking of grub," growled Figgins. "That looks a prime pie, though. Hand it out!"

The three juniors of the New House were quickly discussing the pie. They left a beautifully clean dish when they finished, in about three minutes' time.

"That wasn't bad," said Figgins. "We'll shove the tarts in our pockets and eat 'em over in the New House. Now set to work."

He gave a sudden start, and held up his finger for silence.

"Hallo!" he whispered. "Did you hear that?"

It was a snore from the armchair before the fire.

"Somebody there," murmured Kerr.

They stole towards the armchair, and looked into it. There lay Marmaduke, sleeping the sleep of the fatigued, and evidently not in the least likely to wake. Figgins and Kerr grinned at each other over the unconscious Marmaduke.

"It's the new kid," murmured Figgins. "Looks a sleeping beauty, doesn't he?"

Kerr grinned as an idea came into his head.

"Let's turn him into a real sleeping beauty," he whispered. "He looks as if he wouldn't wake for anything short of an

earthquake. There's Blake's box of paints all handy, and it wouldn't take a couple of minutes."

"Good enough!" chuckled Figgins. "You can do it while I get on with the study."

Kerr speedily wetted Blake's brush and moistened some of the colours. Then, with a light artistic hand, he decorated the countenance of Marmaduke Smythe. Marmaduke's complexion was a good deal like tallow, but Kerr gave him a very rich colour, and he blushed under a coat of crimson lake.

This was sufficiently startling, but Kerr was not yet finished. He drew a circle of white and a larger one of black round each of Marmaduke's eyes, imparting to him a strangely owl-like appearance. Then he added a black spot to the nose, and a green one to the centre of either cheek, and added some dark wrinkles to the forehead.

"My hat!" said Figgins, as he looked at the result of Kerr's handiwork. "I'll guarantee that that'll startle Blake a bit when he comes in."

While Kerr was painting, Figgins had not been idle. He had mixed up books and papers and bread and butter and chestnuts and sausages in a handsome heap in the middle of the floor, and emptied a bottle of glue into the seat of every chair, and poured the contents of an ink-bottle into Blake's clock.

"I think that will do," he said, glancing round. "We don't want to do any damage, you know. This is where we vanish."

The New House juniors, laughing softly, stole out of Study No. 6. In the dusky quad, they watched the chums of Study No. 6 returning from the gym. Digby was still absent from the school. Blake and Herries went into the house, and Figgins & Co. chuckled gleefully.

Marmaduke was still sleeping soundly. He did not hear the door open, but he heard what followed. Blake came in first.

"Hallo! Hallo! What's all this giddy mess? Who's been here?"

Blake lighted the gas, and stared in dismay at the heap of properties piled in the middle of the floor. Then he gave a shriek. Marmaduke had started up, and was staring at the chums over the top of the armchair. Now, to be suddenly stared at by a crimson face, with black and white circles round the eyes, is bound to be startling.

Blake took a single look at the dreadful apparition, and staggered back, treading on Herrie's toes. Herries was equally startled, and he collapsed, and Blake sat down on top of him.

"What is it?" gasped Blake.

"Gerroff me neck!" gasped Herries.

Blake picked himself up. He eyed the horrible object warily. As it made no movement of offence, he did not retreat.

"It's - it's a face!" he said. "Yes, it's Marmaduke. What's the game, Marmaduke?"

Marmaduke stared at him loftily. He had no suspicion that his aspect was anything out of the ordinary.

"I don't know what you are talking about. I have asked you before not to address me. I do not desire your acquaintance, or that of any other low fellow."

Blake burst into a roar. Now that

he had got over the shock, Marmaduke's aspect struck him as screamingly funny.

"That kid'll be the death of me, I know he will!" he gasped.

"I'll be the death of him," growled Herries. "He must have put our study into this fearful mess."

"I don't think so. It looks more like a New House raid."

"Somebody's wolfed our pie," howled Herries. "Here's the dish, as clean as a whistle. It's that new pig, I tell you."

"I have not touched your pie," said Marmaduke.

"Then who has? Speak before I brain you!"

"I don't know."

"Who's been here?"

"Nobody that I know of. I think I must have been asleep."

"I think you must," tittered Blake. "It's Figgins & Co. Grin and bear it, my son. It's all in the day's work."

"That's all very well," growled Herries. "What sort of a blessed leader do you call yourself, anyhow?"

Blake coloured.

"Don't growl," he said. "We'll get our own back in time. Let's get this mess cleaned up. You can lend a hand, Marmaduke."

"I refuse to do anything of the kind. I am not here to do the work of a menial."

"You're here to get a black eye, I fancy, if you don't mind your P's and Q's," said Blake darkly.

"If you're not going to lend a hand," said Herries, "you can clear off while we get to work. Off with you!"

"I shall not stir."

Herries caught hold of the back of the armchair and tilted Marmaduke into the fender. "How's that for high?"

Marmaduke went down with a thump, and jumped up very hurt and very wild. He ran at Herries like a bull and smote him on the nose with terrific force. Herries staggered back and sat down on the nearest chair. He found himself sitting in a pool of liquid glue.

Marmaduke felt it time to make himself scarce. He fled out of the study. Percy Mellish was coming out of his own study, and he gave a yell at the sight of the crimson face, with the owl-like eyes.

"Help!" he gasped, and darted back into his room.

Marmaduke ran on. Finding that he was not pursued, he slackened down. He wondered what was the cause of Mellish's alarm, and he soon had more cause for wonder.

Taggles, the porter, had come to light the gas in the corridor, and he had just done so, when Marmaduke dawned upon him.

Taggles stared for a moment in dazed amazement, and then bolted with a yell of horror. Marmaduke stared after him in bewilderment.

"The man is mad!" he muttered. "They are all mad."

His next encountere was with a maidservant. The maid fled screaming. She burst into Mr. Kidd's study, and collapsed into a chair, still screaming.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed Mr. Kidd. "How dare you? Are you ill? What on earth is the matter, Mary?"

"The ghost!" shrieked the maid. "The spectre! The dreadful sight!"

"Mary, I am more shocked than

I can say to find that you have been drinking --"

"It was in the passage! It's following me!"

"What is following you?"

"The ghost!"

"Mary, I shall speak to the housekeeper about this --"

"There it is!" shrieked Mary.

She pointed to the door. Then, still shrieking, she rushed behind the housemaster for protection. Mr. Kidd was considerably startled by the sight of the awful-looking face that stared in from the dusky corridor.

In the light from the study, however, he recognised the face as human; and after the first shock, he felt angry instead of alarmed.

"Keep it off!" screamed Mary.

"Pshaw! Mary, cannot you see that it is only a boy playing a sill trick?" exclaimed Mr. Kidd impatiently. "Boy, who are you? How dare you?"

Marmaduke was as angry as Mr. Kidd. He hadn't the least idea that there was anything wrong with his face, and the fright of the maid astounded him.

"I don't know what you're talking about!" he said crossly.

"How dare you go about the house like that?"

"Like what?"

"With that face, boy."

"My face! How dare you pass remarks on my face?" exclaimed Marmaduke. He had been born with that face, and he was rather proud of it. "You're no beauty yourself!"

Mr. Kidd reached for a cane, and then reached for Marmaduke. The new boy did not wait. He had learned how the Housemaster could lay it on when he was angry, and he fled.

"Come back, Smythe!" roared Mr. Kidd.

But the new boy was gone.

(MORE OF THIS OLD, OLD STORY NEXT MONTH)

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WHAT PRICE A VISIT TO OLYMPIA?

There is an interesting Lecture Theatre Programme as part of the third Festival for MIND - BODY - SPIRIT, at Olympia, London, from 21st April till 29th April. On Tuesday, 24th, Mrs. Mary Cadogan, with Brian Alderson, will be Dealing with the Fairies, an informal exploration of Fantasy in Tradition and Literature. This particular item runs from 5.30 p.m. till 7 p.m. If you happen to be in London on that day, it would be well worth a visit.

* *

H. Baker Facsimilies for sale. Magnet Vols. 11, 12, 15, 26, 29, 30, Gems Vols. 4 and 5. N. Lee, Vol. 2. Holiday Annuals 1920, '28, '73. H.B. Holiday Ann. 1974. Tiger Tim's Comic Collection (16 Comics of the 1930's). Also "Yarooh" a feast of F. Richards by G. Brandreth. Most MINT or near. S.A.E. Full details -

JOHN GEAL, 11 COTSWOLD ROAD, HAMPTON, MIDDX.

BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 61. WHEN LADIES MEET

Our opening film for the new term was a Musical, and it came from Warner's. Robert Alda (the name eludes me all these years later) in "Rhapsody in Blue". I have a feeling that it was a good film, but it seems to be sunk without trace now. A coloured cartoon in the same bill was "Horton Hatches an Egg".

Next week, from M.G.M., brought Red Skelton in "The Show-Off", a title which sounds typical of the parts played by that star. A Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon was "The Mouse Comes to Dinner".

Next, from M.G.M., came Robert Taylor and Katherine Hepburn in "Undercurrent". A Mack Sennett pot-pourri (from Warner's) was "Wedding Yells", and a Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon was "Puttin' on the Dog".

The following week, from Warner's, had Zachary Scott at the top of the bill in "Danger Signals". "Falling Hare" was a Bugs Bunny coloured cartoon. A musical half-hour "Musical Memories" sounds heart-warming.

Next week, from M.G.M. came "When Ladies Meet" with a cast which included Robert Taylor, Greer Garson and Joan Crawford, and which must have been exceptional. I should love to see it now. A coloured cartoon was a Tweetie Pie item "Hick Chick".

Then, from M.G.M., Wallace Beery in "The Mighty McGurk". A big supporting programme included a coloured cartoon "Big Heel Watha" and a Pete Smith novelty was "Flicker Memories".

Next, from M.G.M., the Marx Brothers in "A Day at the Races". I believe it went down well, though I have read somewhere that the Marx Bros. films for M.G.M. were not so good as their Paramount productions. Maybe it's just a matter of opinion. In the same show was a 3 Stooges 2-reeler "3 Little Pirates". The 3 Stooges comedies came from Columbia, and we played a good many of them. They were quite popular, though they never appealed to me.

Next, from Warner's, Ann Sheridan in "One More Tomorrow". There was another 3 Stooges comedy "Monkey Businessmen" in this bill, and 2 coloured cartoons "Weakly Reporter" and a Barney Bear cartoon entitled "Bear Raid Warden".

The following week brought "Three Comrades", starring Robert Taylor, Franchot Tone and Robert Young - an excellent drama. In the same bill was a Columbia comedy Andy Clyde in "You Can't Fool a Fool"; a novelty entitled "The Horse with the Human Mind" and a coloured cartoon "Unwelcome Guest".

Next, from Warner's, Dane Clark in "Her Kind of Man" plus a 3 Stooges comedy "Uncivil Warbirds" and a coloured cartoon "Inki and the Minah Bird". There were a number of Inki cartoons, but I forget, at the moment, which renter released them.

Now M.G.M. reissued the superb Ronald Colman in "A Tale of Two Cities" and we played it to wind up the term. A coloured cartoon was "Barney Bear's

Polar Pest".

The Universal News was still screened in every programme.

"Tale of Two Cities" at 11,351 ft. was the longest film of the term, with "Undercurrent" at 10,422 ft. a close second.

* *

The Postman Called

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

JACK OVERHILL (Cambridge): The article in the Annual "What Kind of School Stories?" is one of the finest I have read for a long while in any newspaper or magazine. I know little of the ins and outs of the subject, but it was treated in masterly fashion and written so simply and concisely, and was so well reasoned, that it would shame many self-styled critics in Literary Supplements and the Sunday highbrows. Thank you, Harold Truscott.

C. H. MATTHEWS (Market Harborough): One or two things have occurred to me. What happened to Vernon-Smith's mother? Was it ever explained? Did Coker's mother and father ever feature in a tale? Was there ever a story set on a Founder's Day or Speech Day, or, for that matter, any day on which parents were present at Greyfriars? Uncle Henry (brother of Aunt Judy) was mentioned as a sender of hampers to Coker in Magnet 981. Did he ever get another mention?

MAURICE HALL (Walton-on-Thames): Since the November issue you have referred again to my opinion in both December (page 5) and February 1979 (page 4) so I feel that perhaps a few words on this topic would not come amiss.

First the distinction you draw between the old collectors, yourself included, and the group "who are too young to have loving memories of papers which ended forty years ago". I presume that I am placed in this category and it is true that I had only about three years of seeing the "Magnet" drop through the letter-box, but the standard of Hamilton's writing was sufficient to encourage me to go back in time and collect as many of the earlier copies as I could find.

Regrettably, the elder collectors must give way to the younger collectors, this is a fact of life and unless new blood comes in to sustain the hobby, it must eventually dwindle and die, leaving only the

speculators who would buy and sell with little interest in the subject matter.

I stand by my letter to the Telegraph, but would like to add these comments. I think you will find that the A.P. referred inhouse to the "Magnet", etc., as periodicals, (boys' no doubt), but anything that comes out weekly is a periodical anyway, certainly it is in the British Museum index. However, if the Hamilton papers are not comics, what are they?

SIMON GARRETT (Bath): I'm afraid one tends to take C.D. for granted, which is really a tribute to its extraordinary record of punctuality. It must be unique for an amateur publication to appear regularly for so long under only two editors. And that's not counting the quality. Probably every branch of the hobby finds something of interest most months, not to mention cat lovers like myself.

I look forward to another year of much better reading than most of my post or, especially, newspapers.

LEN WORMULL (Romford): Your February issue was indeed a remarkable one, and interesting in all departments. Danny's Diary, especially, pushed the nostalgic button for me. Reminding me of my own blossoming interest in boys' periodicals at this time ... the furore over the young Yehudi Menuhin. What a truly wonderful man he turned out to be. I recommend his biography to everyone. Memories, though dim, of three mentioned films: Chaney's phantom appearance in "London After Midnight"; Gloria Swanson's "Sadie Thompson", with, I believe, Walter Huston playing a missionary; the silent "Sorrell and Son", with H. B. Warner and Nils Asther as father and son (Warner repeated the role in the talkie version, with Hugh Williams his son). Years later I read the book, and cried. The hit article of the month must go to Ernest Holman's "Match of the Decades".

ERIC RUFFLE (Woking): I loved the Annual for 1978 - the best ever. Les Rowley's "Day Return to Friardale" brought to reality the countryside round Greyfriars. "Pathways of Pleasure" by Roger Jenkins made a summer holiday's delight. I greatly enjoyed "The Haunting of Mr. Buddle" with its interesting links with Greyfriars and St. Jim's - all in keeping with the season. "The Coming of Princess Snowee" was a

delightful story. The pictures of Excelsior House and of the London Club brought everything so much nearer and clearer to me. A great edition of a famous book.

NORMAN WRIGHT (Watford): I was interested in G. Hudson's letter re Biggles. "Biggles Looks Back" was published in 1965 just a few years before Johns died, it was one of the last in the series. It is hard to think why Johns decided to reunite Biggles with Marie Janis over thirty years after the story "Affaire De Coeur" was first published. Perhaps he was running out of plots, by 1965 he had written over seventy Biggles books, or perhaps readers had asked him to write a sequel to Biggles' love affair. The tale has never been out of print since first being published in the early thirties. It appeared in book form first in the volume titled "The Camels are Coming", a very scarce title, it was reprinted in the B.F.L. number 614, published in March 1938 with some editing to play down the love interest. It is now available, in its original form in the volume entitled "Biggles Pioneer Air Fighter", published by Dean and Son. In my opinion W. E. Johns was far better at writing short stories than novels. His short stories dealing with Biggles in the Great War are far superior to his later novel length stories. He must have got tired of writing of the same character year after year, a case of a character bringing an author fame, and them being a mill stone round his neck.

* *

News of our Clubs

MIDLAND

Our February meeting was not favoured by the weather. The cold and the snow had gone, but it was a night of heavy rain and far from inviting out of doors.

It was another thoroughly enjoyable meeting and time passed so quickly as we were all so absorbed, that we were surprised when the time came to go home.

Our usual features, Anniversary Number and Collectors' Item were on show as Tom Porter was able to attend though still not fully

recovered from his recent illness. These were Magnet No. 1515, published on 27th February, 1937 and 42 years old to the day, entitled "The Prisoner of the Stronghold" and the Collectors' Item was a Boys' Friend Library (1st Series), "The Woolwich Arsenal Mystery", featuring Sexton Blake. Only the extraordinarily comprehensive collection of Tom Porter makes this feature possible as it goes on from year to year.

Geoff Lardner brought up the topic of Charles Hamilton's use of a very limited number of Christian names in his characters. This is in marked contrast to his genius for inventing intriguing surnames.

Coffee was served at refreshment time and Geoff Lardner paid for the lot.

Tom Porter introduced a game called "Split Names". Each player has a card with the Christian names of a character from the writings of Charles Hamilton and Edwy Searles Brooks and has to provide the surname to score a point. We enjoyed this game very much. It is not new and Tom said it was almost twenty years since he had last played it.

There were two readings, one was by Ivan Webster and the other read by your correspondent. Both were taken from Howard Baker's monthly reprints and deal with the fatuous antics of Horace James Coker. Both stories show Coker at his funniest.

Our next meeting is on 27th March. Let us hope for better weather and a better attendance.

JACK BELLFIELD - Correspondent.

CAMBRIDGE

We met at the Willingham home of Keith Hodkinson on Sunday, 4th March, 1979. After formal business Keith Hodkinson gave an absorbing talk on the Boys' Own Paper, illustrated by a large number of items from his collection. He showed examples of Victorian papers, ranging from the era of the "bloods" to the Aldine and similar libraries. Also examples of precursors of the B.O.P., the 1865 "Boys' Own Magazine" and the 1873 "Everyboys". After the foundation of the B.O.P. by the Religious Tract Society, there had been other rival papers, e.g., "Young England" (1880), a rare item in "Harpers' Young People" of the

late 19th century, and the 1903 "Boys of our Empire" (not to be confused with the Victorian "Boys of the Empire"!). Most of these had been taken over by the B.O.P. He recalled the Editors, beginning with George Andrew Hutchinson, who continued until 1913; his successor A. L. Haydon, who abandoned the weekly issues and changed to monthly numbers; other Editors included G. Pocklington. During the last war the B.O.P. changed to pocket size; the last Editor was Jack Cox who took over in 1946, until the B.O.P. ceased in 1967. Keith showed many off-shoots from the B.O.P. He recalled among authors who had written for the B.O.P. Jules Verne, G. A. Henty, W. H. G. Kingston and many others. Among illustrators he mentioned specially Stanley L. Wood of "Captain Kettle" fame, and showed many of his fine colour plates. He suggested that the style of "The Captain" may have influenced the later style of the B.O.P. Conan Doyle had also written for the B.O.P., and Keith produced a copy of an early "Strand Magazine" containing "The Hound of the Baskervilles".

Part 2 of Mary Cadogan's tape was then played, relating her experiences as a member of the staff of the B.B.C. in the 1940's. After tea, Keith ran an entertaining film quiz, mainly of extracts from films of Children's stories, beginning with "Mary Poppins", and including an early silent version of Verne's "Michael Strogoff". The meeting closed with warm thanks to Keith and Mrs. Hodkinson for their hospitality.

LONDON

There were 27 members present at the Walthamstow meeting and after an address of welcome, Roger Jenkins in the chair, expressed the club's sympathy on the demise of both Leslie Marcantonio and Bert Staples. There were two Museum Press publications on show, the new Hamilton Library catalogue and Volume Four of the Charles Hamilton Companion, the latter being entitled The Schoolgirls' Album and which was jointly written by Mary Cadogan and John Wernham. It deals with the girls of Cliff House which were featured in The School Friend, now seventy years old. A worthy Companion to its three predecessors.

Tom Wright read the poem "Imperial Heritage" which Frank Richards wrote and which appeared in Gyles Brandeth's "Feast of Frank

Richards" in his book entitled "Yarooh' ". Then Tom gave a short discourse about the poem which evoked a discussion.

Jim Robinson conducted a Film Detectives Quiz and this was won by Ray Hopkins. Whilst on the subject of films, Marjorie Norris spoke of the film Tarka the Otter. A reading from Newsletter of March 1962 by Bob Blythe and then Eric Lawrence read several chapters from Magnet 1547 which came from the Skip series. These proved to be very humorous, the antics of both Coker and his Aunt Judy being very comical. Maurice Corkett raised the question of the lack of Nelson Lee facsimile reprints and this evoked a lively discussion. A hearty vote of thanks was accorded to Eric Lawrence for his capable year's service as Chairman and the ladies were thanked for their good work in making the tea. Next meeting at the home of Bill and Thelma Bradford, 5 Queen Anne's Grove, Ealing, London, W.5, Phone 5794670, on Sunday, 8th April. Kindly inform if intending to be present. BENJAMIN WHITER

NORTHERN

Meeting held Saturday, 10th March, 1979.

Though there was no library session at our March meeting, Darrell Swift had brought a pile of Magnets and S.O.L's for sale, so the eager scanning of remembered treasures proceeded much as usual.

This was, in fact, our first all-male gathering for many a long day, and the ladies may be mildly amused to know that the chief consequence seemed to be that chins wagged with almost unprecedented freedom and tirelessness. Discussion Time started with the latest Howard Baker productions and moved on to consider changed reading habits, particularly in the young. From there we passed inevitably to the influence (good, bad, or mixed?) of TV, the decline of parental responsibility and social discipline, and hence to soccer hooliganism and modern teaching methods - which came somewhere near to completing a circle which had started with the school story.

With so much talk going strong refreshments were especially welcome, and in the absence of the ladies Nigel Shepley and Darrell deputised most ably at the tea-pot and the dish cloth. For any interested parties, we can report that they are single, clearly domesticated and not really all that bad looking.

The programme concluded with Ron Rhodes's school story "Checkmated at the Chequers", read by Geoffrey Good. Ron is much to be congratulated on a story which established some well-defined characters and most originally, actually featured a bookie in a sympathetic light. Geoffrey should also be congratulated on his versatility in negotiating public school, public house and broad Welsh accents - sometimes simultaneously!

14th April - Annual General Meeting. JOHNNY BULL

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Can anyone kindly help me in my search for the following MAGNETS - in very good condition, suitable for binding: 1068, 1083, 1087, 1090, 1262, 1263, 1270, 1308, 1311, 1318, 1320, 1322. Good prices offered or various items for exchange. Many other MAGNETS wanted: bound volumes especially welcomed. FOR SALE (or exchange): 3 volumes of MINT GEMS - 621-646, 647-672, 673-698. Please contact -

D. SWIFT

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