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VOLUME 36 NUMBER 425 MAY 1982

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COLLECTORS' DIGEST
Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 36 | No. 425 | MAY 1982 | Price 32p

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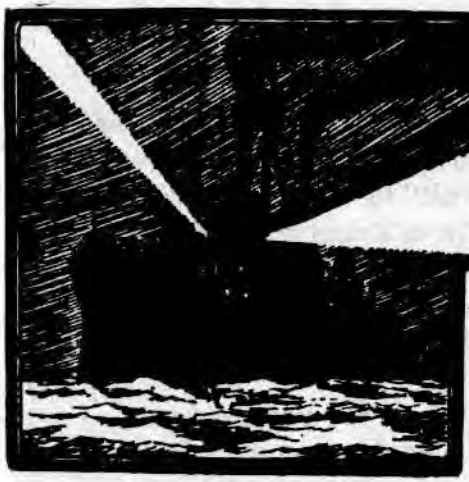


A Word from the Skipper.

A politician thinks of the next election; a stateman of the next generation.

THE PROUD TRAM SERIES

In the extract from his Diary for May 1932 which we publish this month, Danny reminds us that it is exactly 50 years since the "Proud Tram" series ended in the Union Jack.

Six popular writers of Sexton Blake stories were each given a number of clues. Each writer had to create his own story round those clues, and each author worked in ignorance of the others' plans.

The clues were as follows:

When a tramcar arrived at depot after its last run for the night, discoveries were made on the top deck of the car. There was the body of Alfred Mowbray Proud, who had died from heart failure, and there was also Sexton Blake, unconscious from a blow on the head. The conductor of the tram says he did not see them there when he inspected the upper deck on arrival at the depot.

A window of the tram is broken, and beside the dead man is a fireman's helmet, wrapped in paper. On the floor is a banner, bearing the words: "We demand Justice for Our Fellow Sufferers".

The pockets of the man Proud contain various articles, including pawn-tickets for a mandoline and a carpet, eleven picture postcards from a packet of twelve, a knuckleduster, and maps of the tram and Underground Railways systems.

The first story of the series was by Gilbert Chester and was entitled "The Proud Tram Mystery". This was followed by "The Crook Crusaders" by Anthony Skene, who introduced Zenith the Albino into the story. Then, on the same theme, came "Revolt" by G. H. Teed. Donald Stuart followed with "The Witches' Moon". Gwyn Evans tried his hand with the plot, contributing "Fear-Haunted" which introduced the League of Onion Men. Finally, in the issue to which Danny refers in early May 1932 came "The Mystery of Blind Luke" by E. S. Brooks, who introduced Waldo, the Wonder-Man into his novel.

When the last story of the series had appeared, readers were invited to place the stories in order of merit. At the moment I don't know which story was voted the best of the six, but it is possible that Danny may let us know as the months pass.

A minor point of interest is that Robert Murray was originally in the list of writers, but, for some reason, he was replaced by E. S. Brooks.

It was an intriguing experiment, and, I imagine, it may have roused a good deal of interest, though there was always the risk that the stories could seem repetitious, while the recurrence of plot details might destroy illusion.

I do not know whether any of our Blake scribes have ever written on the Proud Series, but I think it would be fascinating if one of our

present day enthusiasts would look at it again, and, briefly appraise the various stories in the series for our Blakiana Column.

THE GIRL WHO LOVED TRAINS

It is unusual to come across a girl who loves trains. Boys - and their dads - are often train-mad, and I must confess that I have always had a weakness for trains, particularly the branch lines with their puffing engines.

As so often happens, that young rascal Danny has reminded me of something. In this case, of a girl who obviously loved trains.

I wonder if any of our older readers remember Helen Holmes, who starred in a number of films in the days when the cinema was young and innocent - and all of them concerning railways and engines and trains. In our throwback to Danny's Diary, covering a month in the year 1912, which we publish this month to mark 20 years of Danny, he mentions seeing Helen Holmes in a railway film. That brief mention brings back a flood of childhood memories.

So far as I can trace, Helen did all her earlier work for the Kalem Company, and every film was about American trains. So she must have loved trains. We often hear of actors and actresses getting type-cast. Helen seems to have been 'train-cast'.

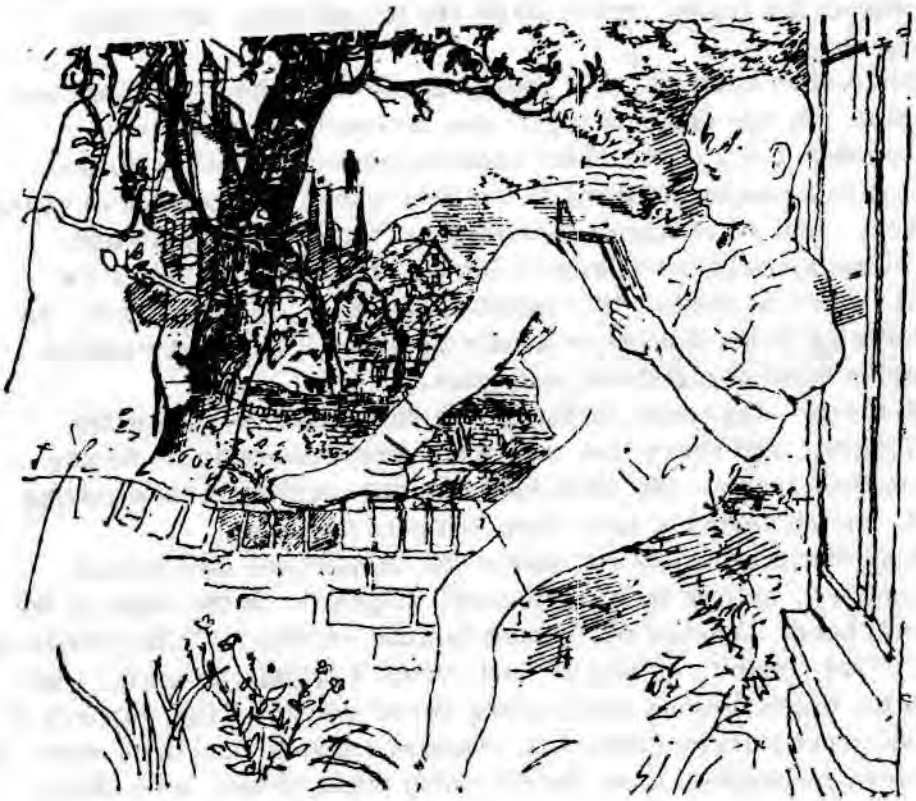
Somewhere about 1918 it seems she founded her own motion picture company, calling it, aptly enough, "Signal". In the wake of the great serial boom, sparked off by such famous serials as "The Perils of Pauline", "The Exploits of Elaine" and others starring the serial queen, Pearl White. Helen Holmes made a long serial entitled "The Hazards of Helen", all about railway robberies, runaway engines, and dirty work on the American railroads. I can recall seeing some of this, as a child, and loving it. Later on, another Helen Holmes railway serial, "The Lost Express" was released in this country by Signal, though I have no recollection of this one.

That, so far as I can trace, was her last film. I wonder what became of her, and why her career was so firmly set on railroad tracks. Surely it can only have been that she loved railways.

Does anyone else remember Helen?

THE EDITOR

TWENTY YEARS AGO EXACTLY we published our first extracts from Danny's Diary - and here is the actual heading we gave it, to introduce the new feature. And, to mark the great occasion today, here are a few extracts from the extracts which we published 20 years back. The opening year of the Diary was 1912.



DANNY'S DIARY

MAY 1912

There's been an awful lot of new papers out lately. A chap's pocket-money goes just nowhere, these days. Last month there was the "Dreadnought", and a day or two ago my brother Doug brought home a new one called "Cheer, Boys, Cheer". It is a fat paper - 36 pages, and that's four pages bigger than the Magnet. It's nearly all serials, too, so I don't think I should like it. Doug says that "Nipper's First Case", all about Nelson Lee and Nipper,

by Maxwell Scott, is good, so I may try it.

Nothing very worth-while in the Gem this month. I suppose the best story was "Figgy's Folly". It was good in parts, especially the train smash, but it was a kind of love story about Figgins and Cousin Ethel. My pal, Lindsay, says that his sister cried over it, but I thought it a bit soppy. Flossie Lindsay says it's the best Gem she ever read, so we don't all see things the same way.

We went to Clacton for Whitsun, going down on the Walton Belle. A big ship, with giant paddle-wheels. It rolled a bit after we left Southend, and Mum kept sniffing her smelling-salts. She didn't like the trip much as it reminded her of the liner "Titanic" which hit an ice-berg last month.

Mum and I go to the Popular Picture Palace every Monday and Friday night. We love the pictures. Last night we saw Frank Grandon and Linda Arvidson in "Enoch Arden", a lovely but very sad picture. This was long, being Biograph's first in two reels; Maurice Costello, Florence Turner, and Norma Talmadge in "A Tale of Two Cities", a Vitagraph picture; Broncho Billy Anderson in "Bad Man of Tombstone", an Essanay picture; Helen Holmes in "The Lonely Line", a railway picture from Kalem; John Bunny, Flora Finch, and Mabel Normand in "The Subduing of Mrs. Nag", a Vitagraph comedy; Pimple in a comic; and the Pathe Gazette with the news and the latest Paris fashions in Pathecolor. A lovely programme.

It has been a good month in the Magnet. By far the best story was "The Road to Ruin". Valence has been expelled for being friendly with Banks, the bookie. One day a new boy named Trevelyan arrived from Cornwall. Because he was Cornish he was dark and swarthy and had long hair. He saved Hazeldene from Banks. This new senior turned out to be Valence in disguise. When the Head found out that he had saved Hazeldene, he gave Valence another chance. So Valence is back at Greyfriars for good. I think it's a bit indelible that Valence could really have come back and called himself Trevelyan and nobody recognised him, but it is a grand story.

A new automatic telephone is being tried out at Epsom. The first in this country with a dial. It takes you 27 seconds to get a number, instead of 62 seconds on the old system.

Flossie Lindsay lent me her new copy of Young Folks' Tales called "Mabel and the Magic Goloshes". I read it when nobody was looking and found it quite all right. I got the Union Jack this week. A good story called "The Cashiered Captain". Plenty of Tinker in it. I like Tinker.

Mum took me to the Chelsea Flower Show in the grounds of Chelsea Hospital. The King had opened it the day before. In the evening Dad met us, and took us to see "Ben Hur" at Drury Lane. Arthur Wontner was "Ben Hur" and Reginald Owen was "Messala". The race on the revolving stage was terrific.

AND NOW - Back to the Present Day for our latest extracts from Danny's Diary - this time we are 20 years on - in 1932.

MAY 1932

The latest series of King of the Islands has ended this month, after only seven stories. The opening tale this month is "Chief of the Wai-Wai". There has been a remarkable discovery of pearls on a lonely atoll, and Ken King sails the "Dawn" there to do some trading. He gets a warm reception from the natives, and our hero only just escapes the cannibals' cooking-pot. Next week brought "The Shark's Tooth". Ken comes across a Dutchman who cheats the shipmates of the "Dawn". But Van Duck, the Dutchman, does not have the last laugh.

The final story of this present series is "Danny, the Cooky-Boy". Danny is kidnapped from under the very nose of his skipper, but, in the end, Ken gets his own back on the kidnapper - and also gets his cooky-boy back into the bargain. And so this short series has come to an end.

In the last Modern Boy of the month, Ken King is replaced by a series entitled "The Correspondence-Course Cowboy", by Sidney Hargrave. The hero is Horatio Hayweed, from Catchem's College of Cowpunching. It's a silly affair, and, from this opening tale, I don't think I am going to like these tales.

This has been a very wet May. In fact, according to the experts, it has been the wettest May since 1878.

Two good stories in the Schoolboys' Own Library. "Condemned by the Form" shows the Greyfriars Bounder at his very worst. His father has placed an orphan, Paul Dallas, at the school, and the Bounder is jealous of, and very beastly to, the newcomer.

"The Trail of Vengeance" is a story of the St. Jim's chums in the other S.O.L. They flee half round the world before a madman named Dirk Power. It's very far-fetched indeed, but I liked it a lot, especially after the party leaves England and gets to the Wild West.

For the first time, Piccadilly Circus is lit by electricity. I expect it's an improvement, but lots of people are sorry to see the lovely old gas lamps go.

At the pictures this month we have seen Lawrence Tibbett, Lupe Velez, and Jimmy Durante in "The Cuban Love Song", a nice musical with some good singing. "Around the World in 80 Minutes" features Douglas Fairbanks, but it is disappointing. Douglas has travelled a lot

and he has taken film shots of the places he has visited. So this one is just a travelogue. Laurel & Hardy join the Foreign Legion in "Beau Chumps" which is a full-length film, and has some very funny moments, but I like their 2-reelers better. Elissa Landi, Lionel Barrymore, and Laurence Olivier are in "The Yellow Passport", a good thriller. Even better is "Arsene Lupin", a detective film starring John and Lionel Barrymore. Sydney Howard was in a so-so British comedy "Up For the Cup", about the Cup Final. And finally, "Sunny Side Up", starring Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell paid a return visit, and I went to see it again. Not the very best of months at the pictures, but not so bad.

I have had two Union Jacks this month. The first one is entitled "The Mystery of Blind Luke" by E. S. Brooks. This is the sixth and final story in which six Union Jack authors had to write stories concerning a Mr. Alfred Proud and his fireman's helmet, both of which were found on the top-deck of a tram. Mr. Proud has apprently died of a heart attack. Each author has to write his own story about the events. And now the last story has appeared with Mr. Brooks' version and readers can place the authors on the theme in an order of merit. The first prize is £10 or a pedigree bloodhound.

Next week in the Union Jack I had "The Monkey Men", which introduces Lobangu, and it takes Sexton Blake to Africa in search of a vanished professor. This one is by Rex Hardinge.

I also bought a Thriller this month. It contained a story about the East End of London, entitled "The White Devil" by Murdoch Duncan.

A wireless milestone has been reached. The last programme has been broadcast from Savoy Hill. We listened to it, and it was a review of broadcasting from Savoy Hill since it commenced exactly ten years ago in 1922.

The Gem stories this month have all been comedy and very light. In "Just Like Gussy", D'Arcy thinks his watch has been stolen and he engages a shady detective named Link to find out who is guilty of the theft. Actually, the watch hadn't been stolen at all. Gussy had left it in a discarded waistcoat. The story introduces Inspector Fix of Scotland Yard.

In "Salesmen of St. Jim's", Cousin Ethel visits St. Jim's as a guest of the Head's wife, and gets up a bazaar to provide an outing for

the Huckleberry Heath Sunday School. Figgins is much in evidence. "The Kidnapped Cricketers" is a story of rivalry with Frank Monk & Co. of Rylcombe Grammar School. And finally, a rather dull tale entitled "The St. Jim's Parliament" in which Tom Merry gets up a parliament at St. Jim's. There is a sequel to this one coming next month. Not an over-good month in the Gem, though there is plenty of fun and games.

Amelia Earhart (she is Mrs. Putnam in private life) has flown the Atlantic in $13\frac{1}{2}$ hours. She is the first woman to do the flight solo.

The Nelson Lee has gone back to all detective stories again, and Doug thinks they are old tales by Maxwell Scott. I had two of them this month. "The Danger Ship" had Nelson Lee and Nipper travelling back from India in a liner, and meeting with adventures on the ship. The other tale is "Looters of the Far North", set in London and Finland. I did not like these two stories very much.

In the Boys' Friend 4d. Library the Rio Kid is back in another collection of stories from the old Popular. The overall title is "The Six Gun Outlaw", and it is fine, as the Kid always is.

There is a new play by J. B. Priestley on at the Lyric Theatre in London. It is called "Dangerous Corner", and Doug went to see it with one of his lady friends. They didn't ask me to go with them.

The Magnet is just great this month. The opening tale, "The Bounder's Luck" is one of the best ever. Mr. Quelch is expecting a visit from an old friend, Monsieur Sarrail, whom he has not seen for many years. The Bounder meets the French gentleman on a train. Sir Hilton Popper sees the Bounder playing billiards in a pub, and goes to report to Mr. Quelch. And the Bounder sees that Mr. Quelch's visitor is not the real Sarrail at all. Sarrail has been kidnapped, and the Bounder is the means of rescuing him. Just tip-top.

"Billy Bunter's Vengeance" is against the Bounder. He plays a ventriloquial trick to get the Bounder away from Greyfriars and make him miss playing cricket in the Redclyffe match. So Harry Wharton plays in the Bounder's place as captain - and the Bounder thinks it was Wharton who played the trick. Next week, "Saving His Enemy", in which Wharton saves the Bounder from certain expulsion. Finally a Coker tale: "Coker's Cricket Craze", in which Coker tries to wangle

himself a place in the First Eleven.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 171, "Condemned by the Form" comprised the first four stories of the 8-story Paul Dallas series of the Magnet's early summer in 1927. S.O.L. No. 172, "The Trail of Vengeance" comprised the Gem's 5-story Dirk Power series of late-summer 1921. It must have been a great treat for Gem readers when it first appeared in 1921, as it was the first genuine story in the paper for the best part of a year.

Concerning the Gem tales of 1932, read by Danny in May, "Just Like Gussy" had been originally entitled "The Bogus Detective"; "Salesmen of St. Jim's" had been "Tom Merry's Bazaar" in 1908; oddly enough "The Kidnapped Cricketers" had originally been two stories entitled respectively "Tom Merry's Struggle" and "St. Jim's Leads"; "The St. Jim's Parliament" had originally been two stories entitled respectively "Skimpole's New Idea" and "Told on the Telephone".

In the Gem of 1908, from which these 1932 tales came, it was curious how, after ten weeks of double-length St. Jim's tales, the paper suddenly reverted to weeks of St. Jim's stories of the length of the old halfpenny blue Gems. During this period the Gem included, as the second part of a double-feature programme, a series of adventure stories concerning "Alan Wayward", written by Innis Hael. Just who Innis Hael was I have no idea. I cannot recollect coming across the name of this writer elsewhere. It is impossible to say why this rather curious change occurred. I think it probable that the editor had in hand the shorter stories by Martin Clifford, left over from the halfpenny period, and decided to publish them over a number of weeks, supported by the Alan Wayward stories. The latter seemed to be reasonably good of their type, but I am not much of a judge of adventure stories. But is is hard to think that there could have been any intention of reverting to shorter St. Jim's tales as a permanent feature.)

* *

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

Just a short preamble this month as the Blake articles are a bit long. I have been given permission by the Editor to reprint some of the shorter articles which appeared in early C.D. Annuals for the benefit of those new members of our Circle who do not possess them. I trust you will all find them enjoyable.

WHO SAID TOM MIX IS DEAD? - Part 2

by William Lister

Bear Creak, Northern Idaho. In 1928 it was the loneliest place in the United States of America, until ... Tom Trowbridge - English and

Patrick Egan - Irish, discovered gold. That did it. Every roughneck and fortune-hunter who heard the news arrived pronto, turning the place into a rooting - tooting cowboy town with robberies, murders, handings and the like. Even poor old Tom and Patrick went in fear of their lives. No matter how bad humanity becomes in the main, there is always one or two worse than the rest and its these who are likely to 'cop it in the neck' so to speak, when Sexton Blake arrives. In this case it is a certain Gull Gibbon and Krock Kelk that take the villains role.

Liberal sprinkling of cowboy illustrations and a vivid description of Tinker's two-day journey of over sixty miles over 'moor and fen' on a Western pony with a pack mule at his side and fully dressed in cowboy attire. How that lad must have longed for their Rolls Royce, way back in civilization.

The struggle for supremacy between Sexton Blake and Krock Kelk continues unabated into the next tale 'The Gold Gang of Bears Creek' (Jan. 1929, No. 1316) a struggle to end in close victory for Blake, allow me to quote:

"Mr. Blake" said Bijah. "Krock Kelk the Mayor of Bears Creek is going to die tonight. We're kind of tired of his ways. There will be a fresh election for Mayor and there's only one name we know to do the job." And so as the body of Krock Kelk swung on the gallows Blake was turning down the chance of being Mayor of Bears Creek. But this time Blake shook his head. The green fields of England and his work there, was before his eyes. Home was calling him. He shook his head slowly, his work at Bear Creek was done.

We haste to tale number four of our Western quartet.

'The Flaming Trail', April 1929, No. 1339, by Arthur Patterson credited with being the author and creator of Krock Kelk whom we recently left in an unfortunate situation, and also the author of yet another Western 'The Case of the Apache Chief' which I have not seen as yet. To my mind, cowboys without Indians are like Apple Pie without custard, plum pudding without white sauce, pork without apple sauce. In other words there is something missing. In The Flaming Trail here come the Indians war-whooping away and prepared to enjoy themselves. Here you come in touch with the Death family in the form of Shadrack Death and his son Ebenezer Death, here you come across, the Apache

chief - dead - a mountain lion lying across him, also dead. Another mystery for Blake as the death had been caused by a knife wound stretching from armpit to waist. It may come as a shock to some fans of Sexton Blake to realise that he is more than a blood brother of the Apache tribe, he is an Apache chief - the Black Panther.

Bear's Claw, an Indian well up in the Apache world has this to say as the Wild West adventures of The Flaming Trail draw to a close - 'There is no prouder nation in the world, this my brothers, is because though many have had great chiefs, none but our nation has the Black Panther.'

He had to stop, clamour of applause drowned his voice. When it had somewhat died down he said his last words. 'Our Black Panther is wise as a medicine man. He has eyes which unlock all secrets and a soul which never quails. The nation owes to him this night all its lives. May fortune attend him. May all his enemies die quickly.' As a Sexton Blake fan one can only state "and so say all of us".

Many readers of the Collectors' Digest will have made the acquaintance of the Edgar Wallace detective, J. G. Reader. In Captain Fog, Texas Ranger Mr. J. T. Edson brings the grandson of one of his famous characters of the Wild West - Dusty Fog, into partnership with J. G. Reader. Had the Union Jack been still going we may have been treated to a J. T. Edson, Sexton Blake Western.

REPRINT OF ARTICLE WHICH APPEARED IN THE C.D. ANNUAL FOR 1976 by permission of the Editor.

THE THIRD MURRAY

Readers of Blakiana in a recent issue of the monthly C.D. will recall the article on "Father and Son" authors jointly written by Don Harkness and myself.

Whilst looking up references to check details for the above article I had occasion to read through the whole of that magnificent contribution to Blakiana, 18 instalments of the "Century Makers" by the late Walter Webb. At the time when William Murray Graydon and Robert Murray were keeping the flag of the Union Jack flying, a third Murray was contributing a fantastic number of stories to the Saga. This was Andrew Murray the famous creator of those incredible crooks Kew

and Carlac. However, it is not about them I wish to write but of Andrew Murray and his gentleman adventurer - The Hón. John Lawless.

Before commencing this work I decided to look through as many issues of the Collectors' Digest as possible, including the Annuals, just to see whether anyone else had "done" this character before. Well, I did read them. What a splendid way to spend a Saturday morning and afternoon. Forgotten was the TV and the Charlie Chaplin film I had intended to see as well as the film in the afternoon. I started on those C.D's and read every issue of Blakiana from 1953 onwards and other items as well. I heartily recommend such a treat to all lovers of the C.D. whatever may be their interests. What a host of memories can be revived. I never stopped for lunch, just read on. My cat Bebe had been fed so she went fast asleep beside me in her own armchair. Dinner was finally achieved at 7 p.m. I had all the information I wanted so back to the object of this article, a tale of two gentlemen, (English) Andrew Murray and the Hon. John Lawless.

Andrew Murray was born in 1880 and wrote his first Sexton Blake story for the Union Jack in 1911. Although I cannot trace any full description of him I should imagine him to be very much like his creation, the Hon. John Lawless who was "tall, dark and handsome". The first tale of Lawless was U.J. No. 550 in 1914, "A Bid for a Battleship". He was described as an adventurer who "sailed close to the wind" at times, but he was certainly an English gentleman, his mother being Countess of Warlowe and his father a famous Arctic Explorer. He inherited his father's love of exploring and most of his younger days had been spent travelling around the world. How easy it was to do such a thing in those days of the early 20th century!

I must interrupt here to say that for some inexplicable reason the Hon. John Lawless and his coloured valet Sam, were originally called Lawliss and Pete. The change was made apparently without any explanation, at least I cannot find any. A couple of the stories are missing from my collection and in the next issue I possess the names appeared as Lawless and Sam. Anyway, from the first Lawless story in the Sexton Blake Library in 1917, Lawless and Sam was the order of the day.

Andrew Murray was a most prolific writer, he became the second

Century maker. Whether he travelled a lot as a young man we do not know, but many of his tales were of overseas adventures with very authentic backgrounds. The number of Lawless tales in the Union Jack was 20 and 33 in the Sexton Blake Library. These 33 appeared between 1917 and 1923, quite an achievement considering all the other work Andrew was contributing at that time. His Kew and Carlac tales were still being published as well as two new characters - Humble Begge and Count Bonalli, the Owl.

In that first U.J. story we learn that the Hon. John Lawless and Sexton Blake are old friends.

Blake certainly had a lot of old friends, must be all those fellows he went to school with. However, friends they were and Blake had often warned John about his proclivity for getting into trouble through wanting to help people, especially those in real distress. Many of the adventures chronicled by Andrew Murray were just that. By some extraordinary chance Lawless would get involved with people, be it when just taking a walk in the usually quiet square where his mother lived or a chance encounter in a country inn. Apart from this Lawless had once been a King's Messenger and still on occasion was requested by the F.O. to take on a mission. Such a one was the story related in S.B.L. No. 35 called "The Half Caste". A tale of skulduggery on the West coast of Africa and that is what is at the root of the trouble - a black skull.

Many and varied were the lands to which Andrew Murray sent his gentleman adventurer as well as Sexton Blake and Tinker. From West Africa back to Italy and then to Africa again to a place called Kooloolomba and a "City of the Apes" truly a forerunner of the "Planet of the Apes", trained gorillas who captured Tinker. Looking through more S.B.L's I found they all had more adventures in Syria, the South Seas, Australia, a visit to the Holy Land in that grand tale "The Mosque of the Mahdi". In the "Red Crescent" Lawless, Blake and Tinker end up in Afghanistan and in the tale called "Blood Brotherhood" they encounter curious and mysterious Indian Magic. These and many others are adventures in foreign lands are part of the Lawless story, many of the intricate plots worthy of being hard-cover best-sellers and better than many a film plot.

Truly Andrew Murray was a very gifted writer of detective-cum-

adventure tales with Sexton Blake and Lawless working together for the good of all. I feel this part of his work for the Blake Saga has been largely overshadowed by his possibly more well-known crooks Kew and Carlac. For myself I prefer the tales of an "English Gentleman".

May I finish by being allowed to quote the definition of an English Gentleman as written by H. Rider Haggard to his son in the tale of Allan Quatermain:-

"In the hope that in days to come he and many other boys whom I shall never know, may in the acts of thoughts of Allan Quatermain and his companions find something to help him and them to reach to what, with Sir Henry Curtis, I hold to be the highest rank whereto we can attain - the state and dignity of An English Gentleman".

* *

Nelson Lee Column

ST. FRANK'S WITHOUT TEARS? by Len Wormull

No boys' writer fired my youthful imagination more than Edwy Searles Brooks. And no boys' writer made me laugh and cry more than Frank Richards. Their unique talents and contrasting styles combined to give me the best of two worlds - St. Frank's and Greyfriars. As different as chalk and cheese, and each captivating me in their own special way. I have only one lament, and it is one that has been with me for a very long time: Why did Greyfriars have the monopoly in tears? A debatable question, for what's tearful and what isn't is so personal, as in the case of laughter. I can only say that I was always on the right emotional wavelength with Richards. His "spot on" touches of pathos, his skilful and sensitive play on the emotions, enhanced many a story for me. And made me cry.

E. S. Brooks was something of an enigma in this respect. Even the very idea of him being a sentimentalist sounds preposterous. His was a programme of high-speed action, tales of the unexpected, mystery, thrills, and excitement. The success formula for boys, and no complaints on that score. It was something he failed to inject into the stories that bugs me: the stuff that tears are made of. At any rate, I have no

recollection of ever crying at St. Frank's.

There were of course obvious drawbacks. Life always seemed that much tougher at St. Frank's, to say nothing of the 'worldly manliness' of its schoolboys. I can imagine William Napoleon Browne's laconic retort: 'No tears, brothers, we're St. Frank's!' Again, the cold, harsh world of crime detection, infused into the stories, was hardly conducive to sentiment. And then, in the first person, there was Nipper. I have long felt that it was a mistake to have handed him the narrative on a plate, as it were. In early days he was too brash and flippant a character to tackle the more delicate shades of emotion, and a case in point is his own expulsion at the hands of Walter Starke. In a clear attempt to excite pity, he remarks ... 'I fell asleep with a kind of lump in my throat' (o.s. 207). Which brought no lump to mine. Happily I met him when he had shed his old image for a more likeable personality. When E.S.B. finally took charge, things did look up a bit in 'sentimental vein'.

"The 'Death' of Walter Church" has long been acclaimed as a Brooksian tour de force, and rightly so. A triumph not only for Handforth but also for Nelson Lee, whose knowledge of poisons was to save the stricken Church. Long ago I was saddened by this tale of schoolboy devotion, and there can be no doubt that Brooks pulled out all the tearjerker stops for this one: the "death-bed" scene; poor Handy caught blubbing; the all-round anguish; Dr. Brett's official death announcement; the hearse. This time round? It just didn't work. Handy did his best, but his over-reacting to his chum's plight struck the one false note. How wonderful if he could have soft-pedalled just that once.

The Harry Gresham Story was another that should have made it into the tear charts, though not quite on my wavelength. Here was a fine character and cricketer, haunted by a secret fear that renders him a coward. There were moments in "Shunned by the Form" where the junior's torment and despair is most poignantly conveyed, moments when my heart went out to him. No tears, but it did much to heighten the story.

At this point I crave forgiveness for mentioning the Magnet Smedley series, which I read concurrently with the above. In this the

Bounder is not only expelled, but also is disowned and disinherited by his father. The severity of the punishment so shocks the headmaster, that he relents and gives him another chance. This one scene is so beautifully restrained and touching, so utterly convincing, that it made a good story into a truly memorable one for me.

It was the kind of compassionate writing that never failed to turn me on. The kind, I need hardly say, I could dearly have wished on St. Frank's.

SUBS! by James W. Cook

Having just read a St. Frank's story by a sub writer has made me realise the feelings of lovers of the Chas. Hamilton tales who have voiced their protests in the pages of the C.D. over the long years.

A 1922 Boys' Realm came into my possession recently and a short yarn about St. Frank's therein was written by a sub writer and a very poor one at that.

Yet I cannot remember any reader protesting at the time of issue unless the editors withheld from their "Reply" columns such indignation letters.

But it seems obvious the editors, when such sub stories were submitted, neither cared for the faithful bands of readers nor the quality of the yarns that the original authors maintained each week.

I should think writers like Charles Hamilton and Edwy Searles Brooks must often have winced at the way their characters were mishandled. Evidently the characters were the property of the Amalgamated Press who could accept them in any way offered by substitute writers.

Perhaps today we have become less submissive towards the editors who allowed these intruders to write about our favourite schools and their characters although we have left it far too late to do anything about it!

Perhaps such sub writers filled in gaps at certain times due to illness, etc. Even so, I feel some true resemblance of the original characters should have been maintained by them.

However, it will still be our privilege to grumble via the pages of the Collectors' Digest about these sub writers who, in their day, decided to write about our schools their way.

REVIEWS

BILLY BUNTER EXPELLED

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker: £7.95)

This attractive volume contains seven Magnets from the early twenties. The star turn - and it really is of star quality - is the 4-story series from the late autumn of 1924 in which Bunter, sentenced to a beating for various misdeeds, tells Dr. Locke that he would prefer to be expelled. It contains the delicious and famous sequence in which Bunter tells the Head that his father might send him to a "better school" than Greyfriars.

So Bunter is expelled, at his own request, but his father does not send Bunter to that "better school" - he puts his son to work in an office. Bunter tries to get back to Greyfriars, unsuccessfully - the Head and Mr. Quelch have had enough of him. Finally, Bunter occupies a caravan near the school in a last desparate effort. At the hilarious close of the series, Bunter manages to bluff his way back to Greyfriars. We weren't like the Head and Quelch - we couldn't do without our Bunter. This is, without any doubt, the best Bunter series of the early twenties - and one of the best of all time. Packed with fun and incident, there is never a wasted word. In the shorter stories of those halcyon days, there was never any need for padding.

From exactly a year earlier comes an amusing Bunter "single" entitled "The Rebel of the Remove" or "The Case of the Missing Cake". It is suspected that the cake, the property of Mr. Quelch, is inside Bunter, but for once he is innocent. The author was in top form in this gorgeous romp.

The volume is completed by two more Bunter stories - "Coker's Rival" and its sequel "Skinner's Chum". This pair is less successful, coming from yet another year earlier still, but it has its moments. These two are from the late white-cover era of 1922. Coker answers a newspaper advertisement - Plays Wanted - inserted by a firm with the typical Hamilton name of Sharkey & Co. Coker thinks he can write a play. So does Bunter. But the enterprising Mr. Sharkey expects his clients to pay to have their work published and marketed. He has no great faith in his clients' abilities.

In my volume, these two Magnets are included in reverse order. Not important, so long as you read "Coker's Rival" first.

An interesting point in the Bunter - Expelled series is that Bunter receives a registered letter - it contains ten bob - from his cousin Wally whom a substitute writer had turned into a form-master. On this occasion, Wally is said to be away from the school. It seems likely that this was the last mention of Wally in the Magnet. He was no great loss, though he had starred as Billy's double in an entertaining series, years earlier.

A thoroughly excellent volume for the Bunter fan.

THE JAPERS OF ST. JIM'S

Martin Clifford
(Howard Baker: £7.95)

The great novelty of this fascinating volume is that it contains three St. Jim's stories

which were new in the early thirties, and four stories which were reprints of yarns written long before in 1907 - 8. The reader is thus able to constrast the style of the young Charles Hamilton with his writing of 25 years later.

"A Knock-Out for Knox", in a mid-1930 Gem, is on familiar lines, but grand fun. I commented once that the few genuine stories of this period in the Gem tend to shine beyond their merits on account of the surrounding bog of substitute stories.

"Figgins in a Funk", in a very early 1931 Gem, has a plot which Hamilton had used before. In this case, Cousin Ethel makes Figgins promise that he will not "lay a finger on Trimble". And Trimble finds out what's in the wind, and makes full use of it.

The third of the "new" stories is undoubtedly the best of the three "new" singles. Entitled "The Shady Three" it was the best Hamilton tale in the Gem since the Cleeve series of four years earlier. Mr. Lathom was struck down by St. Leger who was returning from a trip to the Green Man. Trimble, who happened to be in Lathom's study in search for a confiscated cake, was blamed for the attack and expelled. Like most yarns introducing the Fifth Form, this one is of high quality. A lovely little masterpiece.

As for the four Gems from the reprint era, these stories are full of unqualified charm. "The Treaty of St. Jim's" was the very first blue Gem of the new series of 1908 when the Gem changed from a halfpenny to a penny paper. The story, one of rivalry with the Grammar School, was originally entitled "The Gathering of the Clans". From a few weeks later in 1932 we find "Sacked From St. Jim's" which introduced Tom Merry's unscrupulous cousin, Philip Phipps. Oddly enough it comprises two stories from 1907, entitled respectively "Expelled from St. Jim's" and "Tom Merry's Camp", which had been omitted earlier by accident or design. An excellent and powerful tale.

A Gem from early 1933 contains "The Taming of the Tyrant" in which Mr. Ratcliff falls in love with the sister of Bernard Glyn, then a new boy. Entitled "The Form-Master's Secret" in 1909.

Finally, also from the Spring of 1933, "The Jape of the Term", originally "Jack Blake's Plot" in 1909. Jack Blake has a visit from Uncle Harry - they hadn't met for six years - and Uncle proves a holy terror. In the end, Uncle proves to be Kerr in disguise.

A splendid collection. Every tale is first-class, whether old or new in the early thirties. My own favourites are "Sacked from St. Jim's" of the early work, and "The Shady Three" from the later work. But everything - just everything - in the garden is lovely. Don't miss it.

* *

FOR SALE: Best condition Magnets, 1920's, 1930's, £2 each. Later ones, £1 each. Also Wizards, Rovers, Adventures, Hotspurs: 60p each.

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* *

WANTED: "Billy Bunter for Christmas". DAWKINS, LYNDALE LODGE, 33 IVY HOUSE PARK, HENLADE, NR. TAUNTON, SOMERSET, TA3 5HR.

News of the Old Boys' Book Clubs

MIDLAND

There was a sparse attendance at our March meeting, but it was thoroughly enjoyed by all. The Chairman, Tom Porter, does a very thorough job in preparing his agenda.

Our usual features - Anniversary Number and Collectors' Item, were on show. The A.N. was Magnet 1676, "Sir William's Double" from the Eastcliffe Lodge Series. It was the last series completed in the Magnet. No. 1676 was published on 30th March, 1940, 42 years ago. The A.N. was taken from one of Tom's beautifully bound volumes. The C.I. was another very lovely volume containing copies of the "Beezer" comic.

There was plenty of lively discussion. Bob Wareing made one of his rare appearances and raised the point that the famous Holiday Annual was full of vintage Hamilton, but the other stories were very poor stuff. Most of us agreed with Bob, although one could think of exceptions.

There were two readings by Ivan Webster and your correspondent. Ivan's reading showed Gosling with prospects of a cosy public house and a "widder" for company, cheeking Mr. Prout and Dr. Locke and "young" Potter. Alas for Gosling the whole thing is a confidence trick.

A game of Greyfriar's Binge was played; there was time for two rounds. Vince Loveday and his wife, Joan, were the winners.

We were glad to learn that Geoff Lardner, one of our members, had been given the honour of being president of the 1,600 strong Sandwell Branch of the National Union of Teachers.

The refreshments were provided by Joan Golen, though she was absent ill and Vince and Joan Loveday. The "study supper" is always a success. Peter Masters who lives near Joan Golen, brough the delicious sandwiches along. A mixed assortment of biscuits came from Joan and Vince Loveday.

The next meeting is on 25th May, the A.G.M.

cont'd ..

All good wishes to O.B.B.C. enthusiasts everywhere.

JACK BELLFIELD - Correspondent.

CAMBRIDGE

We met at the home of Keith Hodkinson on Sunday, 4th April, 1982. Bill Thurbon talked on scouting stories (this being the 75th year of the Scout Movement). He pointed out that in the years before 1914 there were frequent scouting stories in a wide range of journals and boys' papers, apart from the Movement's own paper "The Scout". He instanced "Sexton Blake, Scoutmaster" of 1909. He also recalled that the invasion stories by "John Tregellis" in the Northcliff papers had a cadet corps pair of heroes in the "Britain Invaded" series, but a scout hero in the "Kaiser or King" series.

After the Great War, and the scout activities, including the London Scout buglers sounding the "all clear" after air raids, scouting had lost its novelty and scouting stories were mostly confined to "The Scout". He recalled, however, Chums "Scouts of the Baghdad Patrol" of the early post war years. After referring to references to scouting in general books, Bill recalled his early days of scouting in 1913 and then from 1917 onwards. He illustrated his talk with a number of books and photographs. Keith also produced a number of bound volumes of "The Scout", and Mike Rouse passed around an album of scouting scenes on cigarette cards.

After enjoying Mrs. Hodkinson's lavish tea the meeting resumed, with Keith talking about stories of Robin Hood. Keith referred to a wide range of Robin Hood stories - including many various adventures of Robin Hood. He illustrated his talk with a wide range of film excerpts, from Disney to Errol Flynn - he also produced a number of Robin Hood stories. Jack Doupe had brought with him his complete set of the Aldine Robin Hood Library - all 88 of the first edition of the early years of the century, bound into eight volumes, appropriately in lincoln green! Most of these had the original coloured covers, and many expressions of envious admiration greeted this fine collection. Keith announced that at the next meeting Bill Thurbon would follow out the theme with a search for the real Robin.

The next meeting of the Club will be on 9th May at the home of Jack Overhill; this will be the annual meeting of the club.

The meeting closed with a warm vote of thanks to Keith and Mrs. Hodkinson for their hospitality.

NORTHERN

We had thirteen members present on the Saturday evening prior to Easter Day - a good number indeed for our A.G.M. being held on a holiday weekend.

It was unanimously voted that all Officials should be re-elected and so we have Harry Barlow as Chairman, Geoffrey Good as Secretary and Mollie Allison as Treasurer and Librarian. Mollie was able to report, as shown in the accounts presented to us, that the library was doing quite well and funds received were a big help to the Club. Membership is still only £1 per year: we have a number of postal members, who regularly borrow books from our library.

Once again, a brief discussion was held on how we as a Club, could further the knowledge of our existence. A Book Fair was to be held at Manchester on 8th May (the day of our next meeting) and it was agreed that four people would go along with various items to promote the Club. As the Book Fair would end in good time for the members to get to the evening meeting, a full report could be given then.

During refreshments, a box of "goodies" was brought out by Michael Bentley which attracted a number of people!

To conclude a very enjoyable meeting, a recording was played of "Good Old Greyfriars" - this must have been played at every Club gathering in the country, now. Even so, it was much enjoyed - and a number of members had missed the two broadcasts of it so they were particularly pleased to have the opportunity of hearing it.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

LONDON

A record attendance at the Shepperton meeting were well rewarded by an excellent programme. Millicent Lyle gave a fine discourse in which she mentioned the three anniversaries that happen this

year. These being the 90 one of Chums, the centenary of A. A. Milne of Winnie the Pooh fame and also the centenary of Lewis Carroll. Millicent mentioned the amount of quotations that Frank Richards used that were taken from Alice in Wonderland. Generous applause was accorded to Millicent.

With the English cricket season in the offing, the host, Tony Rees, read one of his poems which was entitled "Cricket on Little Side".

Bob Blythe read the Trackett Grim story "Murder in the Muddy March", some more of the E. S. Brooks letters and extracts from the 1965 newsletter.

Mary Cadogan won Bill Bradford's Adjective Quiz and then read a "My Weekly Interview", a feature that appeared in the Greyfriars Herald, new series No. 3 and it was the plump Cliff House Bessie Bunter who was the person interviewed. Bob Blythe conducted two lines of his Bingo game.

A hearty vote of thanks was accorded to the six members of the Rees' family. Next meeting will be held at 58 Stanwell Road, Ashford, Middlesex. 'Phone 53609, prefix 69. Host Isaac Litvak. A full tea, but kindly bring cup or mug. The date is Sunday, 9th May.

BEN WHITER

* * * \

The Postman Called

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

KEN HUMPHREYS (Nottingham): Memo to William Lister. Never, never link Charles Hamilton with Edwy Searles Brooks. It's a bit like talking about Tolstoy and James Hadley Chase in the same breath. Time is showing Hamilton's genius and Brooks' capability. And there's an end to it.

ESMOND KADISH (Hendon): That "Gem" cover on this month's "Digest", looked so realistic that I half-expected to find an actual "working model" of the "aero-car" tucked away inside!

As the song says: "Ah, yes, I remember it well!" My brother actually bought the last issue of the "Nelson Lee" and the "Gem" which followed it. I recall his putting the car together with the aid of some elastic bands, but whether the "working model" actually "worked" is not quite clear.

He had introduced me to the "Nelson Lee" only about a year previously so that its amalgamation with the "Gem" didn't affect me as much as it would have done, perhaps, a year or two later. Even so, I think it aroused a vague feeling of insecurity in me - the kind of sensation you get when you first realise that absolutely nothing in life is going to be permanent!

These "amalgamations" never really seemed to work - they were probably never intended to, I suppose, since the incorporated feature, like St. Frank's, was dropped, after a couple of years. The same thing happened when the "Schoolgirls' Own" vanished, and the Morcove stories appeared in the "Schoolgirl". The Morcove serials lasted less than two years, before they, too, were dropped.

L. S. LASKEY (Brighton): I always look forward to the arrival of the "Digest". "Danny's Diary" is a delightful feature. I shall enjoy reading it even more when Danny reaches my own reading period of the Old Papers, in another four years' time. Long may he continue.

V. T. LOVEDAY (Worcester): I note that Mr. H. E. Price of Chatham wishes to find out the names of the publishers of "I Was There", a

weekly magazine comprising personal experiences of survivors of the first World War, also dates of publication.

A colleague of mine at the office has almost a full set of this magazine, and he was able to supply the following information:

PUBLISHERS - The Amalgamated Press

DATES OF PUBLICATION

First Issue	29 Sept. 1938
Last Issue (No. 51)	19 Sept. 1939

Incidentally, my friend is short of Issue No. 44 to complete his full set. Can any reader help?

LEN WORMULL (Romford): I was a regular reader of the Nelson Lee in its last four years, and I recall the end, and its merger with the Gem, very clearly. A sad day for Lee fans, of course, though the writing had been on the wall for some time. For me, the real shock came much earlier with the destruction of St. Frank's. After that, Edwy Searles Brooks became very much a fallen idol in my eyes. If only we knew then what we know now! The continuation of St. Frank's in the Gem suited me fine, but then I was never really a St. Jim's die-hard. Personally, I would have preferred the tales at the back of the Magnet. How dare you suggest that nonentity, The Ranger, for the last days of St. Frank's!

BILL LOFTS (London): In answer to John Bridgewater's query. The Sexton Blake story in 'Nugget Library' is very well-known, and has been documented before. Firstly this was a reprint of one in The Boys' Realm of 1911, although anonymous was probably by Andrew Murray. Secondly it is the only Blake story known to have an imprint on it of a rival publisher, James Henderson. The reason being simply that A.P. had bought out all their papers, and it took some time before the publishers name was changed. Thirdly the scene of the crime took place at Berkely Square in London - a place that Blake himself moved to, where he had plush offices many decades later. Nugget Library was certainly an interesting paper, "The Green Emerald" being the only Blake yarn, but nobody as far as I know has elucidated who wrote the Nelson Lee and Nipper yarns (not St. Frank's) in its pages.

BEN WHITER (London): The most unusual place where I read my Magnet: When I was a boy, my sister Marjorie and I spent eight weeks of the summer of 1917 in a village called Morton, about five miles from Worcester. I used to get a cheap return ticket on the railway, G.W.R., from Morton to Worcester. I would buy my copy of the Magnet, and then sit in the train reading it for about an hour, before the return journey started.

With regard to last month's editorial, the local train still runs from Grays via Ockenden to Upminster (still a picturesque journey) but it now terminates at Upminster. A passenger for Romford has to change trains, since the Underground was extended from Barking to Upminster. Originally, the railway from Fenchurch St. to Tilbury and Southend via Barking was the old London, Tilbury, and Southend line.

LESLIE HOLLAND (Royton): I find Danny's Diary of particular interest these days as he is now well within my own schoolboy Magnet and Gem reading years. Mention is made this month of Newcastle beating Arsenal 2 - 1 in the Wembley Cup Final in 1932. I remember that well. It was the famous disputed goal final, and, indeed, one of Newcastle's goals does appear to have been scored after the ball had gone dead, if well-preserved film is to be believed. For about a fortnight before that match we were playing "Newcastle v. Arsenal" games in our own school yard. Only a few months earlier, Frank Moss, the Arsenal goalkeeper, had been transferred from our home town club, Oldham Athletic, where he had been a great favourite. He subsequently played for England.

DONALD LANG (Edinburgh): I think Mrs. Radford's item on the arrival of the Digest on a bad winter morning sums up what it means to all of us. At this time of year, when winter has passed and we are at last into the longer Spring days, I always look forward to the arrival of the April issue, which I feel is part of Spring itself now, and makes life worth living again after the winter months.

HAROLD TRUSCOTT (Deal): I was interested in your comments and queries about prizes awarded in magazine competitions. I certainly never knew anyone who won a prize of so much a week for life, although

I remember such prizes being advertised. But a friend and colleague of my father, George Seeley, frequently won prizes for John Bull "Bullets" and competitions in Answers. Prizes of £100, £50, were frequent with him; my father used to say that Mr. Seeley had not had to buy a Christmas dinner for many years, for he always won at least one turkey, and often several. When this happened the others were re-delivered to people he knew could not afford one. And on two occasions, to my knowledge, he won £3,000. This was in the twenties. My point is that there is no doubt that some, at least, of the prizes offered were paid.

* *

HOW'S YOUR MEMORY? by W. Bradford

It is now fifty years since I first eagerly awaited to buy or swap my favourite weekly boys' papers. Because my parents were separated I received a little more than average pocket money, probably as intended compensation. Anyway, it all went to my local newsagent.

The publications at that time were seemingly unlimited or, to be more precise, limited only by available funds. From a combination of memory and reference, may I remind you of some of these papers day-by-day as they appeared in 1932.

Monday	-	Adventure and Champion
Tuesday	-	Triumph and Wizard
Wednesday	-	Boys' Cinema, Gem and Nelson Lee
Thursday	-	Rover and Union Jack
Friday	-	Boys' Magazine, Bullseye
Saturday	-	Chums, Magnet, Modern Boy, Ranger, Skipper, Startler and Thriller

If the week happened to include the first Thursday in the month, you might have designs on the Schoolboys' Own Library (2), The Boys' Friend Library (4) or the Sexton Blake Library (4).

Altogether the above would have cost 6/4d. (32 new pence). Today if you can find copies, the market price would be around £50.

I have ignored 'comics' as in 1932 at nine years of age I thought them childish! Some of you will disagree with my days of publication, probably because a friendly newsagent was not above releasing copies

prematurely. Also changes did occur over the years.

Probably my clearest recollection is of a local shop in Northfields Avenue with a shelf of out-dated monthly libraries (4d.) ultimately sold at half price.

On every visit to our old friend Norman Shaw, I see some of these issues that I thumbed through so many times fifty years ago. Happy days!

* *

"THE J. H. VALDA MYSTERY" by L. A. Hawkey

To some extent this little essay springs from Chris. Lowder's excellent contribution in the 1981 "C.D." Annual - "Cooking up the Story" - and the "mystery" may, as far as I know, not be a mystery at all to many members, no matter how much it has puzzled me for many years.

As Mr. Lowder rightly says, "J. H. Valda was a regular and prolific Amalgamated Press artist, though not much appears to be known about him biographically". Hitherto, indeed, the writer has had to rely on the details given by Mr. Doyle in his invaluable 1964 "Who's Who of Boys' Writers & Illustrators". Like Chris. Lowder I could not understand how so assured and accomplished an artist should suddenly appear, as if from nowhere, around 1920.

At that time he does not appear to have been tied to the "A.P." - his work started to appear in the "Scout" published by Pearsons, about the end of 1919, and continued on and off through the '20's, especially with Sidney Strand's detective stories of "Frank Darrell" - and excellent art-work it was, too. Also in that period he drew for Hulton's "Boys' Magazine" - sometimes the "Falcon Swift" stories - sometimes their pseudo-scientific-fiction serials - he seems to have excelled at both 'tec stories, and "Lost World" adventures! Prior to this, his only connection with Boys' periodicals I can find is one solitary colour-plate in the Boys' Own Annual (1916/17, Vol. 39) which is shared with Chas. Dixon R.I. This depicts Jack Cromwell winning his V.C. - except maybe for the naval gun, the work is typical Valda, especially the tonal quality of the colouring - how he and Dixon came to collaborate - or why - one cannot guess. Perhaps Valda, like Dixon was a member of

the Langham Sketch Club, but the latter, then in his 44th year was already a famous marine artist, whereas Valda seems to have been virtually unknown.

Then, by chance, a few years back I picked up at a local dealers, several bound volumes of Hutchinson's "Ladies Realm", including Vol. 3 (1898) - and there, to my surprise, I found numerous illustrations, mainly half-tone wash, but some plain pen and ink, by John Harris Valda. Their style was typical of the period, little different from Gordon Browne, J. H. Bacon, Chris. Hammond, etc., and the signature, like the other artists mentioned, was written out, just like the signature to a letter. Could this be our J. H. Valda, I wondered, as early as the 1890's - or maybe his father, who Mr. Doyle tells us was also an artist? In the main he seems to have been used on historical stories, but here and there, particularly the way the eyes were sometimes drawn, and the hands held, as if poised over a piano keyboard, one could detect a touch of the "JHV" of the 20's and 30's. But then families of artists tend to have remarkably similar styles - the Brock's, Cuneo's, Paget's and Hardy's, for example.

It was when I saw the rough sketch Valda had supplied for the "Man with the Rats", and spotted the signature, that I became certain that the "Ladies Realm" artist was indeed the "gruesome artist" of the "Champion", and "Union Jack", etc. The signatures were identical. Soon came further proof - many fine illustrations and some really excellent colour plates in Hutchinson's 4-volume "Story of the Nations" - published circa 1911/12 - and then some equally convincing and stirring contributions to the 6-vol. "Deeds That Thrilled the Nation" issued during, and depicting, the 1914-1918 war. And now we find the "squared-off" initials "J.H.V." with which C.D. readers are doubtless familiar.

Later, I acquired more volumes of "Ladies Realm" and in 1909 there is a tribute to their artist John Harris Valda, telling us, amongst other things, that his father had, in fact, been an artist of some repute but had died when JHV was a boy and his own ability had been fostered by his mother, and developed to such an extent that he was now running his own Academy of Art in Kentish Town, and also preparing for a London exhibition of his own work. A 'photo - presumably recent - shows him at that time to have been probably in his 30's, which in turn would mean he was born, maybe, in the mid-1870's; and as Brian Doyle tells

us he is thought to have died during the last war, he would have been near 70 years old, and evidently did not turn to work in Boys' papers 'till he was almost 50. He also drew in several issues of 'Pearsons' Magazine' prior to 1914.

It is only guesswork, but the onset of the Great War may have put paid to his own Art School, and although the War itself seems to have kept him busy as an artist, its aftermath may have found his pre-war market rather limited. The monthly Magazines still running were going over more and more to photographs, and styles, too, had changed - though it must be stated that his work in "The Story of the Nations" and in the War books, standing as it did alongside that of Caton-Woodville, Stanley L. Wood, Matania, Lionel Edwards, Allan Stewart, etc., more than holds its own.

Anyway, he possibly found that a more lucrative field, from 1919 onwards, was in the growing number of Boys' periodicals, and he adapted his talents admirably in this direction - his covers for the "Monster Library" have rightly been mentioned - so also should his covers for the earlier "Champion Annuals" - he was a master of arresting colour-work - while I always felt that next to Parker - he was the best "Union Jack" artist. Which, I wonder, was the first S. B. story he illustrated - no doubt some afficianado can tell us. Fred Bennett, Valda, Glossop, Parker, and above all, J. Louis Smyth, were my very favourite artists - I have learnt a bit about Bennett, and Parker, and now, hopefully, established how Valda came on the scene, seemingly "fully-fledged" around 1919. Maybe one day I shall be as lucky with Louis Smyth, though my many efforts so far, have met with no response.

What a pity Valda didn't from the outset, depict St. Frank's in the "Nelson Lee" - Arthur Jones was all right in his rough and ready way - but he was no Shields, Chapman, MacDonald or Wakefield. Who knows but what Valda's artistry might have kept the Nelson Lee going a little longer - or have made him - like the illustrators mentioned above - almost a "household name" to all those interested in the old periodicals.

* *

SALE OR EXCHANGE: Schoolgirls' Own Annuals 1924 -25-26. WANTED: "Lair of the Vampires"; "Werewolf of Whispers School" (Imperialism Hobsen), "Origin of the Aryans", Taylor. State price.

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