VOL. 40
STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS DIGEST
52p. APRIL 1986. Nº 472.

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STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR
Founded in 1941 by
W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST
Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

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A LITTLE PRAYER

This is nothing to do with old boys' books, but it makes a little fill-up for my column when the thought comes to me, after writing hundreds of Editorials, now what the dickens shall I say next month. Besides, it may interest some readers.

It was in that bitterly cold and snowy period which has been a feature of this winter. The intense cold got some of us down - and especially your old editor. The weather was not kind to ancient monuments.

It was Saturday lunch-time. I had popped into an hotel to get a light lunch. All of a sudden, the earth started heaving, the dining-room spun round and round. In recent times I have had

the occasional dizzy spell - the kind of thing that scares you when you are not at home. But this "turn" was very severe.

I weaved my way out of the hotel, trying to control my direction. Outside I clung on to a post, feeling all the while that it was most incongruous for the editor of a famous magazine to be seen clinging to a post outside an hotel. Should I ever live it down?

Opposite the hotel is a bus stop, and I knew that a bus was due in about fifteen minutes. I appealed to a young man who was just about to enter the hostelry. "I'm feeling terribly dizzy. Would you be kind enough just to help me across the road to the bus stop?".

He stared at me, shook his head, grunted something under his breath, and passed on, like the Levite in the parable. Perhaps I shouldn't blame him. He thought I had been bending my elbow, though I had had nothing stronger than a coffee.

A gentleman came along. I appealed to him. He was kindness and consideration itself. He gave me his arm and took me over to the bus stop.

And there I was, with the world spinning round me, and a bus due which was almost certain to be crowded in the Saturday lunch hour. How shall I get on, pay my fare, find my way to a seat, get out five minutes later, and then walk the distance from the bus stop to Excelsior House? I just didn't know, but I felt really scared.

I closed my eyes, and sent up a simple little prayer: "Dear Lord please help me."

I opened my eyes. The bus was coming. It was completely empty. The driver was an old friend of mine whom I hadn't seen for ages. He helped me on, and saw me seated, before he started off again. Five minutes later he drew up his bus bang outside my front door. He got down and saw me safely indoors before he went on his way. I wonder when I shall see him again to thank him for being such a wonderfully good Samaritan.

Such a simple prayer ---

A MOST FAMOUS SERIES

One of the most famous series in the Magnet has never been read by the keennest Greyfriars fan or the most avid Magnetite. It was to have been that most popular of all phenomenons, a series starring Harry Wharton. It started with "The Shadow of the Sack", and then it stopped dead - dead as a door-nail. Nobody has ever read it or has any idea how it would have developed.

Yet down the years, it has probably had more mention in the letters which make up my vast mail every month than any of the

truly great series. Last month, in our columns, Mr. Bill Lofts discussed it under the heading "You Never Read These Stories!" Our London Club every month, gets an instalment of how Mr. Leslie Rowley imagines that the series might have turned out. It is always cropping up. A non-existent series which gets lots of attention, and which will go on intriguing the fans while the hobby lasts.

As I have said before, it has always been my view that the full series was never written at all. A small chunk of it - a few chapters from what would have been "The Battle of the Beaks" - supposed to have been found in a garage - appeared in a book named "Yarooh!" some years ago. The rest is silence.

Yet this non-existent series takes its place in the hall of fame.

OASIS!

By a coincidence, quite a large number of readers have hit upon the word "oasis" to describe their favourite magazine in the letters I have received from readers in this past month.

An oasis of warmth in a cold world; an oasis of sanity in an insane world; an oasis of decency in what our world has become today.

Fed up with queueing for everything; tired of the smut and violence which makes up our environment now; weary of our clumsy currency which sags down our pockets without being worth much; sick of change for the sake of change - change which always seems for the worse.

Maybe the word "oasis" is a good one to describe our C.D. which is now in its Ruby Year. An oasis of the world we used to know when we were younger - and which seems, in so many to have been a better one than the specimen we adorn today. Or am I looking at the distant past through rose-coloured glasses?

THE EDITOR

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WANTED: "Bunter" hardbacks with D.W's. Bound volumes Magnets, Gems; Wodehouse school stories. SALE: H. Baker Magnets; C.D. Annuals; Schoolgirls' Own Annual 1923; Elsie Oxenham; E.M. Brent-Dyer books.

James Gall, 49 Anderson Avenue, ABERDEEN, Scotland. Tel. Aberdeen 0224-491716.

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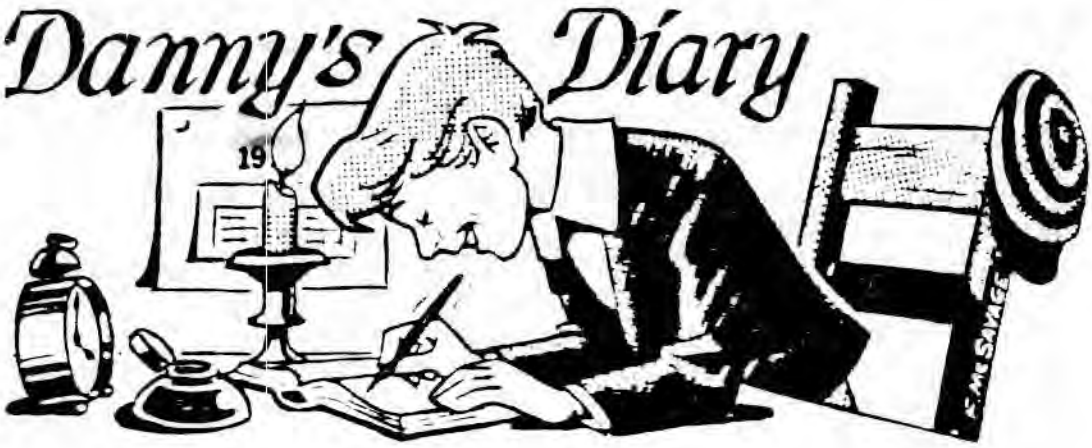
FOR SALE: Book Club out of print No. 4 "Harry Wharton & Co. in India" £16.00. In print No. 20 "Harry Wharton & Co. in Hollywood" No. 21, "The Greyfriars Film Stars". £14.00. Holiday Annual 1927, £6.00. All plus postage.

T.V. Jones, 43 Brooklands Park, Longlevens, Gloucester, GL2 0DN.



APRIL 1936

Our new King, Edward the Eighth, has inspected our new liner, the Queen Mary. It was a great occasion.

The Prime Minister has announced that the King's coronation will take place on May 12th next year. I shall look forward to that, for it will give us a day's special holiday from school.

The new series of King of the Islands has continued and come to an end this month in Modern Boy. First of the month is "Stealer of Men". Ray Paget, the scallywag whom Ken King was reforming, has run off with Dandy Peter. Now, at least, Ray Paget finds out what Dandy Peter's business is at Dutchman's Island, and it comes as a great shock to the deserter from the Dawn.

Then came the final story in the series, "Dandy Peter's Vengeance". With every stitch of canvas set, Ken King's ketch races over the Pacific to save the scallywag. So at last Ray Paget comes to his senses, and it begins to look as though Ken may make a man of Paget after all. This has been a great series, quite one of the best of Ken King. I shall miss them very much and hope it won't be long before Charles Hamilton writes another series for Modern Boy.

All month the Captain Justice stories have carried on, in Modern Boy. Opening tale is "Terror of the Atlantic". A monster man of Metal - a mighty Robot - is wrecking ships on the open sea. Captain Justice learns the reason, and leaps into action. Next came "War

of the Robots". Justice seeks out Garth Leopold and his Man Monster, but Garth strikes the first blow.

Next came "Atlantic Raider", which carries on the Metal Monster theme. Final of the month is "Prisoner of the "Iron Man". To Captain Justice there flashes a terrible message from the ocean bed. On the Captain's reply depends the life of young Midge, a captive with eighty fathoms of sea above his head.

Also in Modern Boy there is a new series of farce westerns about Horatio Hayweed. They leave me a bit cold.

Summer Time started on the 19th of the month. Always seems awfully chilly in the mornings when summer time starts. But Cambridge has won the Boat Race which pleased me, as I am a light blue supporter.

A pretty good month in the monthlies. In the Schoolboys' Own Library the story is "The Voice of the Tempter", starring "Tatters", a one-time tinker's boy who stood between a rascally relative and a fortune. It's exceptionally good. The other S.O.L. is "Chums of Toppingham" by John Lance. I don't know the author or the school, and it seems an odd choice for the S.O.L. It's about Bob Merrick & Co., the cheery chums of the Classical Fourth at Toppingham School. Seems as though the author is a bit of a copy-cat.

There is a Pierre Quiroule novel in the Sexton Blake Library. It is "The Lost Expedition" and it is great. Eaten up with fever, a solitary white man endures the last few miles of a trail through the swamps of British Guiana. In a clearing there is a rough dwelling and in it another white man waits. Later the second white man stealthily leaves the clearing, and in the hut the other man lies dead - and his killer starts off with a secret worth a fortune. Grant and Julie play prominent parts in this tip-top tale.

Another Sexton Blake Library I had this month is "Murder on the Fourth Floor" by John G. Brandon. That aristocratic world rover, the Hon. Ronald Purvale - R.S.V.P. to his pals - plays a star part in this detective yarn.

In the Boys' Friend Library there is another tale of Nelson Lee and Nipper. It is "The Eye of the Dragon" and it is by G.H. Teed. So many authors seem to be writing about Lee and Nipper these days.

A jolly good month in the local cinemas. Ralph Bellamy was in an exciting air film "Air Hawks". An exceptionally eerie evening came with Boris Karloff in "The Black Room."

One Mum and I enjoyed very much was "The Passing of the Third Floor Back" starring Conrad Veidt. It was about a Christ-like person who stayed in a lodging house, and the effect he had on the other people living there. A very sad one which Mum loved was "The Dark Angel" starring Merle Oberon and Fredric March. An officer blinded in the war tries to dismiss his fiancee without letting her know of his infirmity. A real weepie, this one.

Anna Neagle was good in a British film "Peg of Old Drury". But the best of the whole lot is Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in "Top Hat". This is a gorgeous singing and dancing musical, and I reckon it will last for ever.

One night Dad took Mum and me to the Holborn Empire, for a splendid variety bill which included Lew Stone and his Band, on a stage for most of the second half. Plus the Two Leslies (Sarony and Holmes); and Robb Wilton who was in a side-splitting sketch "The Fireman".

My brother Doug took me one night to the first house at New Cross Empire where we saw a fairish revue "Love Up the Pole" starring Ernie Lotinga.

If we go to Bournemouth this summer we shall find a change, and rather a sad one. The trams there have been scrapped this month and replaced with trolleybuses.

In the Magnet the month opened with "The Millionaire Stowaway" The Greyfriars chums' trip to Brazil is over, and they are preparing to sail for home. They make the acquaintance of an American boy, Putnam van Duck. His father is a millionaire who fears that his son may be kidnapped by gangsters. In fact, one gangster already on the scent is Chick Chew who is said to have made millions of dollars out of the kidnapping business. Putnam's popper has employed another type of gangster, Poker Pike, to keep an eye on Putnam, much to Putnam's annoyance. And Putnam stows away on the liner which is bringing the Greyfriars chums back to England. At the end of the story we say goodbye to Putnam van Duck, but it is clear we are going to meet him again in the future.

Back at Greyfriars, in the month's second Magnet entitled "His Record Condemned Him!" we resume the Eric Wilmot series which was so amazingly interrupted by the trip to Brazil. Mr. Prout has lost a ten-pound note, and suspicion falls on Wilmot who was expelled from his previous school. Actually there was no theft. It was all a muddle caused by that ass Coker.

Then we come to the final story in the Wilmot series, and it

is entitled "Not Wanted at Greyfriars!" A chap named Crawley turns up from Topham School, bent on making Wilmot pay a price for Crawley keeping a miserable secret. At the end, Wilmot is cleared of the charge of theft for which he had been expelled from Topham, and is able to go back to his former school.

Finally comes "His Gunman Guardian" when, as expected, Putnam van Duck turns up again. Van Duck, dodging Poker Pike, who is employed to guard him, turns up at Greyfriars as a new boy - with Pike installed to keep an eye on him. It is breezily written but a bit far-fetched.

A new Agatha Christie play has opened at the New Theatre in the West End of London. It is called "Love From a Stranger", and it is written by Frank Vosper from a short story by Mrs. Christie It is reported to be beautifully done, and Frank Vosper and Marie Ney head the cast. The last act is so tense and thrilling that several people fainted from fright on the opening night. Doug has said that if I behave myself during the next week or two he will take me to see it.

First Gem of the month is "Figgy's Grand Circus". It is the birthday of Taggles, the porter, and Figgins has the idea of giving him a "benefit" concert. They even engage Billy Bunter of Greyfriars as a ventriloquist.

Then came "Clue to a Fortune." Tom Merry, out scouting in Rylcombe Woods helps a fugitive Italian to outwit his deadly enemies, and Tom becomes possessed of a document which holds the clue to a fortune. Next week comes the cover-to-cover sequel "The Treasure of Santa Maria", with the St. Jim's chums visiting the Grand Lagoon of Venice to seek that fortune and save it from the villains. A rattling good pair of stories which I have enjoyed muchly.

Then another tip-top tale, "Tom Merry's Big Fight". The star turn at the Wayland Empire was Tiny Tim, a boxer, who did Tom a service. And when, one night, Tiny Tim is unable to appear at the theatre, Tom Merry takes his place in the boxing act. One good turn deserved another.

The Rookwood series has ended in the Gem. First of the month was "The Black Sheep's Secret". Leggett is the black sheep who learns a secret, concerning Slog Poggers - a secret worth £50. The following week brought "Lucky Lovell", the final tale about Slog Poggers.

In the final week of the month, Rookwood is replaced by "The Making of Harry Wharton" which tells how Wharton arrived at Greyfriars, and is the first Magnet story of them all serialised.

NOTES ON THIS MONTH'S "DANNY'S DIARY"

S.O.L. No. 265 "The Voice of the Tempter" comprised the three middle stories from the 9-story "Tatters" series of the Magnet of early 1931. Whence came "Chums of Toppingham", S.O.L. No. 266, I have no idea. It may have been an original story, but it had possibly been a serial in one of the non-Hamilton papers. It seemed an odd choice for the S.O.L. The writer, John Lance, is also beyond my ken.

The 1936 Pierre Quiroule story, "The Lost Expedition", had previously appeared in the S.B.L. in the autumn of 1923, under the same title. We reproduced the 1923 cover of this novel in the January Blakiana.

"Figgy's Grand Circus" of the April 1936 Gem had been "Taggle's Benefit", a better title, in the summer of 1913. "Clue to a fortune" and "The Treasure of Santa Maria" had been "Tom Merry's Discovery" and "The St. Jim's Adventurers" a little earlier in 1913. Two very fine stories which would have been extended into a long series in later years. The setting of Venice novel, and there is little doubt that Hamilton was writing from personal experience of that city.

"Tom Merry's Big Fight" of 1936 had been "Schoolboy and Gentleman Boxer" - an odd title - in mid-1913.

"Love From a Stranger", which opened at the New Theatre in April, 1936, was the dramatisation of Agatha Christie's brilliant short story from "The Listerdale Mystery" collection. Frank Vosper, who adapted it, kept very close to the original, and it ran for many months with considerable success. It was made into a film the following year. The play has been a great favourite with Rep companies ever since. Frank Vosper, who appeared in the play as one of the two leading stars, mysteriously disappeared from an oceanliner, in 1937, and it is generally believed that he committed suicide over a love affair.

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FOR SALE: More Gems (and getting toward the end of them): 1001-1003; 1005-1006; 1008-1011; 1013; 1023; 1028; 1031; 1037; 1050-1051; 1055; 1063; 1065; 1073-1080; 1082-1083; 1085-1107; 1109-1110; 1112-1114; 1116-1117; 1119; 1123-1131; 1133-1135-1137-1145: all at 80p each plus postage. Gems Nos. 1061, 1657: 25p each plus postage. S.O.L. No. 396 "Petticoat Rule at St. Frank's: nice copy £1.00 plus postage. "Penny Pictorial" Oct. 1903) nice copy £1.50 plus postage; Marvels 267, 268313 (late 1909) £1 each plus postage; 186 (1907) £1 plus post) Boys' Cinema 362; 364 (1926) £1 each plus postage) Boys' Herald 90, 91 (1921) £1.00 each plus postage.

Write ERIC FAYNE. (No reply if items already sold)

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TWO POUNDS each offered for the following Rookwood S.O.L.'s: 262; 272; 278; 284.

P. Hanger, 10 Park Square, Kings Heath, Northampton.

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FOR SALE: Nelson Lee Library. O/S and N/S. Approx. 400 copies. Few other duplicate O.B.B.s. Would exchange for Sexton Blake material pre 1945. Ken Townsend. 7 North Close, Willington, Derby. DE6 6EA.

DEATH OF BARRY PEROWNE

Mr. Ernest Holman has sent us the following obituary notice which appeared in the March issue of Wisden Cricket Monthly".

Barry Perowne (ne Philip Atkey) - Dec 24, in Marbella aged 77. Author and playwright. In 1932 began writing Raffles stories in the style of creator E. W. Hornung - collected in books Raffles Revisited (1974), Raffles of the Albany (1976), and Raffles of the MCC (1979), all cricket-flavoured tales of the gentleman burglar. Perowne played for Somerset Stragglers.

Barry Perowne wrote about a dozen Raffles tales for the Thriller. Later he contributed four stories in the Sexton Blake Library. They were SBL 577 "Raffles versus Sexton Blake"; SBL 601 "Raffles' Crime in Gibraltar"; SBL 669 "The ARP Mystery"; and "Scuttlers' Cache" in the first edition of the Sexton Blake Annual.

Our recollection is that these novels were exceptionally good, and especially the first one "Raffles versus Sexton Blake".

LOTS IN A NAME

By Ernest Holman

One great advantage given to the stories of Sexton Blake was the fact that, with many different writers, character names could be given a wide range. Not only wide but intriguing.

Not for these stories the Lagdens, Poynings, Rackstraws, etc. from the school yarns; I nearly added Mr. Nemo but reference reveals that just such a worthy provided Blake with his bloodhound, Pedro.

Most of these names were, of course, of a criminal turn of mind. Assorted types, they were, too; never lost for a spectacular crime, even if it eventually identified them by individual trade marks.

The vast majority of these characters came from other shores. The High Aristocracy produced Baron von Kravitch, Prince Menes, King Karl of Serbovia; the Learned members included Drs. Ferraro and Satira, Professor Kew. A larger, more general group, offered the reader such a fascinating personalities as Paul Cynos, Felix Dupont Krock Kelk, Leon Kestrel, George Marsden Plummer, Huxton Rymer - plus the singles of Waldo and Zenith.

Gangs were in abundance, under such descriptions as Brotherhood of Silence, Criminals' Confederation, Black Trinty, Council of Eleven, Double Four, Yellow Beetle. Additional identifications to some already mentioned crooks were Scotland Yard Renegade, Master Mummer, Wonder Man, Albino. There was also a mysterious Mr. Mist.

If the ladies have been left until now, it is certainly not because they are classed under the heading 'least'. Far from it, these adventuresses; they contained such adversaries as Vali Mata Vali, Yvonne, Olga Nasmyth, June Severance, Mary Trent and even a Miss Death. They were often a stumbling block to the detective and, at times, to their own partners. One must not, of course, leave out the 'sultry' business of Roxane!

On the 'right' side of the fence, remembrance must be given to Inspector Coutts and the early Jules Gervaise; not overlooking the Fleet Street stalwarts, Julius Jones and Splash Page.

Even the 'factuals' cropped up. Kaiser Wilhelm more than once; Emperor Franz Joseph was once mentioned in a 'coup'; some of the Governments of the day. Like his Baker Street neighbour, Blake declined the offer of an Honour.

When the Union Jack inset for the forthcoming issue was seen, there was always at least one interesting name to wet the reader's appetite.

THE FRECKLED HANDS

by John Bridgwater

When two stories have very similar titles it is interesting to compare them and see how the two authors approach the subject. The two Freckled Hands are:-

1. "The Clue of the Freckled Hand" by Paul Herring in ½d Union Jack No. 420 of 10.5.1902.
2. "The Freckled Hand" by Peter Todd (Charles Hamilton) in The Greyfriars Herald No. 4 of 11.12.1915.

Remembering "The Speckled Band" adventure of Sherlock Holmes the title "The Freckled Hand" seems very appropriate for a Herlock Sholmes parody but to find it as the title of a Sexton Blake story

a mere ten years after "The Speckled Band" appeared in the Strand Magazine one wonders if there may be a similar connection, but surely Blake would never be associated with a parody? Upon investigation it is found that the only thing the Holmes and Blake stories have in common is a doctor, both doctors are, incidentally, poisoned but in quite different ways.

The freckles themselves are as different as the stories. Those in "The Freckled Hand" are quite normal ones on the hands of the murderer, Dr. Grimsey Pilott. The freckles in "The Clue of the Freckled Hand" are grey spots on the hands of the murder victims where the poison was injected. "... a small grey speck exactly like the freckles of a sunny complextion sometimes exhibits", to quote Paul Herring. Grey ? On a sunny complexion ? May be in the Munster family.
(Remember Fred of the Funeral Parlour ?)

Whilst Hamilton's parody is pretty straightforward, following the original story reasonably closely, the Herring tale has a dash of the fluid Si-fi about it having a newly invented poison which leaves no trace beyond the grey freckle showing where it was injected and a potion made to a Gipsy formula which enables a person to completely change his facial appearance so that he may exactly resemble any person he chooses. A few drops of it and the criminal, called The Human Mask, looks exactly like the doctor who invented the new poison. A few more drops and he is Sexton Blake to the life. Dr. Jekyll ought to have consulted the Gypsies before embarking on his Hyde producing experiments. He would have found their prescription much more effective and practically painless.

"The Speckled Band" story is much too well known to require further repetition. (If you do not know it I strongly recommend you read this excellent tale at once).

"The Clue of the Freckled Hand" starts off with a doctor who has accidentally poisoned himself with his newly invented poison (which leaves no trace beyond the freckle) meeting the Human Mask, telling him who he is and that he is dying of poison. The Mask gives him a teaspoonful of his face changing fluid leaving the dead man urecognisable. The Mask takes the doctors place and proceeds to poison his rich patients after forging cheques for large amounts in their names. Blake is called in to investigate a case of burglary and forgery involving The Mask. After many incidents and investigations Blake finally discovers the meaning of the grey freckles almost getting one himself from a poisoned

ring in the process. Finally when he is on his way to arrest The Mask the criminal commits suicide. An ingenious and interesting story, worth reading if you can find a copy, but on the whole I think I enjoyed Hamilton's story best.

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ALWAYS THE BRIDESMAID - BUT NEVER THE BRIDE?

Part 1

By W.O.G. Lofts

I never read Nelson Lee as a boy, the reason being that the Library finished in 1933, some months before I had ever started to read boys papers. True that some St. Frank's serials continued in The Gem, whilst reprinted series appeared in the monthly School-boys Own Library up to 1940. By this time I had become hooked on the same publishers Greyfriars in The Magnet. Boys can be extremely loyal to their own favourite school, and I was really proud to be a member of the Remove for the low school fees of twopence a week'

At the same time I have always been interested in the character of Nelson Lee, and the history of the whole saga. In my opinion and over the years, I have long reached the conclusion that Nelson Lee and St. Frank's followers have been unfortunate in many ways in having to play second fiddle to even greater characters. Over-shadowed by the great rival Sexton Blake detective, or else the Hamilton schools of Greyfriars/St. Jim's/ and Rookwood. Hence my rather unusual or perhaps apt title, and in the forthcoming series of articles I hope to present plenty of new facts on the subject for the interest, I hope of all readers.

Nelson Lee was created by a Sheffield - Yorkshire doctor by the name of John William Staniforth, when he first appeared in the Halfpenny Marvel No. 46 dated 18th September, 1894. The hero

was coined by joining the surnames of two of his correspondents - a Mr. Nelson and a Mr. Lee. Probably also his subconscious mind had reminded him of two very famous people of that period of the same name. The first Nelson Lee was an Indian Scout who won fame for his bravery whilst being tortured at the stake, and the second was a writer who had won praise from Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert and from the Prince of Wales. The story - and incidently, all his boys stories were written under the nom-de-plume of 'Maxwell Scott', the names orginating from his wife's maiden name, and the name of a former friend who had recently died - a Mr. Scott.

'Maxwell Scott' was a most conscientious writer as regards quoting true facts in his stories, for he would write away for guide books, street directories, steamship timetables, as well as having the latest Bradshaw Railway Guide by him to get the train times correct.

Sexton Blake on the other hand had appeared some forty issues earlier in No. 6 of the Halfpenny Marvel, so always had some sort of seniority. But to counteract this there was a considerable difference in the merit of the stories, as well as several other factors of which the main one was that the character was 'Maxwell Scott's exclusive copyright, so consequently he wrote all the stories with not only a very high standard, but with a sort of continunity as well.

Sexton Blake on the other hand was being written by a variety of writers, none of whom was anywhere near 'Maxwell Scott's standard. Even the original writer Harry Blyth was probably a far better crime reporter than he was at writing boys literature!

"SKELETONS ARE SKELETONS FOR ALL THAT"

by William Lister

Skeletons came into their own only on special occasions, such as when you are on a desert island digging for the pirate's buried gold. Other places are, while bull-dozing on an estate which usually leads, if successful, to a police investigation. The odd skeleton has been known to turn up in old buildings, cupboards, trunks or under a concrete floor kitchen. One was found down a disused well. Have a look around, you too may be lucky!

The cinema lends a hand to fulfill our desire for skeletons. Way back in my teenage days; days of the silent films, I went to see "The Cat and the Canary". The seats were well filled; the manager took the stage explaining it was not for the nervous.

The theatre was plunged into complete darkness.

The audience gasped as the doors on each side and in the rear, dramaticly swung open and from each door walked a skeleton, eight in all. The skeletons took the stage amid gasps of amazement, squeals of excitement and a little nervous laughter; the lights come on. A successful play to boost the film. The men in black tights and luminous paint, very effective.

Most writers of ghost and thrillers know the value of having a skeleton supporting the character. Edwy Searles Brooks also.

E.S.B. could always produce one when needed and he needed one for "The Mystery of St. Frank's No. 282 of the Schoolboys' Own Library.

The college buildings of St. Frank's had been damaged by fire. So for the purpose of this tale, some of the St. Frank's boys are to be found in a hired building in London, a stone's throw from Holborn.

It is in this building our skeleton appears. This is a haunting story, but a story without the background of the Festive Season. There is no snow, no fog, no Christmas puddings and no Holly or mistletoe. However, there are passages in which the haunting thrills of Christmas are more than equalled.

Allow me to quote, in the words of Edwy Searles Brooks, one or two brief passages.

"Teddy Long stood stock still, frozen to the spot. Right in ront of him about ten yards off, something was moving. Teddy gazed at it with his tongue clearing to the roof of his mouth, his hair bristling upon his head. After one horrible moment something took shape. At first it had been a mere haze against the blackness. But then it changed its character. The haze disappeared - or rather it took on a definite shape.

Instead of a haze, Teddy saw an object which brought a gasp of absolute terror from his parched throat. It was a skeleton, and it was moving towards him slowly and deliberately. And then, at the last second Teddy long recovered the use of his limbs."

And there's more' Handforth sets off to prove there is no skeleton.

"The next second, the door burst open and Handforth appeared. His face was white his eyes were staring. "I saw it' I saw something out there - a filmy kind of skeleton."

Teddy Lone had seen it, the doubting Handforth had seen it, and now Nipper investigates. "As I stared down the passage, I saw something moving in the darkness, the outline of a human skeleton

became apparent".

Hold tight, dear readers, there's more.

"I was expecting midnight to chime out at any moment, when I heard a slight sound. I had my hand on Nelson Lee's arm, I felt him grow rigid. A faint creak, and then down the passage we saw something moving. As it drew nearer we saw the outline of a grotesque-looking skeleton."

Well, readers, believe it or not that's four top characters that have seen that skeleton, and don't forget Edwy Searles Brooks describes it as grotesque. So it must have been a horrible sight. Personally, I should think any skeleton, grotesque or not, walking towards me as the clock struck midnight would be a horrible sight, and I would find the use of my limbs in spite of my suffering from gout.

Could Nelson Lee and Nipper be mistakes? Could Handforth and Teddy Long have eyes that deceived them?

Could the other St. Frank's boys who claim to have seen it, be wrong?

Read 'Schoolboys Own No. 2 by E.S.B. when all will be revealed.

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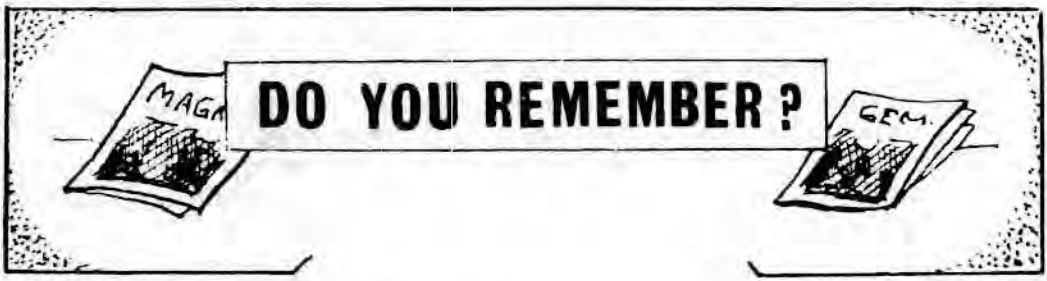

No. 23 - Magnets 997 - 1004 - Dallas series

by Roger M. Jenkins

The Magnets of the late nineteen-twenties are a never-ending source of pleasure to read. They portray the rising powers of a gifted writer who was yet to achieve his finest work but whose abilities, particularly in the interplay of one character upon another, were already at their highest pitch. The Dallas series was just one part of the developing saga of Vernon-Smith, whose nickname the Bounder had never been so completely justified before.

Paul Dallas was the son of a man who had once rendered Mr. Vernon-Smith a financial service in years gone by. Mr. Dallas

was thought to have perished in a foreign jungle, and the millionaire found Paul in a charity school (whatever that might have been in the twenties) and sent him to Greyfriars. The Bounder was furious because he regarded Dallas as an interloper whose intention was to supplant him in his father's affections and finances. The stubborn arguments between father and son were never better exemplified than in No. 1000 when the Bounder refused to go home for the vacation if Dallas were there, and Mr. Vernon-Smith went off with Dallas, leaving his own son to spend the Easter at School.

Like all series of this time, there was no sense of repetition: each development opened up something completely fresh. In the beginning, the Bounder's enmity towards Dallas was open and ineffective, but as time went on he resorted to underhand methods, the most striking of which were in Nos. 1001-2, when Dallas's expulsion was engineered by Vernon-Smith by the end of the first number, and his re-instatement ensured by Ferrers Locke (a chance visitor to Greyfriars) in the second. Gradually, the Bounder's teeth were drawn by Ferrers Locke, Mr. Vernon-Smith, and Mr. Quelch, until he was reduced to impotent rage and hatred towards his foster brother who, for the sake of the plot, was an eminent sportsman and also a boxer, after coaching by Bob Cherry. The whole series was written with such great power and assurance that it draws the reader on with ineluctable fascination.

Of course, Redwing was caught up in this situation. He was perspicacious enough to point out to Vernon-Smith that he hated Dallas just because his father wanted them to be on friendly terms, and that if the millionaire had approved of the sailor's son, Vernon-Smith would not have wanted Redwing as a pal. The climax came in No. 1000 when the Bounder unjustly suspected Redwing of having betrayed him, and taunted him with the fact that the very scholarship he held had been founded by Mr. Vernon-Smith at his son's request, so that Redwing would win it - a reference to events of a previous decade. It was at this point that Redwing left Greyfriars for some time, and did not return until he could pay his own way, leaving Skinner as the Bounder's study-mate again. No. 1000 is noteworthy for another reason, since it was an important anniversary number, with reproductions of advertisements for the first Magent and penny Gem, and it also contained a long message from the real Frank Richards, the only time he ever wrote directly to the readers. The editor wrote a companion piece, looking forward to the two-thousandth issue of the Magnet but that, alas, was not to be.

DOMESTIC STAFF AT GREYFRIARS

by Edward Baldock

One hears very little of the comparatively unsung legion of domestics at Greyfriars. To maintain, clean, feed and generally attend to the welfare of such an establishment their number must be considerable. Kitchen staff, dormitory staff, cleaning staff, nursing complement etc. Largely annoymous, we may be sure that they are always actively pursuing their various duties unceasingly. We are not sure whether Greyfriars' fellows are responsible for the cleaning of their studies, although it may be presumed that at some point there must be the desirability of the feminine touch if a reasonable standard of cleanliness is to be maintained. The exact length of the many passages and landings have, I believe, never been computed. The various form rooms present quite a formidable cleaning problem. Shuffling feet, chalk and book dust all perpetually adding their quota to the daily task of an ever-active domestic staff. Fellows are hurled into unsalubrious ditches and ponds, are immersed in slime and weeds and crawl forth in what can only be described as a shocking condition. Who repairs the damage and effects the transformation to a civilized state once more? Brimming ink bottles are thrown, fearful mixtures are concocted from gum, soot, ashes etc. for the anointing of unfortunate victims. Imagine their state after such attentions. It presents a major task of reformation and cleaning for someone. Feathers fly from burst pillows in Homeric battles in the dormitories, the resultant chaos may be imagined; here is work indeed for a disciplined and faithful domestic force. One is reminded somewhat forcibly of this when, as not infrequently happens, a study has been shipped. It is then that one ponders: who repairs the damage? Who reverses the resultant chaotic aftermath?

Visualise, for instance, the second and third form day-rooms at the end of a wet and therefore muddy day. Although confined mostly within doors by the weather, there are sure to be hurried excursions out into the elements to the tuckshop and to other quite unnecessary places, all of which will bring within doors its complement of mud and dirt which will be distributed piecemeal. When one views life from such angles as these, it begins to assume formidable proportions indeed. Thus does the domestic staff of any great establishment present fascinating possibilities, that of a public school such as Greyfriars must have an added attraction for the researcher particularly as so little is recorded of them.

One reads occasionally of a maid called Mary, addressed by Mr. Quelch in moments of stress, e.g. when the vacuum cleaner is humming its loudest in Masters' passage, as 'My good girl'. She comes under the jurisdiction of Mrs. Kebble, head of the cleaning staff.

Trotter the page, something of an institution at the school, is frequently brought to the fore. A cheerful and obliging young fellow who probably knows rather more about the unofficial activities of the Junior school than may be imagined by his superiors.

Assuming that Trotter 'lives in', it would be interesting and revealing to examine the recesses in his sanctum where we would, no doubt, find a fairly liberal mass of Sexton Blakes, Dixon Hawkes and Boys' Friends together with a goodly sample of similar literature covering the whole spectrum of the boys' world. A wide-awake young fellow, Trotter performs his domestic functions against an extremely colourful background. His personal remininscences would, I think, prove most amusing and instructive to any future historian of Greyfriars.

Gosling, the Greyfriars' porter, is part of the bricks and mortar of the establishment; of indeterminate age, he is a crusty old fellow whose charge of the lodge and gates has been paramount beyond the memory of most of the other inmates of the school. Collected in his grizled old head are the memories and experiences of generations of boys. A wily and ancient character whose palm, with sufficient 'oiling', is able to smooth the way of transgressor and decent fellow alike.

The next time we visit Greyfriars it would perhaps be revealing as we pass through the old gateway, to give rather more than a cursory glance at the lodge, home and headquarters of the incorrigible Gosling and note the gleaming, polished windows and the immaculate, neat curtains - (is there a Mrs. Gosling?) - appearances would certainly suggest so, difficult though it may be to visualise a young, romantic, even an amorous Gosling somewhere far back in time - but who knows? If this be the case, almost of necessity would our sympathies be extended to her for having taken unto herself - unwittingly we must assume - what has proved to be surely one of the offspring of the original 'origin of the species'. It is an intriguing idea with which to conjure.

Passing on, eventually one comes to that hallowed piece of turf known to posterity as the 'Sixth Form Green' - (woe betide any lesser mortals should they have the temerity to transgree, even by a toe, upon this sacred area). It is not without constant attention,

and in season, with repeated cutting and edging that such perfection is achieved and maintained. By whom? Mr. Mimble, an ordinary, faithful old fellow, with but one pair of hands, surely cannot spare the time needed for such perfection. No, other hands, skilled in the arts of lawn culture, are evident. This also applies to the not inconsiderable number of neatly clipped hedges in the Head's garden, not to mention the flower beds and borders. His wife, Mrs. Mimble, a very popular figure with the whole school, presides over the destinies of the tuck-shop. She is held in special veneration by William George Bunter, even though she is adamant in matters of credit, and by certain other fellows whose predilictions for pastries and gaseous drinks are somewhat in excess of wise.

Then further afield stretching away, shimmering in the summer heat or conversely shrouded in autumn mist and damp, the scene of so many Homeric battles, are the level green expanses of Big and Little Side; both in immaculate condition, a herculean task by any standard to maintain. In the background, although seldom mentioned must surely be a professional groundsman, probably with several assistants.

Returning to the school buildings, stand a moment and attempt to compute the number of windows: study windows, form room windows, leisure room and masters' study windows, all gleaming and flashing back the rays of the evening sun, all obviously spotlessly clean and polished. Another somewhat daunting task. The 'men' I imagine do not clean their own study windows - no - it presupposes an unseen legion of busy workers, largely unsung. As Mr. Quelch would probably have said: 'Hic labor, hoc opus est.'

It is only when one begins to scrutinise more closely and to wonder a little beyond the average that these points intrude themselves upon one's attention. With a small effort of imagination one may see that loyal army of domestic and other workers silently plying their respective crafts indoors and out throughout the year and throughout the ensuing years. Performing their allotted tasks yet playing a very insignificant role in the central theme of the Greyfriars' story. They are nevertheless essential appendages, without which the old school would not remain in our minds the dear place that it is. I feel that they, whomsoever they may be, should enjoy a shaft or so of reflected glory once in a while.

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Sherlock Holmes Commentary, fascinating detailed notes on all the cases. Mint in dustwrapper, signed and dedicated by author. £3 and £1 postage. Roots, 48 Shalmarsh, Higher Bebington, Wirral, Cheshire.

REVIEWS

VERNON-SMITH AT LARGE

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker Book Club Special: £18)

This gorgeous volume contains 6 consecutive Red Magnets from the autumn of the year 1913. The stories themselves cannot be faulted from any angle, containing some of Frank Richard's most outstanding work of the Red Cover period, while production, as always, is up to the unfailing high standard of these remarkable books.

The opening two stories in the book are among the finest "Bounder" tales ever written. Boys breaking bounds and rules, to travel to distant schools to play in football matches which have been forbidden to them, became a familiar

theme as the years passed, but this pair was possibly the first on the theme and certainly the best.

The sequel, with the Bounder expelled for his escapades, is strikingly compulsive reading. He disappears and turns up hiding in the ruined tower. The Chapman picture, in which he rescues Mr. Quelch in the thrilling finale, is a fine one, very famous in its day and reprinted on several occasions.

At this time Chapman was giving the finest work of his entire career, and he was clearly still basing his drawings, with great advantage, on the work of Arthur Clarke. A picture, in the opening story, is one of those unlikely affairs which provided amusement for the more critical among us. Here we have Mr. Quelch, at Courtfield Junction, yanking Vernon-Smith from the train. Mr. Quelch is in full scholastic armour - cap and gown - which would be most unlikely at Courtfield Junction - while the footballers are apparently travelling wearing their football kits, most unlikely for a lengthy journey in late October by train.

In contrast to the stark drama of the opening tales, the next one in the volume is all fun and games. "The Greyfriars Gold-Diggers" does not carry the same meaning as the term was to have a couple of decades later in the famous Warner musicals in the cinema. When fortune smiles on the Greyfriars gold seekers, it is the gentle Alonzo Todd who is the fortunate one - and, in typical Alonzo style of the period, he hands his little fortune to the Society for Providing Tracts and Trousers for the South Sea Islanders.

Next comes "The Coker Cup", a stereotyped footer tale with Coker supplying a handsome silver cup for competition. It runs the full gamut of Cokerisms.

"Cast Up by the Sea" is drama again, dealing with the unceremonious arrival of Cholmondeley, a new boy from India, and the mystery which surrounds him, after the best Frank Richards style.

"The Biter Bit" is a delight, starring the inimitable Fisher T. Fish, and the interest the Yankee junior has in the love affairs of "Mossoo". A smashing bit of fun to wind up an outstanding volume.

With Reference to W.E. JOHNS. (Compiled by Clinton K. Stacey: CBS Books £10)

Reviewed by Jack Adrian

This book is, in the words of its producer Clinton K. Stacey, "essential to the collector of W.E. John's works, to catalogue collections and authenticate editions" -- and here I must declare an interest. Since 1982, Peter Ellis, co-author of the Johns biography By Jove, Biggles (recently paperbacked, incidentally), and I have been steadily compiling a full-scale Johns bibliography Peter has mainly been tracking down original serialisations of Johns' work in newspapers, magazines and Annuals, while I have been concentrating on identifying and defining First Editions.

Four years may seem more than enough time to complete such a project but Johns presents huge -- and, it has to be said, fascinating -- problems to the researcher. Because his own records were chaotic and a good deal of his work

was done pseudonymously or anonymously, often for cash across the table, much of his early magazine and newspaper appearances can be tracked down by following often only the faintest of blazes through the well-nigh impenetrable jungles of the British Library or the Bodleian.

The books themselves ought to present fewer difficulties, but, as I've discovered, identifying the true 1st Edition of many of Johns' works is by no means easy. His publishers -- John Hamilton, Newnes, the OUP, Hodder and Stoughton -- cranked the handle on Johns with no thought that in 40 or 50 years' time collectors would be in hot pursuit of his books, and the establishment of what did or did not constitute a 1st Edition was low on their list of priorities.

Bibliography is an exact, and exacting, discipline; accuracy is all. And to achieve any degree of accuracy the bibliographer cannot operate in a vacuum. In his pursuit of his author he must make himself aware of a whole range of topics beyond his own immediate concern: books as books, publishing practices, printers' habits, editorial house styles. Only when he has grasped that such things exist in the first place can be begin to start to make sense of the complexities inevitably involved in pinning down the canon of a high-output author such as W.E. Johns.

How, then, does Clinton K. Stacey fare in the research stakes? Not, it has to be said, at all well. In his Introduction he states that it has taken "several years to unravel the facts in this book", but since most of these facts are lifted wholesale from By Jove, Biggles one can only assume he is a slow reader. Certainly, there is no evidence that he has undertaken research of any kind, major or minor. Time and again we are told that items are "untraceable", that information "has proved extremely difficult to gather". And yet the information he seeks concerning, for instance, Johns' appearances in newspapers, comics and magazines is all readily available, either on microfilm or in bound volumes, at the British Newspaper Library at Colindale. The books, too, are held by many of the country's copyright depositories.

In his interminable pages of lists Clinton K. Stacey notes title, when published, publisher, page-count, illustrations and price. But the one fundamental item missing is an exact description of the books themselves -- cloth-coloured, and whether variants exist; cover illustrations, if any; whether it is stamped in gilt or black; the book's collation; whether the number of titles on the author's list is significant or not; and so on -- without which it is virtually impossible to identify a 1st Edition, whether pre-War or post-War.

What strikes one forcibly are the errors that abound in this work, some of them verging on the ludicrous. Clinton K. Stacey believes that the Boys' Friend Library is a "very scarce" series of booklets (it isn't); that "2/3 new titles" were issued monthly (no, four new titles per month were issued regularly from 1922 to 1940); and that four Biggles titles only were published (there were eight). He is under the strange delusion that the Amalgamated Press was under the "leadership" of P.M. Haydon (he was simply a controlling editor) and that "little is known" of the publisher Max Parrish (who would doubtless have been rather miffed at this intelligence).

He says that "The Camels Are Coming" was first published at 3/6d (7/6d); that the price of the Mellifont "Mossyface" is "untraceable" (3d); that the dust-jacket for "The Spy Flyers" shows "2 planes over the sea" (five planes over fields);

that the Biggles serial "Storm Troop of the Baltic Skies" was "never completed" in "The Thriller" (it ended in the final issue, No. 589); that only one Johns serial appeared in Gem (there were two); that "it isn't certain" that the three non-series stories in "Comrades In Arms" were by Johns (this is sheer nonsense).

W.E. Johns is now a much-collected author whose 1st Editions have attracted the attentions (like it or not) of the kind of dealers to whom pricing a book at under a tenner is hardly worth the effort. Thus it is essential that a bibliography should be accurate to the last detail and contain an abundance of hard bibliographical information.

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MIDLAND

The bitter weather hit our attendance and only 6 brave souls turned up. It scarcely seemed worth while to have a meeting, but we decided to carry on. At least it was warm and cosy in our room at Dr. Johnson's House.

Refreshments were provided by Betty Hopton, who had travelled all the way from Burton on such a night. A really fine gesture.

The chairman was your correspondent and he provided a 15-answer quiz which was won by Ivan Webster. There followed a reading from the Brander series, Magnet 1171, in which Coker is savagely caned by Meyer Brander and Blundell humiliated. This was surely one of Charles Hamilton's finest series.

A game I devised followed, "Take a Number". Hamilton characters with each letter having a number on it. The aim is to be the first in getting the name with very few numbers used up. David Packwood and Ivan Webster tied for first place.

It was now only about 8.40, but we decided to call it a day, and went out to face the bitter cold. Our next meeting is on the 29th April. Good wishes to all Old Boys' Book Clubs everywhere.

JACK BELLFIELD (Correspondent.)

LONDON

There was another good attendance at the March meeting at the Ealing venue. With the local associations of Frank Richards, it was appropriate that Roger Jenkins read the only message that Frank Richards wrote for the correspondence columns of the Magnet. This appeared in the 1,000th issue.

Leslie Rowley read another instalment from his account as to how the four unpublished Magnets may have been written. This passage was an amusing account of Paul Prout. Then it was the turn of another eminent Hamiltonian, Arthur Bruning, to elucidate on the Samways book "The Road to Greyfriars." He spoke of Samway writing the St. Sam's stories and the short poems. At the end of the discourse, a lively debate took place with opinions expressed by Roger Jenkins, Maurice Hall, Graham Bruton to name a few. Generous applause was accorded to Arthur at the conclusion of the debate.

Eric Lawrence was presented with the Mastermind scroll that Leslie Rowley has so ably written in his very good Gothic writing.

Eric Lawrence won the Nelson Lee quiz that Bill Bradford conducted.

After the tea interval a toast was drunk to celebrate the 400th issue of the club's newsletter. A vote of thanks was accorded to the secretary.

Next meeting will be on Sunday, 13th April at the Bisley residence of Roy Parsons. As a full tea will be provided, kindly inform the host if intending to be present. Brookwood 80059 is the telephone number to ring.

BEN WHITER

NORTHERN

Meeting held: Saturday, 8th March, 1986

We had nine present on a fine, spring-like evening (a contrast to the past two months).

Keith showed an intriguing item to the Club - an old copy of the Northern Club's Library Catalogue, a copy of which most members had not seen before. This encouraged us to review our library and to produce a new edition.

Copies of the new books A BEAR'S LIFE (Rupert) and THE MAN WHO DREW TOMORROW (the life of Frank Hampson, the Dan Dare artist) were on show. Both books excellently produced. Also, some original art work from the front cover of a Sexton Blake

Library caused some interest.

Our main item, was a discourse betwen Keith Smith and Geoffrey Good - THE ORWELL/HAMILTON DEBATE. Although all our members knew about the Orwell essay and Hamilton's reply, no one present had been able to read the original work of Orwell. Keith read excerpts from the essay. The essay itself is regarded by many as an expert piece of work. Frank Richards' reply in HORIZON was discussed - and then the further comments of F.R. in THE SATURDAY BOOK a few years later, as Orwell did not reply to F.R's original response. This time Orwell did reply; and can be seen as a climb down in THE GUARDIAN. It was agreed, that Orwell did have some points and although we agreed with F.R., he was a little bit "naughty" or at least, mischievous in some of his comments. The essay of Orwell is often a study piece for students: regrettably, Charles Hamilton's reply which is of equal merit, is often not acknowledged.

Margaret Atkinson presented one of her meticulously prepared riddle-me-rees and it was obvious that a great deal of preparation had been made. Tom Dutton was the name of the Remove boy featured.

Our next meeting is April 12th and will be our A.G.M.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

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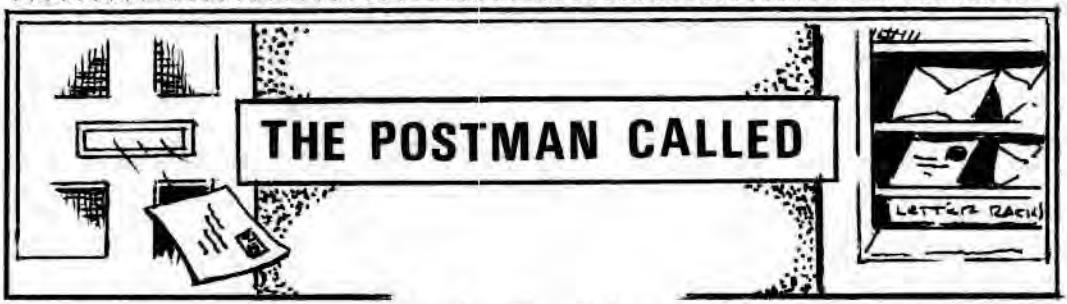

TERRY V. JONES (Longlevens) The February C.D. is a real winner. How delightful it is to read its gentle articles amidst the terrible world I exist in as do we all. A real escape from the evil Godless Society around us. I'm back in my childhood every time I open another new issue. It's a wonderful tonic for me.

HARRY PEMBERTON (Manchester) Your comments on Agatha Christie in the February editorial prompted me to mention an odd coincidence at the beginning of the year. I had started reading A.E.W. Mason's "The Prisoner in the Opal", a detective story.

About the same time the B.B.C. put on a radio serial of Agatha Christie's "Mystery of the Blue Train". I noticed that both stories were practically the same - the theme, characters (though different names). Having both books in my possession I looked up the publication dates - both the same 1928, so I couldn't see either author being guilty of plagiarism. The twist in the tail, from my point of view, was that one of the murderers in the Christie tale was a lady by the name of Mason. I haven't read the Christie story yet, so I may have got it all wrong. B.B.C. radio and TV plays always seem rather different from the written stories.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: "The Mystery of the Blue Train" was actually an extension of a short story "The Plymouth Express" which Agatha Christie had written some years earlier.)

ALAN MCRPETH (North Shields) I continue to enjoy the Digest each month, particularly the articles referring to the Magnet, Gem, and Nelson Lee Libraries. Are there any other subscribers in the North Shields, Newcastle-on-Tyne area, who may be interested in meeting occasionally?

PHILIP TIERNEY (Grimsby) Whilst appreciating the problems with which the Cliff House writers were faced by not being allowed to mention Greyfriars. I cannot understand why they created more confusion by inventing those incredible new schools for their boy characters. Highcliffe was already there and St. Jude's and Redcliffe were quite near. Why could they not have used them?

No doubt readers of both the Magnet and School Friend (or Schoolgirl) would have been just as puzzled by the absence of the Greyfriars characters, but at least the overall picture of the Friardale area would have remained consistant instead of being completely distorted.

Incidentally John Wheway must have been placed in a dilemma when, writing as Hilda Richards, he had to tell a reader that he/she and Frank Richards were not related. Certainly this was true in so far as Charles Hamilton and John Wheway were not related but, in terms of fiction, Hilda Richards was Frank's younger sister.

TOMMY KEEN (Thames Ditton) The name of Gracie Fields absolutely leapt from the page of 'A Word From the Skipper' in the February issue. To me, the name is like a Magnet (and of course that word in periodical form attracts me too). The new look on Music Hall sounds most interesting, but, as you say, there could be some inaccuracies, as the information given regarding "Mr. Tower of London"

is certainly wrong. This revue began in 1918, and finished in 1925, and I have been given to understand that Gracie did not miss one performance. What a Star.

Referring to Kingston Empire, she was appearing there the very week she married Archie Pitt at Wandsworth Registry Office in 1923.

So sister Betty carried on with "Mr. Tower of London?" It was also revived in the 1930's with Betty Driver playing the Gracie role.

On to another subject as mentioned in the C.D. - Highcliffe School! There was a Fourth Former called Philip Derwent, and although he was a J.N. Pentelow invention, Frank Richards is credited to writing one story about this character, "Flap's Brother" - Magnet No. 515 (maybe a little spot of wrist twisting here), a rather maudlin story, and from then on (although I may be wrong) F.R. left Derwent severely alone.

Philip Derwent was also the character known as 'Flip' (and not Phyllis Howell of Cliff House, as I recently read), his twin sister Philippa, also of Cliff House, being known as 'Flap'.

Finally, my grateful thanks to Mrs. Irene Radford of Bridgewater for her kind comments. The Christmas C.D. cover intrigued me immensely, as it appeared to be based on a Gem cover which had been selected to adorn the pages of "From Wharton Lodge to Linton Hall" (Page 199), with Gussy & Co. throwing coins to the carol singers. I particularly liked this Gem cover when the illustrations for the book were chosen, and agree with Mrs. Radford that the December C.D. cover was excellent.

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A LETTER FROM FRANK RICHARDS

by J.P.H. HOBSON

Among my most treasured possessions, carefully preserved in a cellophane sleeve, is the reply to a letter written by myself to Frank Richards in 1958. I wrote thanking him for all the enjoyment he had given to me over many years with his great stories in the Magnet and the Gem, also to tell him that, having initiated my daughter into this magic world, she had also become an enthusiastic follower of the adventures of Harry Wharton and Co. and Tom Merry and Co.

Addressed from 'Rose Lawn', Kingsgate, Kent on 23rd October, 1958, it is, I should think, a typical Charles Hamilton letter, not too long, yet expressing as only he could, all the sentiments and

pleasure he experienced when receiving letters from his readers. It is clearly obvious that he cared a great deal for young people.

At this particular time he was actively engaged in the writing of his novel-length stories of Greyfriars for Messrs. Cassell. He states that he believes he is enjoying this period of his life perhaps more than at any other time and that he thought the present series (the book-length tales) were better than anything he had previously done. I thought this a little surprising when one considers the wonderful work he was producing in the twenties and thirties, and even earlier during the first world war, especially in the Gem.

He expresses amazement that, having started their careers in 1908, Harry Wharton and Co. should still be going strong in 1958; he further adds that he believes Billy Bunter will last as long as he himself. How off the wicket he proved to be on this point, with all the Greyfriars' fellows going as robustly as ever they did in days of yore, almost eighty years after the 'kick-off' and a quarter of a century after his own demise. And more remarkable yet, they seem certain to continue their happy progress through the medium of facsimiles and reprints - Ad infinitum.

In his letter he states how well he is feeling for an old boy despite the ominously mounting toll of years gathering round his head. Commenting upon a signed photograph which was enclosed in which he is depicted smoking his much loved pipe and sporting his familiar smoking cap, he says that the old boy feels much younger than the image in the picture would suggest - rather charming I thought and very typical. A treasure indeed.

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WE'RE GETTING THERE

by SIMON GARRETT

British Rail's rather optimistic slogan reminded me of the Golden Age of travel in the Magnet.

The foreign travel series certainly lacked the subtle character portrayals and conflicts of Charles Hamilton's best work, but at worst they made a pleasant change and the best of them are classics in their own right.

A surprisingly large proportion of a series was often devoted to simply 'getting there'. In both the China and India series, considered the best of their kind, the Greyfriars party spent les than 25% of their time at their ultimate destinations. Once they did arrive it was no anti-climax for there was plenty of genuinely exciting action among the pigtails and the Pathans respectively. Yet much of the appeal, for me at any rate, lay in the steady build-up of pace and interest: the quiet preliminaries at Greyfriars and/or Wharton

Lodge, the leisurely progress to ever more exotic places, and the running fight waged across continents with some sinister and persistent enemy aided by a variety of local villains from Parisian apaches to Egyptian peasants.

The transportation itself comprised a remarkable variety of mostly land and sea vehicles which gave far more scope for adventure, incident and humour than aircraft. This did mean that Greyfriars holidays were often unrealistically long but in the 1930's, the idea of intercontinental air travel bordered on science fiction and this was not Charles Hamilton's forte.

In the Mauleverer South Seas series, the party reached Singapore by air but the actual flight was hardly mentioned. By 1949, and the 'Bunter in Brazil' hardback, air travel was becoming a familiar experience, though hardly jet-paced:

"The jolly old world is growing small these days", marvelled Nugent. "London - Portugal - West Africa - South America - all in under two days!"

Everything had to be compressed in the hardbacks so only about 20 entertaining pages could be devoted to the air journey and the same to the overland trek from Rio to the Quinta Branca plantation. Compare this with the original Brazil series in 1936. Here, the Atlantic crossing alone filled two entire Magnets. This included 3 chapters in Lisbon, 3 more in Madeira, 4 in Teneriffe and 2 in Pernambuco: a variety of settings for skirmishes with the desperado O Lobo, Bunter's usual misadventures with donkeys, and Hamilton's characteristically fascinating historical and geographical asides. Next game a full Magnet covering the eventful advance to Boa Vista plantation, highlighted by a hilarious encounter with a comic-opera revolution. This time, less than half the series was set at the destination.

It was about the same in the 1929 Hollywood series.

This time most of the travelling was done in the USA, with the sea voyage taking only 6 chapters. Hamilton really spread himself on the trans-continental rail crossing, which accounted for no less than three Magnets or nearly 2.5% of the entire series. Of the 87 chapters from landing at New York and arriving at Hollywood, 14 were spent in New York, 9 in Chicago, 7 in Sacramento and 8 in San Francisco (30 years too soon for hippies and flower power!)

On and off the train, there was ample scope for the diverse misadventures of Coker (kidnapped in New York), Vernon-Smith (arrested in a Chicago night club) and Bunter (losing himself, ventriloquising etc). Vernon-Smith was to be kidnapped in New York, just like Coker, in the Texas series nine years later.

When the travel element was reduced this was usually for the obvious reason that there wasn't so far to go. The Egypt, Sahara and Kenya series are examples, the latter spending as much as 95% of its time in Africa. A special case was 1938, when both the Texas and Mauleverer South Seas series were squeezed into the summer hols, and the last of the Magnet foreign travel series saw the great man some way below his best form. It would have been marvellous to have had just one more great series, preferably in one of the few glamorous locations which hadn't seen Bunter being booted. Australia or New Zealand would have been interesting, though the 'Big Chief Bunter' hardback of 1963 did end up in NZ.

Still, it is churlish to complain when one recalls just how much Charles Hamilton opened up the world to his pre-war readers: twice each to North Africa, black Africa, North America and the Pacific Ocean and once each to India, China and South America, not to mention countless forays into Europe. These series grip the imagination even in the Age of Concords - how much more must they have meant in a period when a day trip across the Channel was something to write home about!

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