STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS' DIGEST
VOL. 54 No. 643 JULY 2000

# THE SCHOOLGIRL

Every Saturday 2D.

No. 298. Vol. 12. WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED "SCHOOLDAYS." Week Ending April 13th, 1935.

## MABEL LYNN'S THRILLING MASQUERADE!

Babs helps Mabs to prepare for her role as the White Goddess. A dramatic moment in the grand long story of Barbara Redfern & Co. inside.

# GREYFRIARS INTERVIEWS

This week's brilliant verses by our long-haired poet are written around

**BESSIE BUNTER,**

the Cliff House member of the Bunter tribe.

(1)

To Bessie Bunter I was sent
To seek some information,
And wondered idly as I went
About her occupation;
But not for long, for I had guessed
The secret of the puzzle,
For what do Bunters all do best?
Just guzzle, guzzle, guzzle!

(2)

Yes, Billy loves what he can eat
Far better than his teachers,
And Sammy Bunter thinks it sweet
To feed his classic features,
And Bessie has the Bunter mind
Where foodstuffs are in question:
It's strange they never seem to find
The pangs of indigestion!

(3)

She was not guzzling ginger-beer,
I thought it rather funny,
Until the reason was made clear—
She hadn't any money!
When I appeared, she beamed at me
Through giglamps which adorn her.
"You know, we can't talk here!"
said she,
"Let's find a quiet corner!"

(4)

The corner that we went to first
Was called the tuckshop, really,
Where Bessie ate until she burst—
Well, not quite that, but nearly!
I paid the bill (a quid or two,
A sum not worth the mention),
Then asked her for the interview:
She gave me no attention.

(5)

The second corner, Uncle Clegg's,
She thought was quite delightful,
And here she dealt with scrambled eggs,
(Her appetite was frightful).
I paid—I think it was a pound—
She walked out pale, but portly;
That quiet corner still not found,
I hoped we'd find it shortly!

(6)

In Chunkley's Lounge we looked in vain,
Alas, we could not find it!
The bunshop proved a fearful strain,
But Bessie did not mind it.
Said she: "We'll take a private box
At Chumgum's Mammoth Circus."
"Sez you!" I yelled. "I'm on the rocks!
I'm going to the work'us!"

(7)

The girl who looks for quietness
In circuses is barmy;
The box was quiet, more or less,
But not the circus army.
The lions roared, the clowns all bawled,
I laughed like some hyena,
While Bessie Bunter sat enthralled,
Her eyes on the arena.

(8)

"That's that!" I said, when we were through.
I purchased her some toffee.
By way of thanks she led me to
A cafe for some coffee.
A quiet corner found at last!
But there was nothing doing,
For she was gobbling much too fast
To think of interviewing.

(9)

A taxi took us back to school,
(An ambulance was needed).
She sat there silently, but cool,
She took the biscuit, she did!
"Now what about that interview?"
I asked in tones of sorrow.
"Cliff House!" said Bessie.
"Toodle-oo!
Call back again to-morrow!"
(Thank Heaven to-morrow never comes. Eh?)

# STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

**Editor: MARY CADOGAN**

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## The Editor's Chat

### HONOURS AND AWARDS

We have recently heard that J.K. Rowling, author of the Harry Potter books has been awarded the O.B.E. It is, of course, good that the value of children's literature should be recognized in this way, and no-one should be grudging about this author's remarkable success in awakening in many children a real and strong desire to read for pure enjoyment.

However, several of us will echo the feelings of C.D. contributor Derek Ford, who writes to me as follows:

> 'What did you think about the O.B.E. award to J.K. Rowling? Much more worthy were Enid Blyton, Richmal Crompton, Frank Richards and Anthony Parsons who never received any awards for giving pleasure to generations of young readers...'

It seems sad that so many truly great children's authors of the twentieth century have received no formal, national acknowledgement of their achievements. Looking through copies of the C.D. published after the death of Frank Richards, I noted that many readers hoped there would be a suitable

memorial for him. Efforts were made to achieve something, but it was to no avail.

Probably the only honours to those splendid writers of the past will remain those of countless readers' respect, gratitude and affection. At least the C.D. in its articles and tributes, continues to give them appropriate acknowledgement. As a last thought on the subject, I would suggest that in honouring J.K. Rowling, who despite her success is a newcomer on the children's book scene, the 'powers-that-be' have sadly bypassed several splendid *living* authors whose books have given, and still give, great pleasure, stimulus and satisfaction to young readers. To name only a few, there is the author of the Jennings books, Anthony Buckeridge: also Alan Garner, Bernard Ashley, Philippa Pearce... readers will have many more names for this list, I know.

Happy reading,

MARY CADOGAN

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## THAT UNFINISHED MAGNET SERIES – ONE OF THE BEST?

**by Andrew Miles**

**Part One**

It is intriguing to contemplate what might have been in the plot of the greatest *Magnet* series never published – *Magnet* Number 1683ff. I have long pondered the matter. This article seeks to examine that series and makes some conjecture about how it might have unfolded. With the existing story *The Shadow of the Sack* published, the titles of four missing stories known, and an unfinished story, re-produced in Giles Brandreth's "Yarooh!" and re-named *Exit Bunter*, there is plenty of material on which to make some comment and to draw some conclusions.

The series begins with a traditional beginning of Term at Courtfield Station. Amidst the usual jostling for seats and general ragging Wharton is the victim of Bunter's machinations and left behind to walk to Greyfriars. A row with Hacker on the station and another with Price over a bookie's letter establish a series which is steeped in conflict. We see Hacker and Price, each acting independently, harbour a deep grudge against Wharton. The scene is set for Wharton to be assailed on two fronts. On one side is Hacker, who is convinced that Wharton has been in contact with a racing man and is also deeply resentful of Wharton's impertinence towards him. He presents the evidence of Price's letter to Quelch who, in a touching scene, assures Wharton that he will not mis-judge him as he has before (cf the "Stacey" series 1422ff). Quelch clearly believes Wharton and dismisses Hacker's claims. On the other side is Price who blames Wharton for letting the letter from Sanders fall into Hacker's hands; neither has he forgotten the unpleasantness in Eastcliff Lodge over the Christmas hols: furthermore, Wharton suggests to Price that he should own up to owning the letter; after all, Quelch has undertaken not to report the matter. The ensuing scrap leaves Price gasping on his study

floor and harbouring the deepest enmity. That Hilton does not take his side infuriates him further. The story ends with the comment that "they were at the beginning of what was going to be a very exciting term".

*Exit Bunter* was assumedly the sixth instalment (Magnet 1688) of the series and probably not the last. The four missing numbers fall between it and 1683; it is, therefore, extremely valuable for the plot developments which it reveals. Hacker is still deeply suspicious of Wharton; Price is still bitter towards him and seeking to land him in the soup with Hacker. We learn that several messages have been left for Hacker and tricks played on him. Perhaps scrawled on his looking-glass, chalked on his Form blackboard or daubed in ink on impot paper on his study desk, these messages apparently tell him to leave off the Remove. We learn that, on at least one occasion, Price had left such a message and that Wharton had licked him in his study for it. This is clearly not the same licking as that in 1683. We also learn that there have been quite a few spots of trouble between Hacker and the Remove – and Wharton in particular.

What appear to be the salient features of this series? The isolation of Wharton is a recurring theme. It is different from the isolation inflicted on him in the various Downfall/Rebel series. Traditionally, his isolation is caused in part by his own temper and sense of hurt under some injustice. In this series, however, he remains popular with both the Remove and Quelch. We see him isolated twice – once in 1683 and once in *Exit Bunter*. In 1683, Bunter has stolen his seat and ejected him from the train. The ensuing isolation exposes him to suspicion in a series of chance happenings. In *Exit Bunter* his use of Quelch's 'phone at the same time as Price's slanging of Hacker from Courtfield Post Office exposes him to Hacker's already deeply held suspicions. After a violent confrontation in Quelch's study, he receives the unqualified sympathy and support of the Co. It is Inky who remembers that Price was responsible last time; perhaps some of his detective work comes into play. Wharton's isolation in each case is only temporary – long enough to expose him to accusation. In addition, the support of Quelch for his Head Boy remains steadfast.

The role of Bunter is central. The fat Owl is repeatedly the cause of Wharton's woes; in 1683 he is responsible for Wharton's grubby state which initially arouses Hackers' ire, and for Hacker discovering Price's letter and blaming it on Wharton. In *Exit Bunter* Wharton is delayed for over ten minutes in Quelch's study after kicking out Bunter who is bent on revenge for a whopping. Wharton wastes time picking up the Form papers which Bunter has accidentally spilled. If this had not occurred, Hacker would not have come upon him and accused him of slanging him over the 'phone. Quelch repeatedly takes Wharton's side throughout, to be portrayed in a sympathetic light after his lengthy incarceration in the Lamb series. He is no doubt very happy to be back in harness and is very kind throughout. He is unaccustomedly mild in his reproach of Wharton's disrespectful remarks about the Acid Drop. Has he mellowed a little? Or is he portrayed thus merely to create a greater contrast with the impetuous Hacker?

Hilton is portrayed in a favourable light, as he sometimes is in other series (eg. "Hilton Hall" *Magnet* 1401ff). He thinks that Price should own up to receiving the letter from Sanders. His role serves to highlight the viciousness of Price and to isolate his evil intentions. Loder makes a brief but typical appearance in 1683, but there is no indication of whether he joins Price in a vendetta against Wharton. He intervenes on Price's behalf

in the "Coker Expelled" series (1565ff) and could do so again in 1683ff. If he is manipulated by Price, Price's position would certainly be significantly stronger. We are told that Loder is carrying a grudge against the Co after the Eastcliff Lodge series (1676ff) and it would be like him to nurse it for a whole term. Coker's fatheaded actions might also occasionally effect the course of events. It was his washing of Wharton in the Fifth Form passage which led to Bunter finding the bookie's letter.

Hobson and Co. of the Shell could play an interesting or even pivotal role in the series. Hobson chips Wharton about his grubby face in 1683. He also leaves him a packet of soap in Form. Wharton is ready to scrap in quad with him, but goes along with Bob Cherry's suggestion to use the soap to wash him instead. Hacker's inevitable intervention is not well received! Generally, the Removites enjoy a far better rapport with the Shell than with any other Form. The Seniors are aloof from them, the fags are beneath their consideration and the Fourth, although closer in age, are such footling asses that there can never be a warm relationship. The Shell chaps, on the other hand, are like the Removites – cheerful, good at games and always ready for a rag. Unlike the Fourth, they do not put on side and are worthy opponents on Little Side. The Famous Five will occasionally tea with Hobson, but never with Temple. This rapport could feature in series 1683ff. A friendly rag in the Shell passage could, for example, result in attempted interference and a serious complaint to Quelch – something he is never pleased to receive! In this instance, however, he takes umbrage at Hacker's rudeness and interference and punishes no one. The Shell might assist Wharton in a rag on Hacker whom they loathe.

How might the series have unfolded after 1683 and leading up to *Exit Bunter*? The titles of the four missing manuscripts give us a tantalising glimpse. *Magnet* 1684, entitled *The Battle of the Beaks*, would certainly have developed the strongest antipathy between Quelch and Hacker since their famous feud of *Magnet* 1086. This was re-ignited at Courtfield Station where Quelch did not care to see Hacker leading Wharton by the collar. The sharp exchange between the two beaks foreshadows further frosty encounters. In 1683 Quelch has dismissed Hacker's complaints over the washing of Hobson in the quad as "nonsense". Hacker's implacable belief that Wharton is blagging would no doubt have been effectively contrasted with Quelch's keen judgement. Quelch has taken Wharton's word over Price's letter in 1683 and Hacker is no doubt deeply resentful that his evidence has been disregarded. Bunter's fatuous antics would also continue to feature prominently as he repeatedly lands Wharton in the soup with Hacker. Perhaps he kicks a footer over the Remove landing. Wharton runs down to fetch it and meets Hacker coming up, having been biffed with it. Bunter would not, of course, have been playing passage footer. He might have kicked the ball in retaliation for Bob Cherry's playful landing of the ball on the tightest waist-coat at Greyfriars. Or the Owl might sneak some smokes from Smithy's study and, rorty dog that he is, put on a fag in Study No. 1. Hacker later finds the study reeking like a tap room after Bunter has left. In each case Hacker is quick to blame Wharton and in each case Quelch, the downy bird, elucidates the truth.

The title of 1685 *Bandy Bunter* (changed by the editor from *The Meddler*) has long titillated me. How did Bunter get bandy? We have seen him blind, deaf, lame, suffering pneumonia in both legs and with his spinal column fractured in several places! Does he once again, although usually in robust health, succumb to injury on a compulsory games

practice afternoon? Does he gain leave from practice or once again risk six from the ash plant of the Head of Games? Does he suffer a genuine injury incurred while fleeing from a cane-weilding Hacker who had caught him snooping bikkers from the box in Common Room? Perhaps he crashes into Fish, who is deep in his account book, and sprains his leg. As Bunter hobbles away, does the Bounder let out a foot to trip Hacker as he charges past in pursuit?

While frowsting about the House or grub-hunting in the Remove passage, does the Owl spot Hacker snooping in Study 1, looking for smokes in Wharton's desk or a racing paper under the cushion of the armchair? The original title of *The Meddler* assumedly refers to Hacker and his unpleasant habit of meddling in the affairs of other Forms – especially the Remove. By keeping a keen eye on Wharton, he could quite easily have spotted him in some misdemeanour. Ragging Hobson, ducking Temple, bumping Coker, booting Bunter or playing leap-frog in Form when Quelch is late for class are all possible events which could have led Hacker to attempt to intervene. He might even have attempted to quell a disturbance in Moossoo's French set; he would then have been driven from the room by a shower of whizzing French grammars. The insolence of Wharton or the Bounder, both leading lights in pelting Hacker, would have irked him further. 1683 shows both of them cheeking him. While the Bounder is the most disrespectful of the Remove, Wharton, when his back is up, is even more insolent; as an enemy, he is even more dangerous.

The change of title of 1685 would have been made to keep the focus on Bunter, the star of the *Magnet* ("Billy Bunter's Own Paper") in its later years. This would have been particularly apt since, by then, the world-wide "Billy Bunter" club, killed along with the *Magnet* by the paper shortage, would have been launched. Whether this would have reversed the *Magnet's* falling readership, alas, we shall never know.

In 1686 (*What Happened to Hacker*) we can assume that Hacker disappears. Perhaps he misses callover, or even class. He could have been stranded at Lantham after missing the last train; some young rascal out of bounds had buzzed a rotten orange at him from one of the carriages; he went down with a sickening thud on the platform and, by the time he resumed the perpendicular, the train had gone. He suspects Wharton, who was playing cricket at Redcliffe. Price is, of course, the culprit. The 10 mile walk back to Greyfriars during blackout does nothing for Hacker's temper! Or did the Co. shut him in Gosling's woodshed, the Remove box-room or the vaults when they espied him shadowing Wharton? Of all the Greyfriars masters, he alone would have such manners and customs. Whoever trapped him, Wharton would be blamed and have a tenuous alibi.

The title of 1687 (*The Hidden Hand*) would assumedly be referring to Price. It is in this episode that Hacker would receive offensive messages telling him to keep out of the Remove. His interference in the French set rag has earned Extra for the whole Remove. Possibly it is Bunter who, hiding behind Hacker's armchair while hunting cover with a confiscated cake, sees Price in the study. Wharton has also been seen, by Capper, hunting Bunter in the Master's passage and is blamed. When Bunter can tear himself away from the cake, he remembers seeing Price. The Remove attempt to rag Price in his study, but are ejected by Blundell and Co. Coker learns of Price's actions and, in his high-handed manner, frog-marches him to Prout's study. Hacker, in a state of acidulated bitterness, rejects the confession and Price gets off; Wharton is however, cleared of suspicion by

these events. Coker, as Fifth Formy as ever, will accept no thanks for his action and reminds the Co. that all fags need regular lickings. In gratitude, they leave him alone instead of strewing the quadrangle with him! On another occasion Bunter might leave a message stating "Hacker is a beest" on the Acid Drop's table. Wharton is immediately blamed; the lines which he left in Quelch's study prove that he went to the Masters' Passage. It is Quelch who again ascertains the facts – much to Hacker's chagrin. Bunter's remarkable orthography left a vital clue!

*(To be concluded)*

THE FIRST DAY OF TERM—AND HARRY WHARTON'S IN HOT WATER ALREADY!

Breathing hard, Wharton submitted to being walked along the platform with Hacker's bony paw on his shoulder!

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**WANTED:** Champion Libraries. No. 95, *To Victory with the Tank*, Rupert Hall. *Whippets of War*, 152 Donald Dane. *Pals of the Fighting Tanks*, Herbert Macrae. *War Hawks of Flanders*, Rupert Hall. ASHLEY, 46 Nicholas Crescent, Fareham, Hants, D15 5AH. Tel. 01329 234489.

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## 'LITTLE FOLKS' – the magazine that was far bigger than its name

*BRIAN DOYLE reminisces about the well-loved 'Little Folks' children's magazine that run for more than 60 years, had an exceptional roster of popular writers and artists, was read by increasing numbers of 'Big Folks', especially in its last 20 years, but which was finally destroyed by its title, which was too misleading for its own good.*

"What's in a name?" asked Shakespeare in 'Romeo and Juliet'. Quite a lot, when you think about it, though we're talking titles here, not actual names.

'Little Folks' was a children's magazine that succeeded in spite of, rather than because of, its title. It was probably the longest-running of all general children's magazines, beginning in 1871 and ending in 1933 – a healthy marathon run of 62 years. (I don't count the 'Boys' Own Paper' (88 years) since that was a boy's rather than a children's publication.)

'Little Folks' was an acceptable, indeed an agreeable, name for its first fifty years or so, but later in its life, the title rather limited its readership to, well, to 'little folks' – very young children. Whereas much of its contents could be read and enjoyed by all ages up to around 15 and even beyond. It literally catered for all tastes and young ages, from simple fairy and nursery tales and pictures at one end of the scale, to stirring and exciting adventure stories about pirates, highwaymen, soldiers, sailors and explorers at the other. There were many excellent school stories too, for both boys and girls. And lots of factual articles. It was very often aimed at 'big folk' as well as 'little folks'. That title was apt to be misleading, especially in its later period, and indeed was to prove its eventual undoing.

Young readers over the age of, say, 10 or 11, were understandably embarrassed to be seen with the magazine, especially the boys... It was a pity the publishers couldn't change the title to 'Young Folks', but perhaps there were copyright problems concerning the old Henderson's 'Young Folks' (which, of course, was famous for having serialised Robert Louis Stevenson's 'Treasure Island' (under the original title of 'The Sea Cook').

There were apparently talks and discussions occasionally, concerning a possible title-change, but this was presumably dismissed by Fleet Street wags as 'title-tattle'...! (There was even a small reader who thought (quite logically), it was said, her favourite magazine was published and written in 'Little Folkestone'...!)

But let's get down to a few basics about 'Little Folks' and its history. The magazine started in January, 1871, by publishers Cassell, Petter and Gilpin (later to become 'Cassells'). 1871 was quite a good year as far as children's publications were concerned. Apart from the debut of 'Little Folks', Lewis Carroll's 'Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There' was published (in December, but dated the following year). So were Edward Lear's 'Nonsense Songs' and George MacDonald's 'At the Back of the North Wind'.

There were no coloured pictures in those early issues of 'Little Folks' and all black-and-white illustrations had to be engraved on wood by hand. There were 'Moral Tales for Sunday Afternoon' and simple stories, often with a religious feeling and a well-pointed moral, with evil vanquished and good reaping its own reward (with a few obstacles to be

overcome along the way). Death and illness were not avoided, but happiness struggled through now and then, probably much to small readers' relief.

The magazine aimed to amuse its youthful readers and, at the same time, 'to persuade them to think and do a little for themselves' (as it said). It featured poetry and little tales by child-readers ('all certified authentic by parents, ministers and guardians') and ran 'pretty stories to make you smile'. There were plenty of pictures of small animals, especially kittens, puppies, birds and farmyard animals, not forgetting puzzle pictures and drawings to paint.

'Little Folks' was originally published in weekly parts, then in monthly issues. After five years it was re-launched in slightly larger format and starting again with a new 'No. 1'. In the 1880s it comprised a monthly of 64 pages and a few years earlier, in 1875, the first 'Little Folks' 'Annual' appeared (actually six issues bound together, usually from November to April, and May to October, sadly omitting the lovely colour covers that were such a feature of the later issues). These bound volumes comprise the format that most collectors are familiar with today, as few single copies seem to have survived, especially from the early years. Confusingly, up to about the turn of the century, there appeared just before Christmas, a special 'Little Folks Annual;, of around 50 pages consisting of new material and not normally bound in with the 6-issue volumes.

Early contributors to the magazine included such authors as W.H.G. Kingston, L.T. Meade, Mrs. Ewing and Evelyn Everett Green. In Volume 65 (1906-07) there was a fairy story, 'The Magic Mirror' by Rosamund Nesbit Bland, who was the famous children's author E. Nesbit's 'surrogate' daughter. (In fact, her husband Hubert's daughter by another woman, but whom Nesbit raised as her own child. This story, written by Rosamund when she was only 20, appears to have been over-looked by biographers of Nesbit.)

So many famous artists contributed to 'Little Folks' that it would take a page to list them all. Hilda Greenaway was one, and others included H.R. Millar, C.E. and H.M. Brock, Thomas Henry, Hugh Thomson, John Hassall, William Heath Robinson and his brother Charles Robinson, Hilda Cowham (who did all those long-legged schoolgirls), Mabel Lucie Attwell, Walter Crane, Paul Hardy (and his sister, Esme Stuart Hardy), Gordon Browne, Helen Jacobs (sister of author W.W.) and the prolific Harry Rountree (who did many colour plates and colour covers). And, of course, the great Arthur Rackham, who did many pictures for the magazine between 1896 and 1905. It was then edited by his great friend and ex-fellow-pupil at the City of London School, Sam Hamer. Rackham's illustrations also appeared in various books published by the 'Little Folks' publishers, including 'The Little Folks Fairy Book' (1905).

Mention of editor Hamer, brings us to the various editors of 'Little Folks'. I cannot trace the early ones, but the later incumbents included the aforesaid Samuel Hamer (1895-1907), Charles S. Bayne (1908-15) and the final editor, H. Darkin Williams (1915-33). Some sources state that F. Knowles Campling was editor around 1917 but, since he was editor of 'Chums' at this time, this is uncertain. He was a regular contributor of stories and serials to 'Little Folks', however, mainly under his pen-name of 'Eric Wood'. Another prolific contributor of stories and serials, Christine Chaundler, both under her own name and as 'Peter Martin', was sub-editor of the magazine from 1914-17. She also wrote many girls' books and children's stories in hard-covers.

Authors contributing to 'Little Folks' who later became well-known popular writers for adults, included Ford Madox Hueffer (a fairy story), subsequently a successful novelist as Ford Madox Ford, and Henry Taprell Dorling, then a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy, who contributed 'The Launch of a Leviathan' (How a British Battleship Takes to Water) to Volume 78 (1913). Under the name 'Taffrail' he later became quite famous as the author (both under his real and pen-name) of more than fifty sea and adventure novels right up to the 1950s, also writing books on Naval history and on ships and the sea). He later won the D.S.O., reached the rank of Captain, and retired from active service in 1929. ('Taffrail', by the way, means the rail round the stern of a vessel). Another early contributor was Arthur Bryant, later Sir Arthur and a distinguished historian and author.

*'Little Folks' Vol. 85 1917 Illustrated by Hogl Harrold*

Girls' school stories in the magazine were supplied by such names in the genre as Angela Brazil, Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Elsie J. Oxenham, Dorothea Moore, Ethel Talbot, Nancy M. Hayes and Doris Pocock. Boys' ditto were written by Gunby Hadath (under his own name and his pen-name of 'John Mowbray'), Harold Avery, R.A.H. Goodyear, Alfred Judd, A.L. Haydon, Meredith Fletcher (actually Mary Fletcher Kitchin) and the previously-mentioned Peter Martin (really Christine Chaundler, who was perhaps better-known as the author of such girls' school story classics as 'Sally Sticks It Out'). There were also stirring serials from D.H. Parry (also writing as 'Morton Pike'), W. Bourne Cook, Olaf Baker (who specialised in early science-fiction stories), Eric Wood and Frank H. Shaw.

There were, too, such literary features as 'Novels in a Nutshell:, hobby articles, columns on pets, games and music, film reviews and the 'Editor's Chat' (featuring the adventures of red-headed office-boy 'Carrots'). There were also the Correspondence Pages, replete with letters from young readers (usually girls – boys seemed reluctant to take pen in hand). Well, they were purportedly written by readers but, call me cynical if you like, I suspect they were mostly written by the tots' doting parents, probably the mothers. They were too well-written, too amusing, too 'cute' and too long, with rather good and well-reasoned reviews of recent stories; they were just too good to be true. But maybe I'm just being pedantic...

And I mustn't forget to mention the excellent and really worth-while good work 'Little Folks' did, year after year, on behalf of sick children. The magazine collected donations from readers to maintain wards in The Queen's Hospital for Children, in Hackney Road, Bethnal Green, East London, and also established, in 1911, the 'Little Folks' Children's Convalescent Home at Bexhill-on-Sea, Sussex. Readers gave sums ranging from a few pence to a few pounds and actually raised £3,000.00 between 1899-1905 – no mean sum in those far-off days. Full details of the cash raised, and from whom, were tabulated in every issue and the Duke of York (later King George the Sixth) visited the Bexhill Home in 1930.

The Amalgamated Press 'took over' 'Little Folks' from Cassell's in the 1920s (the last Cassell volume was No. 104 in 1926). Nothing seemed to change much, however, except perhaps that the contents and contributors became even better and the age aimed at was that much older; authors now included Percy F. Westerman, Michael Poole, John Hunter and other fine and popular authors, many of whom were to be found writing also for such excellent magazines as 'B.O.P.', 'Chums', 'G.O.P.' and 'The Captain'. The artists maintained the usual superlative standard too.

In 1931, came the 60th Anniversary – and the Diamond Jubilee issue of 'Little Folks', with a special 100 page number containing serials by the likes of John Mowbray (Gunby Hadath) with 'The Laziest Chap in the School' and Elsie Jeanette Oxenham with 'Peggy-Perfect Goes to School' (illustrated by Thomas Henry – famous, of course, for his 'William' illustrations). There were congratulatory messages (with photographs – 'so *that's* what they look like!') from such worthy contributors as Gunby Hadath, Ethel Talbot, D.H. Parry, both C.E. and H.M. Brock, Alfred Judd, Christine Chaundler and Dorothea Moore, plus several great colour plates by Harry Rountree (who naturally did the colour cover!). The 'Little Folks' Home Pages were 'conducted' (though minus a baton) by 'The Sunshine Lady', who reported that £20,000.00 had been raised over the past 30 years in connection with the Children's Hospital and the Children's Convalescent Home... Editor Darkin Williams looked forward to celebrating the magazine's Centenary in 1971 – little did he know...

Did *you* know, incidentally, that S.G. Hulme Beaman (later to create those marvellous tales about Toytown, featuring Larry the Lamb, Ernest the Policeman, Mr. Growser, and other memorable characters, both in books and, best of all, in the BBC Radio's 'Children's Hour' ) wrote and illustrated a Sherlock Holmes parody, 'Detectives in Toyland' for 'Little Folks' in 1924? It featured Sheerluck Homes and Dr. Rotson investigating the murder of a Golliwog in Toyland (surely it should have been *Toytown* –

it's Noddy who lives in Toyland... As Mr. Growser might well have exclaimed: 'It's disgraceful – disgraceful – it ought not to be allowed!').

Such are the unexpected little gems you can find by browsing through back-volumes of 'Little Folks'...

One serial that I particularly enjoyed (read as an adult – the magazine was well before my time to have perused it as a child!) was Alfred Judd's 'Five in a Secret' (superbly illustrated by H.R. Millar, who did most of E. Nesbit's wonderful stories), in 1917. Another memorable serial (recalled by 'C.D.' reader Fred E. Snowden in an issue of 1992) was Dudley Clark's 'Underground to Anywhere' (illustrated by C.E. Brock), which was on the lines of an 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' pastiche and told of the exploits of a small boy named Clive in London's Underground Railway network and of the many unusual characters he met there. That appeared in 1916. And our worthy editor, Mary Cadogan, also once recalled one of her own favourite 'Little Folks' stories in the volume for 1919 – 'The Girl Who Found the Fairies' by Ethel Talbot, which unusually combined the worlds of school and magic.

*'Little Folks' Vol. 85 1917 Illustrated by H.R. Millar*

If that American genius, Charles Schultz, had been around earlier he could well have been a contributor to 'Little Folks', since his world-famous comic-strip 'Peanuts' (with Charlie Brown, Snoopy the dog, et al) was very nearly titled 'Li'l Folks' when it originally began publication in 1950 in a local newspaper in Minnesota. Schultz, in fact, apparently preferred this title, but the publishers over-rode him and insisted on calling it 'Peanuts'...'

Mention should perhaps be made of the advertisements in the magazine. Most of them seemed to be aimed at the mothers of 'Little Folks'. During the first quarter of the century, for example, products advertised included Chlorodyne ('the reliable family medicine for almost every ailment'), Eno's Fruit Salts, Vaseline, Wright's Coal Tar Soap,

"Then the next thing she remembered was being pushed towards the front by a number of friendly hands" (p. 188)

*'Little Folks' Vol. 85 1917*
*'The Best-Dressed Girl in the School'*
*A. school story of*
*EVELINE M. WILLIAMS*
*Illustrated by*
*Norah Schlegel*

[illegible] were stripped to their [illegible]

*'Little Folks'*
*'With Blade or Bow for England'*
*by D.H. Parry*
*Serial in vol. 85 1917*
*Illustrated by C.E. Brock*

Bird's Custard, Fry's Cocoa, Mason's Ginger Wine Essence, and 'Force' Wheat Flakes; it perhaps says a lot for quality – and advertising – that half-a-dozen of these are still available today!

The magazine appeared to be going well and doing well all through 1932 (one of its finest years, and a particular favourite of mine) and included a myriad of excellent stories, serials and pictures, when writers included Hadath, Avery, Chaundler and Parry, plus the usual array, in both black-and white and colour, of superlative illustrators. Then, in February, 1933, came the bombshell – and the final issue – when the motto of the month might well have been 'All good things must come to an end...'

It could all have been neatly summed up by Oscar Wilde, who said (in his play 'A Woman of No Importance'): 'A title is really rather a nuisance...' As I mentioned earlier, older readers weren't happy to be seen reading a magazine with the title 'Little Folks' – it was somewhat 'infra dig', though many of its stories could well be enjoyed by the same youngsters who read 'Chums' 'BOP', 'GOP', 'The Captain' and many others in the same class; indeed, some of its regular contributors also wrote for these magazines, as I've already noted.

But, as the final editor, H. Darkin Williams, wrote, in his last Editorial: '...our title has become out-of-date through he course of time. .. the misfortune of our title... it was difficult to persuade boys and girls of up to 16 to ask for a magazine with this title...' Another drawback was the price – at one shilling for a 'glossy' monthly with 80 or more pages and many illustrations, it was certainly good value. But for that munificent sum you might buy, instead, say half-a-dozen 'Magnets' or 'Gems' or 'Schoolgirls' or similar papers, or a whole dozen penny comics...'

Though Shakespeare enthused about the 'blessedness of being little...', the blessedness of being 'Little Folks' was not so blessed, it seemed. Even Sherlock Holmes once said: 'The little things are infinitely the most important...', but, again, not apparently, the 'Little Folks'...

So then, 1933 was a year of arrivals and departures – 'Little Folks' departed and the famous film of 'Little Women' arrived. And 'Little Folks' was 'absorbed' in the adult magazine 'Quiver' (also edited, as it turned out, by H. Darkin Williams. He, at any rate, wasn't out of a job, like 'Little Folks'.

'Whatever title suit thee...' said Robert Burns somewhere. The 'Little Folks' title suited the magazine perfectly for its first half-century or so, but then the words outgrew the title, as it were, and its pictures added further distinction. Older readers grew slightly ashamed to be seen with a 'baby-ish' magazine, as their unfriendly and unperceptive friends doubtless mocked it and the fashion (or un-fashion) grew until 'Be-Little Folks' became the order of the day.

As that clever Canadian humorist Stephen Leacock once said: 'It's marvellous what a good title does...'

It was all such a pity. Why, oh why, couldn't they have just changed the title to 'Folks' and be done with it. That would have been acceptable. Wouldn't it...?

**********

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## MANY HAPPY RETURNS! by J.E.M.

I was inspired by John Bridgwater's nostalgic journey (referred to by our Editor in Digest 641) to strike a similar trail myself. Mr. Bridgwater had wondered what Blakian adventure was being celebrated on the day he was born, which set me wondering what Blake was doing on my own birthday eighty years ago. But, cautioned by Mr. Bridgwater that any specific date might find Blake engaged on a "rather undistinguished case", I decided to look at the great Baker Street file for the year 1920 as a whole.

The *Sexton Blake Library* in that year seemed to find our detective largely in the company of Leon Kestrel and Granite Grant. His weekly exploits in the *Union Jack*, on the other hand, involved a much wider cast of favourite characters. These included not only Kestrel (again!) but Count Bonali, Zenith the Albino, George Marsden Plummer, Losely and Lobangu, Rupert Waldo and – perhaps most exciting of all – the Criminals' Confederation. The C.C. appeared no fewer than ten times in that fateful twelve months, though of course always invisible to me, since I was still, in the words of the Bard, "mewling and puking", if not in a nurse's arms, at least in my Mother's!

Amazingly, I was able to catch up with this unforgettable saga for, by the happiest chance, my first introduction to Sexton Blake coincided with a re-hash of the series twelve to thirteen years after its original appearance in the year of my birth! *Volcano Island* (UJ 1500) was a re-write of UJ's 829 and 830, *Sinister Island* and *The Man from the Sea* which, to be fair to the facts, appeared just *before* I was born.

However, from 1920 itself came *The Dog Detective* (UJ 887) which reappeared in 1933 l(UJ 1526) as *Behind the Fog*, the penultimate tale in the Crim Con saga.

The final episode from 1920 was *A Bid for Billions* (UJ 893) – an extremely eye-catching title in the days when a *million* was an almost unimaginable sum! This reappeared in 1933 as *Sexton Blake Wins* (UJ 1529), which says it all. Exit the Criminals' Confederation (for the second time!) and enter a kind of second birthday for a thirteen-year-old who was to become a life-long enthusiast of Sexton Blake.

Indisputably, the Crim Con provided one of the greatest attractions of the Blakian casebook, being, it seems, as popular on its second appearance as it had been on its first. If there is any Blakian – or even non-Blakian! – reader who is unfamiliar with this series, I urge him or her to rectify the omission forthwith. An added bonus, as far as the second run is concerned, are some wonderful illustrations by Eric Parker. The cover of *Volcano Island* brilliantly depicts a bird's-eye view of the Crim Con's headquarters in the heart of the eponymous island. (You may, at this point, recall that a James Bond story, written long after, featured a master criminal whose HQ was also the interior of a volcano.)

*Volcano Island* reminded us that, in the Pacific, volcanic islands can not only erupt from the sea-bed but may also erupt and disappear again... Not long ago we saw an actual example of the first phenomenon on television. What happens to the Crim Con's island you must discover for yourselves. Enough to say that the crooks' organisation, or at least some of it, survives the anger of nature and it takes several more episodes to tell how *Sexton Blake Wins* in his long battle with this international union of outlaws.

It is obvious that a first encounter with a fictional delight, which is going to last a lifetime, has an impact which will not be experienced by everyone. But most Blakians will surely agree that the *Union Jack* went out with a bang not a whimper. Its last two years when I first encountered it saw some most memorable tales – The Onion Men series, the Proud-Tram series, those wonderful Christmas stories by Gwyn Evans, the Next Move serial and finally, though certainly not least, that re-run of a saga which had originally appeared in the year I myself first saw the light of day.

In addition to a whole host of glittering characters who had become firm favourites over the years – Mlle Roxane, Wu Ling, The Hales, Waldo, Vali-Mata-Vali, Zenith (of course!) and countless others – we shall not easily forget that international band of crooks known as The Criminals' Confederation. Its two leaders, the suave, quietly menacing John Smith and the snarling repellent Mr. Reece who finally took sole command of the C.C. in its last days remain true immortals in the Blakian pantheon.

(For nudging me back to such characters and periods in the great case-book, thank you most warmly, Mr. Bridgwater, and our Editor!)

**********

## NEW BOYS AT ST. FRANKS

**by E. Grant-McPherson**

Archibald Winston Glenthorne was returning to St. Frank's College by foot, and was most unhappy. The night was very dark, and a powerful gale added to his discontent by blowing in his face. The reason for his walking was that a landslide had blocked the railway line between Bannington and Belton. As he wended his weary way, he suddenly heard a crash, followed by a plaintive cry. Hurrying onward, he saw a tree lying across the road; as he got nearer, he could see a figure under the branches, managing to drag the body free, he realised that it was a boy about his own age, and his face was covered in blood. Archie, finding that the lad was still conscious, helped him to his feet, and half carried, half dragged him on through the storm, towards St. Frank's.

Archie is just about at the end of his tether when they see a light through the trees and, approaching it, find coming from a cottage. Knocking on the door, Archie is surprised to find that the occupants are a party of 'bloods', from the College, engaged in

playing cards. However he impresses the urgency of the matter upon them, and they take the now almost unconscious stranger, and Archie in, undress them, wrap them in blankets, and sit them in front of the fire. Kenwood, who, appears to be in charge, gives the stranger, a sip of brandy, which seems to do him a bit of good, and returns a little colour to his face.

The party-goers then find some water and, after cleaning the blood from the lad's face and bandaging his head, return to their games of cards, leaving the two in front of the fire. At this point, Archie, being very tired, a bit dizzy from his exertions, and the fumes from the fire and cigarette-smoke, drops off to sleep.

After a while, he wakes up and, finding that his clothes have dried in front of the fire, dresses himself, and prepares to leave. At this point, Fullwood, who has just left the card table, notices him still looking a bit unsteady, and tells him to take it easier with the champagne next time, saying that "he had drunk a whole bottle himself".

At this statement, Glenthorne begins to worry as he does in fact still feel quite dizzy, but he says nothing, and, seeing the other lad is still asleep, leaves the cottage. The storm by now has abated considerably, and he is able to return to St. Frank's with no great trouble, where Phipps manages to smuggle him up to his bedroom.

The following morning, Archie discovers that the lad whom he had met last night, is in fact, a new boy named Larry Scott who is destined for the Remove.

Scott causes quite a stir when he talks to some of the juniors, and Handforth in particular. Handy, in his usual blunt way, wants to know all about Scott, who counters by telling Edward Oswald Handforth that he is quite the ugliest boy that he has ever seen. After Church and McClure have succeeded in restraining Handy's attempts to punch Scott's nose, Handy decides that he will 'let him off this time', and peace is restored, Nelson Lee arrives and, after welcoming Larry Scott, tells him that he is to join Singleton in study N.

When Larry gets to the study, Singleton tells him that "he's not coming in this study, and he can tell Lee, to 'go and eat coke'". Later on Mr. Lee happens to meet Scott, and asks how he is getting on with Singleton. The new boy tells the Housemaster that the Hon. Douglas would not let him in. Lee asks if that was all he said, and Scott gives him the message about 'Eating Coke', whereupon he is told to return to study N. and take up residence.

After the juniors realise that the new junior is incapable of speaking anything but the truth, many of the more caddish juniors, get a lot of fun, from asking Larry questions, many, very personal, about his early life, which he is course, always answers truthfully, until the practice becomes known to such stalwarts as Nipper and Handy, when the fun becomes mixed with thick ears and black eyes.

When Scott is asked about his arrival, so late at night, the story of how he and Archie arrived at the cottage comes to light, and, of course, most of the Removites, immediately assume that Archie became a member of the party. Later, Lee hears the rumours, and gets the whole story from Scott.

Archie, is of course exonerated from any blame, and is highly praised for his courageous action, and the actual guilty partygoers are found and punished.

Larry Scott appears a few times after this, but never again takes a leading role.

**********

## THE BOUNDER'S WAY

**by Ted Baldock**

All lights were dimmed, the hour was late,
When Smithy climbed the wall,
His nerves were in a jumpy state,
His losses were not small,
The cards had failed to play his game,
In the dingy smoke-filled bar,
He had lost, and lost again,
Where now his lucky star?

After lights-out. There were familiar, recurring situations – 'set pieces' – which never lost the power to excite and alarm. Vernon Smith detected returning from a nocturnal adventure, if such it may be called, from the 'Three Fishers', that seedy establishment on the banks of the river Sark.

These confrontations never failed to concentrate the attention. One sees again the rays of the lamp playing on the Bounder's startled features in the moment of detection, the grim visage of the Remove master in the shadows; high drama this.

That Smithy will ultimately be cleared and escape expulsion we know. But the heart-stopping moment never lost its power, and we never tired of the repetition.

"So, you have returned Vernon Smith!"

The accusing – and familiar – sentence uttered in the deepest of tones conjures at once the tall, angular, dressing-gowned figure with gimlet eyes holding aloft a lamp in the doorway of the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars. The long, dim and shadowy room with its rows of beds on either side, with a few fellows sitting up and witnessing the dramatic scene of the Bounder caught in the act of returning from one of his nocturnal excursions to the 'Three Fishers'. So often described this confrontation never lost its intensity.

Mr. Quelch has been sitting up far beyond his usual retiring time which has occasioned a distinctly retrograde effect upon his humour. Indeed so overcome has this been by righteous anger that the prospect for the delinquent seems likely to be grim in the extreme.

Now Quelch had caught the Bounder 'red handed' as it were. Smithy had almost 'made it', having silently entered the unlatched box-room window and made his way along the passages, up the stairs to the Remove dormitory. He was, so he congratulated himself, 'home and dry' when the rays of a lamp cast shadows along the passage and a tall figure appearing enormous and menacing bore down upon him in the gloom and the fatal words were uttered.

This was a disastrous moment for the Bounder. His fate at Greyfriars trembled in the balance. Many times had his career been in jeopardy and never had it failed to send a chilling shudder down his spine.

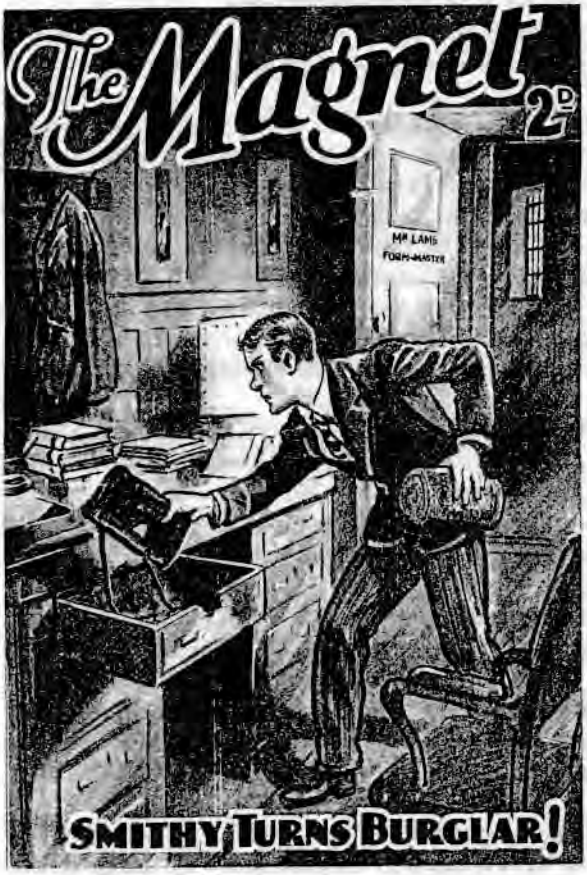
Few will disagree that Herbert Vernon Smith is an enigma. Anyone so designated must be a more interesting personality than somebody less complicated. The fact that Smithy presents to many conflicting facets to the world at large marks him as a subject for closer scrutiny.

"Oh, it is a perilous boy: bold, quick, ingenious, forward, capable". These words of Shakespeare sum up the character of Vernon Smith. A great potentiality for good, oft-

times unevenly balanced by a tendency to swing in the opposite direction according to circumstances and how his wayward nature chooses to dictate.

Tom Redwing, his particular chum may be well said to fill the role of guardian angel, always appealing to the nobler side of his friend's oscillating nature, and receiving little encouragement of thanks. A typical example may be quoted. Smithy intends to play the 'Giddy Goat' by breaking bounds after lights out to honour that doubtful hostelry the 'Three Fishers' with his company, and his far too ample supply of banknotes. There has been an impatient, whispered altercation in the dusk of the dormitory, Redwing, anxious and concerned, is trying to persuade and 'head off' the recalcitrant Bounder by appealing to his better nature, but Smithy, in one of his less attractive moods, is determined to go ahead, even against his own better judgement, for the devilment of the situation and to annoy his chum – such is his perverse humour.

Sadly he is at his sarcastic 'best' when baiting Redwing and insisting upon his own headstrong way. Soon he has gone by the time honoured route via the box-room window, over the leads and so to the cloister wall, leaving an anxious and worried chum praying that he will not be spotted by a wakeful master or prefect. As has so often happened, Redwing will lie sleepless gazing into the darkness awaiting the return of the rebel. Yet the regard which each holds for the other will in no way be impaired by these nocturnal expeditions. Therein lies much of the charm and attraction the Bounder holds for his true-blue friend. He may indeed be described as a young rascal with all the elements within him of being a really decent fellow. An enigmatical oddity, no less.




There is something in Tom Redwing's personality, his uncomplicated and straightforward acceptance of life, his honest and loyal support of rules and authority, which attracts the Bounder, constricted though he is by his devious and sardonic nature. He is well aware of these less than admirable aspects in his make-up and secretly would give much to be more of a kind with his uncomplicated chum.

Vernon Smith is seen at his best when Redwing manages to

get him away by himself, cycling over to Hawkscliff to his father's cottage or spending the day sailing in the bay and climbing on the cliffs. It is then that a new character emerges and the Bounder seems to shed his shady aspects like a chameleon and becomes for a brief spell an ordinary decent fellow.

These interludes are almost idyllic – Frank Richards at his best. They remain in the memory with a freshness pleasant to recall and give the firm impression that there is far more good than otherwise in Smithy's colourful character. We recall him as a rather hard featured, yet by no means unhandsome youth who sported a coloured or 'fancy' waistcoat in contrast to the orthodox garb generally worn. One suspects that this gesture was a tilt at authority, for he was not in any way a 'dandy' and dress did not enter too largely into his scheme of things.

We know from experience that he was exceedingly adept in detecting the chinks and flaws in the armour of the powers-that-be-: nothing delighted him more than to exploit these insights!

Picture the billiard room at the 'Three Fishers' public house, that disreputable riverside inn on the banks of the Sark. A large low-ceilinged room dominated by the table in the centre, overhung by three large green shaded lamps throwing maximum light upon the table beneath. French doors lead out into an unkempt garden from which a path runs down to the towpath beyond a thick hedge. Another door opens into the bar, and yet another, covered by a dingy red curtain, leads into the private sanctum of Joseph Banks. In this 'office' is transacted much of his shady business and betting deals, the validity of which would hardly survive too searching a scrutiny.

The hour is late, long past 'lights out' at Greyfriars. The atmosphere of the room is one swirling cloud of pungent blue tobacco-smoke. This clings to everything, ceiling, walls, even the clothing of the several inmates.

Banks, an obese and beery figure with the sleeves of his shirt, a vulgar garment with loud pink stripes, turned back to the elbows, stands leaning on his cue watching Vernon Smith, who has also shed his jacket and has a cigarette drooping from the corner of his mouth. There is an unhealthy glitter in his eyes as he moves round the table while playing his shots. An expert performer, but, unknown to the others present, there is, deep down within him, a very real sense of dissatisfaction at the futility of what he is doing which is contrary to the nobler instincts in his nature.

Of this he is painfully aware; yet he persists. His feelings of contempt are not only for those with whom he is consorting but for himself. Such are the conflicting currents in his nature. Confronted with the choice he would probably rather be sleeping peacefully alongside the other fellows in the Remove dormitory. We must take our Bounder as nature made him.

His father, Samuel Vernon Smith, a formidable figure in the city is, in truth, rather proud of his son's sharpness, and has frequently opined that it will stand him in good stead in the great world of business into which one day he will be launched.

Whether the Bounder will become a 'Bull' or a 'Bear' is problematical, and according to the direction of the wind. One aspect is certain, his acuteness and an 'eye' to the main and most profitable chance will assure him a lucrative career.

There is no doubt that Tom Redwing gives his chum a sense of stability which is sadly lacking in the Bounder's make-up. Waywardness and wilfulness are two elements

well to the fore in Smithy's character, with constancy being at a low ebb, excepting towards Redwing. Even this, upon occasion, tends to wear thin according to his prevailing humour.

Greasy pasteboards, the ace of spades and jokers indistinctly seen through a haze of tobacco smoke, and the billiard table at midnight seem to have a peculiar fascination for Smithy, expressing that sense of recklessness and rebellion which seems to be inherent in his character. Yet when he *does* rise to better occasions – as he is perfectly capable of doing – he is well worth watching on Little-Side, be it winter or summer. Vanished then are the mists and shadows; in the ascendancy are those happier facets of his nature, and at the end of the day he has proved a splendid sporting counterpoint to Harry Wharton and Co.

Mr. Quelch, a keenly observant and by no means inexpert assessor of boys, has often pondered upon the strange relationship between Redwing and Vernon Smith, the coming together of two diametrically orientated members of his form. The attraction of opposites – a well used phrase – may be suggested as a possible explanation, although it can be said that for much of the time Tom Redwing is uneasy in his mind as he contemplates the antics of his wayward chum. Time has revealed to him the chinks in Smithy's armour, the 'soft' spots which may sometimes be appealed too. It has been said that there exists some good in the least likely material. This is certainly the case with the Bounder, who possesses the intelligence to realise when he is 'playing the ass' even though he may lack the necessary force of will to cry halt.

The possibility is that when Smithy is climbing through the box-room window after 'lights out' intent on one of his 'sprees' at the 'Three Fishers' with certain insalubrious cronies, he feels rather an ass in placing himself in such a situation through pure crassness and bravado. Surely a warm bed in the Remove dormitory would be preferable. Common sense strongly dictates that this would be the sensible thing to do.

Thus there is a warring of emotions in his mind which usually ends with a shrug of the shoulders and a leap for the top of the old ivy-clad wall of the cloisters at that point favoured by fellow 'night birds'. So does victory go to the shadows. Yet the small candle of decency never ceases to cast its faint rays which thankfully give sufficient light for more positive future activities from the Bounder.

Vernon Smith has justly acquired the sobriquet of 'Bounder'. Once committed to the warpath he is capable of unreasonable risks from which only his phenomenal luck has saved him. His 'star', and on so many occasions the timely intervention of Tom Redwing and other fellows, have proved to be his salvation. Even Billy Bunter has been known to weigh in and save the Bounder's 'bacon' on several memorable occasions, and to wax priggish in the extreme about it subsequently.

Practically the whole of Smithy's attitude is revolt against the accepted order of things. Aligning himself with the orthodox seems foreign to his nature. One may occasionally meet other similar fellows, most of them very decent at heart.

Fate has been generous to him in his choice of chums, particularly in Tom Redwing, who is always determined – *per fas et nefas* – to stand by and practise his seemingly infinite capacity to forgive and forget.

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# NEWS OF THE OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUBS

## NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

We were pleased to welcome three members, who are only able to visit us on occasion, at our June meeting.

We spoke briefly concerning our Golden Jubilee Celebrations on 14th October. A number of people, other than members of our Club, have already booked for lunch on that day and all members of other Clubs and readers of the C.D. are welcome to join us on that special occasion. A favourable report was given with regard to the progress of the forthcoming "Jennings Meeting".

We had two disappointments with regard to our programme: firstly, our speaker for the evening was at the very last moment unable to be with us and, secondly, our proposed July meeting at Borders Bookshop has had to be cancelled because of a large music event taking place on that day. This meant that many roads would be closed in the city, and the bookshop was not staying open to its normal 11.00 p.m. However, Geoffrey Good kindly offered the use of his home in Wakefield for the July evening meeting.

As an emergency last minute arrangement, our June meeting was taken up by the showing of a video kindly loaned by Mr. John Wernham. We were able to see the London O.B.B.C. visit to Margate and Folkestone, presumably in the late 1960s or very early 1970s; a visit to the home of C.H. Chapman; some film taken in the back garden of "Rose Lawn" and John Wernham himself talking on local television about the O.B.B.C. and his collection at Maidstone. Other clips were shown, making this evening very enjoyable with a promise of more to come when we meet at Geoffrey's in July.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

## LONDON O.B.B.C.

There were many fine entertainments on offer at the June meeting of the London O.B.B.C. at Bill Bradford's Ealing home.

Bill presented a "mixed bag" quiz; Brian Doyle spoke on "Alf's Button" by W.A. Darlington and Andrew Pitt tested members' knowledge of schools featured in films. Also featured in the packed programme were a grid puzzle from Roger Jenkins, a reading from the "Magnet" selected by Eric Lawrence and Bill Bradford's "Memory Lane".

VIC PRATT

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## SUMMER BOOK SELECTION

**by Mary Cadogan**

***Steeley and the Missing Page & Other Stories*** by W.E. Johns, and ***The Famous Five Adventure*** by Enid Blyton: both illustrated by Andrew Skilleter. Published by Norman Wright, 60 Eastbury Road, Watford, Herts. WD1 4JL at £19.50 each, plus postage and packing. *(See enclosed order form)*

Everyone has heard of Biggles, even if they have read none of the books which chronicle his remarkable exploits. W.E. Johns's other hero with an aviation background – Deeley Montfort Delaroy (nicknamed 'Steeley') – is less celebrated, although in some ways he can be seen as a more complex and intriguing character than James Bigglesworth.

Steeley started out as an anti-hero who, disillusioned with 'the land fit for heroes' that followed the First World War, decided, in Robin Hood style, to rob the rich and distribute his pickings to ex-servicemen who were on hard times. Eventually seeing the error of his ways, he was recruited to work for national security at Scotland Yard and with the Secret Service.

Most of his adventures appeared in periodicals and were collected into five full length books between 1936 and 1939. However, two novelettes, *Steeley and the Missing Page* (1937) and *Nazis in the New Forest* (1940), were serialized respectively in *The Thriller* and *War Thriller* but these slipped through the net of book publication. Only now have they been collected and produced in book format.

A third story, *The Ravensdale Mystery*, which does not feature Steeley is also included. This was originally published in 1941 in the *Girl's Own 'Annual'*, volume 62. It focuses on a schoolgirl heroine who is instrumental in foiling the activities of a nest of Nazi spies operating near her school on a desolate part of the north-east coast.

With this new book it is good to be reminded of other aspects of Johns's work than his stories of the (deservedly) resilient Biggles. Whether battling against ruthless members of London's pre-war crime gangs or engaged in desperate anti-espionage adventures, Steeley is tough, quick-witted, gutsy – and chivalrous to the weak and those who are down on their luck. His exploits are narrated by his side-kick, 'Tubby' White, who, like Steeley, has been a wartime pilot. In the tradition of the Holmes/Watson combination, their partnership facilitates detailed discussion of plans and procedures, and the unravelling of mysteries. *Steeley and the Missing Page* offers lots of escapist action and excitement, as well as the tensions and satisfactions of Johns's conveyances of battles between good and evil. This collection provides perfect holiday reading and the publisher is to be congratulated on making the stories available in an accessible format.

The book's third story, *The Ravensdale Mystery*, shows Johns (under the pen-name of 'William Earle') writing in an unfamiliar idiom – the girls' school story. This episode originally appeared in the so-called 'Annual' of the *Girl's Own Paper*, a book which actually comprised one year's copies of the monthly *G.O.P.* bound together. The story is set out as if it had been serialized in the monthly magazine – but it never was! With some other additional material, it was included to bulk out the 'Annual' because, I suspect, the monthly had been considerably reduced in size through wartime paper shortages. Whether or not Johns was invited to write this makeweight piece at short notice we shall never know. By autumn 1941, when the 'Annual' appeared, he was the star writer of the

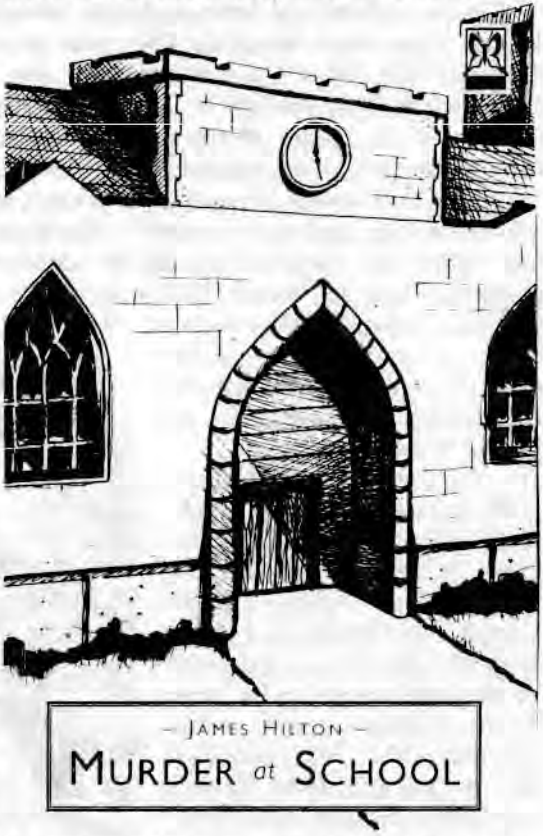
*G.O.P.* having launched *Worrals of the W.A.A.F.S.* as a serial in it almost a year earlier (in October 1940). He was also contributing regular aviation features and patriotic pep-talks to the paper.

In his excellent and bibliographically informative introduction to *Steeley and the Missing Page*, Peter Berresford Ellis (who co-authored with Jennifer Schofield the definitive W.E. Johns biography) suggests that, in Joan Scott, the heroine of *The Ravensdale Mystery*, we might be 'seeing the emergence of an embryonic Joan Worralson ('Worrals')'. This seems unlikely as *'Worrals'* was published a year before *'Ravensdale'* but it *is* curious that both characters were given the same Christian name.

Johns uses several stereotypical characters and situations – the 'outsider' heroine who has to make good with her peers; a French mistress whose values seem so different from those of her fellow teachers that she soon becomes suspected as an enemy agent – plus secret caves and tunnels that link the school to the sea and are ready-made for the nefarious activities of German spies! Written for a younger audience than the Steeley stories, it is still very readable with, of course, a special interest for students and connoisseurs of Second World War fiction.

*The Famous Five Adventure* is the only play which Enid Blyton wrote about her very popular group of child adventurers, the Famous Five. Norman Wright records in his introduction to the book that this play was produced on the professional London stage for two Christmas seasons during the mid-1950s. Its publication now in book form (from Blyton's own almost forgotten carbon copy) saves it from extinction and we should be extremely grateful for this. The play comprises three acts, and makes lively, entertaining reading. I have always felt that Blyton's skill as a playwright has never been properly acknowledged (she wrote many short plays especially designed for juvenile actors, probably in school productions). *The Famous Five Adventure* clearly illustrates her abilities as a dramatist. The dialogue is natural: action is brisk: there is humour interspersed with drama. Andrew Skilleter's pictures appropriately express the mood which is a blend of thrills and chills and nostalgic charm. This book should become an important collectors' item. Snap it up while you can – it is published in a limited edition!

***Murder at School*** by James Hilton. ***Death on the Oxford Road*** by E.C.R. Lorac. ***The Eye of Osiris*** by R. Austin Freeman. (All available at £7.95 each post free from the publishers, Swallowtail Books, 3 Danesbrook, Claverley, Shropshire, WV5 7BB. Also available from bookshops.)




Good detective fiction is always in season. When we savour it between November and February its murky mysteriousness seems to enhance the sombre winter mood. In summer, especially when read in the garden or on the beach, it neatly counterbalances days that are steamy and over-sultry. Always, as well as offering the stimulus and satisfaction of puzzle-solving, it produces a sense of well-being – even of cosiness – within the reader. (Relief, perhaps, that our lives pursue mundane courses rather than the high and murderous dramas we are reading about!)

Swallowtail Books' first selection of sleuthing stories is wide-ranging and appealing. These well-produced, chunky paper-back volumes are excellent value. For C.D. readers, possibly the most intriguing of the present batch is *Murder at School* by James Hilton. This author, of course, with his *Goodbye Mr. Chips* has carved himself a lasting niche in the school story hall of fame. *Murder at School* was published in 1931 – three years before *Mr. Chips* – under the pseudonym of 'Glen Trevor'; it cleverly exploits the heightened intensities of feeling, events and relationships in the miscrocosmic, even sometimes claustrophobic, world of public school.

The crisp overall mood differs markedly from the more gentle one of Chips's Brookfield School. Colin Revell, the dilettantish writer and amateur sleuth at the centre of events, is an old boy of Oakington School who is invited by the present Head to investigate the curious circumstances of a pupil's supposedly accidental death. Revell is no potential Mr. Chips: '... the Headmaster of Oakington was hardly a host he would have chosen. He disliked schoolmasters and sentimental revisitings with almost equal degrees of intensity, and the two in conjunction could raise in his mind only the most dismal of prospects.' However, he *does* take up the challenge and becomes involved in several murder mysteries in which various members of the school staff, from the worldly,

bon-biveur Head downwards, become suspects. It all adds up to college-confine sleuthing at its most enjoyable.

*Death on the Oxford Road* is by E.C.R. Lorac (in real life Edith Caroline Rivett-Carnac, who wrote over seventy detective novels). Like Hilton's story, this is set in the 1930s. There is much to enjoy in the complex investigative processes that are unfolded, and most of us will read with equal relish the details of motoring and other social delights of the period which crop up in the narrative. Red herrings and plot twists abound. This novel owes nothing to the amateur crime-solving enthusiast: sleuthing is in the firmly professional hands of Chief Inspector Robert Macdonald of the C.I.D., and his methods are persuasively recorded.

The most ambitious and powerful of these three crime stories is R. Austin Freeman's *The Eye of Osiris*. First published in 1911 and set in London and the Home Counties, the narrative is richly atmospheric. Early twentieth-century London vignettes are used both to produce frisson and to convey a feeling of well-being. The author has skilfully strung together a collection of bizarre events and fairly staid Edwardian characters. Country houses, London courts, 'mummies' (at the British Museum) and other Egyptian artefacts provide plentiful clues – and distractions.

In the middle of it all is the formidable super-sleuth, Dr. Thorndyke, who inexorably and meticulously is eventually able to unravel apparently insoluble puzzles. Jogging along in parallel with murder, mystery and mayhem is a surprisingly intense romance.

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**WANTED:** All pre-war *Sexton Blake Libraries*. All *Boys Friend Libraries*. All comics/papers etc with stories by W.E. Johns, Leslie Charteris & Enid Blyton. Original artwork from *Magnet, Gem, Sexton Blake Library* etc. also wanted. I will pay £150.00 for original *Magnet* cover artwork, £75.00 for original *Sexton Blake Library* cover artwork. NORMAN WRIGHT, 60 Eastbury Road, Watford, WD1 4JL. Tel: 01923-232383.

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**UNBOUND MAGNETS WANTED:** 64 91 95 110 204 207 215 217 219 220 221 223 227 229 230 231 253. G. GOOD, Greyfriars, 147 Thornes Road, Wakefield, West Yorkshire WF2 8QN. Tel: 01924-378273.

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**It helps the C.D. if you advertise your "For Sales" and Wants** in it. The rates are: 4p per word, £5 for a quarter page, £10 for a half page and £20 for a whole page.

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**FOR SALE:** Bound volume of five copies of the Boys' Friend 1904 £10.00 – phone for details for all the Boys' Friend. Five copies of The Big Budget 1905, bound - £10.00. Bound volume of eight Boys' Friend, 1901 - £15.00. Bound volume of nine Boys' Friend, 1905, containing Nelson Lee Prison Warden serial - £15.00. The following are Gerald Swan Publications: Girls' Fun Comic, 1954 - £2.00 each, 3 no. 6d editions. Yankee Gang Shorts £2.00 each, 2 No. Yankee Western Shorts £2.00. Yankee Air Action £2.00. Yankee Air Action £2.00. Schoolboys' Album, 1948 - £3.00. Schoolgirls' Album £2.00. B. BLIGH, 55 Arundel Avenue, Hazel Grove, Stockport, Cheshire, SK7 5LD. Phone/fax: 0161-483 7627.

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## THE THIRTY NINE STEPS AND THE BROADSTAIRS CONNECTION

**by Tony Cook**

For the benefit of those who may not be fully acquainted with "The Thirty Nine Steps", John Buchan's first published book, I will begin with some background material.

Sometime during the years 1912/13 Buchan, having read some contemporary thrillers, commented to his wife, 'I should like to write a story of this sort and take real pains with it. Most detective story writers don't take half enough trouble with their characters, and no one cares what becomes of either the corpse or the murderer'. These thoughts must certainly have been the beginning of JB the storyteller. The first of what he termed his shockers was "The Power House", serialised in Blackwood's Magazine and produced in book form in 1916. "The Thirty Nine Steps", his second novel, also having been serialised, was his first published book, appearing in 1915 thus giving rise to the popular misconception that it was his first novel.

In August 1914, just before the first world war began, Alice, Buchan's daughter, had undergone a mastoid operation and needed a period of convalescence. The family decided on Broadstairs. They found lodgings at "St. Ronans'", Stone Road. Unfortunately Buchan himself was seized with what he described as one of his unaccountable pains and was himself confined to bed. There is no doubt that Broadstairs was the catalyst for the closing chapter of the book. While the Buchans were there, Susan, Buchan's cousin, was in residence not far from "St. Ronan's" having been lent a villa named "St Cuby" on the North Foreland. Opposite the villa were some steps leading down through the cliff onto a small private beach. These and other factors set the scene for the final chapter of the book. There does, however, seem to be divided opinions as to whether JB finished the book during his stay. J.W. H. de L'A Buchan in an article entitled "John Buchan & The Great War" states 'In November 1914 his health failed again and he was to take to his bed once more. There he completed his 'shocker' as he called it, *begun* while he was convalescing at Broadstairs in August!" Andrew Lownie in his excellent biographies of JB says, 'It was there (at Broadstairs) Buchan *completed* the book with which his name is indivisibly associated, "The Thirty Nine Steps"'.

Either way there is no doubt in my mind that the last chapter of the book took shape while he was confined to bed at "St. Ronan's", and I feel it matters little exactly where it was completed though I venture to suggest that he would have put pen to paper during his stay and while all the facts were fresh in his mind rather than to waste time, notes or rely on his memory at a later date. He was not the type of person to waste precious time.

Why, one might ask is the book so popular? Since the first printing over one and a quarter million copies have been sold, one of the most important editions being from the OUP in their World Classic series in 1993. This was edited and introduced by Christopher Harvie, and also contained a section of explanatory notes. Another reason for its general popularity is that it has been filmed on three occasions. In 1943 JB sold the film rights to Gaumont British at Lime Grove Studios where it was made and directed by Alfred Hitchcock. In the long run it turned out to be a fair representation of the book despite the introduction of a female lead (Madeleine Carroll). Robert Donat played Richard Hannay. The book contains no female characters at all. This departure *did* cause adverse comments from sundry quarters. The premier of the film at the Gallery Cinema in Regent Street was attended by the Buchan family. Susan Buchan later commented, 'John enjoyed it and did not mind the introduction of a woman into the story or the alterations to

the plot. My own opinion is that it would have been a better film if they had stuck to the original story; but if one forgets about the book, "The Thirty Nine Steps" as a film, was good entertainment'. Further comment from William Buchan, was that at least Hitchcock stuck to the main core of the plot and there was no mention of the enemy or the war. Hitchcock himself suggested that the film would never have survived had he not introduced some love interest, and after all Madeleine Carroll was, indeed, a beauty of her time, which was true. The second film made in 1960 was very similar to the first in its presentation, apart from the usual director's licence, with Kenneth More playing the part of Hannay. It was not until the third version that the story went into the world of pure fantasy with Robert Powell in the lead, ending up with Hannay clinging on to the minute hand of Big Ben to prevent the triggering of a massive explosion. This was pure Harold Lloyd! It is interesting to note that the original version has now become a classic and in 1997 a poster advertising the film was sold at Christies for £5,890, a considerable sum even in this day and age.

On the 23rd September 1999, the British Film Institute announced its top 100 British films of the century. The Hitchcock version of "The Thirty Nine Steps" was ranked number 4. This is a great accolade for both Director and Author. One feels sure that JB would have been both surprised and pleased at this outcome.

In the world of second-hand books and the on-going interest of many collectors for first editions of their favourite authors, I have noticed that recently, despite very high prices, "The Thirty Nine Steps" is being offered at between £35 and £65 depending on the condition. One dealer recently advertised a very poor copy '1926 H & S complete but...' for £10. At least this should stop collectors of Buchan books from over-emphasizing the popularity of this book!

For those readers interested in illustrators and book illustrations, it was not until 1964 that a publisher bothered to illustrate a volume of "The Thirty Nine Steps". Dent then saw fit to issue the book in their C.I.C. series and engaged no less an artist than Edward Ardizzone for the artwork. Despite his international reputation as an illustrator it was certain that he never took the trouble to read the book and, further, the publishers themselves were satisfied not to comment. The cover, typical Ardizzone style, shows Hannay hiding in the heather to escape the attention of what he calls 'the cursed monoplane'. The illustration clearly shows a biplane. It has always been my contention that where possible all illustrators, whether professional or commercial, should take notice of the text but in so many cases this does not happen. In 1985 Chatto and Windus produced the first illustrated version in full colour with illustrations by Philip Hood. This turned out to be a great success and I doubt if many Buchan fans would voice serious adverse comment about the depiction of the characters. It must be said that Hannay as illustrated bears an uncanny resemblance to Robert Donat but this I am assured by the artist was suggested by the publisher. Philip Hood is an artist of some distinction. For several years he was on the staff of Punch in the capacity of magazine designer. He also continued his work through advertising and packaging and in recent years has done much work for hotels and private houses both in this country and abroad. He lives in North London with his wife and three children.

*To be continued*

# THE
# THIRTY-NINE STEPS

by
JOHN BUCHAN

*With a colour frontispiece*
*and line drawings in the text by*
EDWARD ARDIZZONE

LONDON: J. M. DENT & SONS LTD
NEW YORK: E. P. DUTTON & CO. INC.

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## Various Parties Converging on the Sea

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