

Collectors' Digest

Vol. 7. No 82

OCTOBER

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H. Lewis

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Editor, Miscellaneous Section,
Herbert Leckenby, Telephone Exchange,
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A YORKSHIREMAN IN LONDON: As I mentioned last month, Father Time has it that I become an "old man" next year. Methinks there must be something wrong about his reckoning. Here's a typical day during my latest tour of London Town - From South London to meet Jimmy Stewart Hunter at Liverpool Street (for the second time) at 11.30 a.m., on to the Ministry of Civil Aviation, fourth floor to see Arthur Richardson in the afternoon, then out to Surbiton for an evening with Eric Fayne. In between calls, walking along miles of London's pavements, Fleet Street, Strand, Piccadilly, etc. etc. Home round about midnight.

From the very moment I spotted the tall figure of the ever-faithful Len at King's Cross on my arrival, to the time we said farewell at the same place, it was just like that. Retire on the grounds of old age! It's daft!!

Back home I'm faced with the same old problem as in five earlier years - how in the space available to give an adequate account of my holiday and to express my sincere heartfelt thanks to all those who once more, gave me such a wonderful time.

Always outstanding, of course, is the Brighton meeting where at Robby's hospitable home one meets so many old friends. This year there seemed to be more than ever, though I was sorry Norton

Price and Mrs. Price could not make the journey. Earlier in the day, some of us had been along to Bill Jardine's at the other side of Brighton, to lunch. The generosity, thoughtfulness and kindness of people like "Robby", Bill Jardine and their wives, always astounds me. They, especially the ladies, must have been working for days in preparation for the occasion. Verily the forming of the London O.B.B.C. and all it has led to is real romance and a story of noble deeds.

Then there's that great fellow, Harry Homer. Back for a short while from Spain one of the first things he sees to is that there are seats for me and Ben Whiter on the front row of the Arsenal stand. A grand gesture you know. Later, refreshment with him in the regions where only the elite of Highbury are to be found. There Harry told me of the progress made with the Blakiana section of the Annual.

One other happy event was a half-hour's lunch time chat near Fleet Street with George Mell, whom I was meeting for the first time. Along with Len more chat about the Annual.

Then once more meeting Roger Jenkins at Marble Arch, tea at the Corner House then our usual stroll through Hyde Park, Green Park, Whitehall - Roger says he does more walking on this occasion than any other day in the year. Before I left him he had promised two articles for the annual. Oh yes, it was a busman's holiday all right!

Other annual rendezvous - Eric Landy at Liverpool Street, Charles Vennimore by Cleopatra's Needle; the usual pleasant evening at Bob Blythe's; happy meetings with Bob, Eileen and Ben at "Cherry Place", Wood Green; long looked forward to chats with John Shaw at Camberwell and an hour or two gazing in wonderment at Bill Martin's marvellous collection.

Out to familiar Greenwich to be welcomed by dear friends of mine, Charlie and Olive Wright, second to none where making a fellow feel at home is concerned, as many beside myself can testify. Finale there when Charlie invited me to lunch at the Seaman's Hospital.

Last, but by no means least, Len first to greet me, last to say 'au revoir', in between acting as guide and with Josie looking after my comfort at Archdale Road

Just one note of regret, there was no meeting with Tom Strype by Kemsley House, Grays Inn Road. Three letters to him failed to

bring a reply. That was so unusual for Tom that I could not help feeling perturbed, and pray that no harm has befallen him.

Apart from that disappointment everything went according to plan, each appointment being kept dead on time. And it's something of an achievement to have squeezed all that happened to me into so small a space.

The future is in the lap of the gods, but I'm keeping my fingers crossed and, as I said at Brighton, unless something beyond my power intervenes, I'll get to London Town again next year, even if I've got to walk.

Postscript: Jokingly, it would appear that Fleet Street knew I had gone to Town, for whilst I was there two papers featured articles appertaining to our circle.

The "Evening News" has a 'strip' called "Peter Jackson's London", something on the lines of Ripley's famous "Believe It or Not". Well, on Sept. 16th the greater part of it was devoted to Bill Martin, that personality all of you know but few have seen. It dealt with his wonderful collection. As soon as I saw it, it struck me it would be a great idea if it could be reproduced on our cover. The moment I got back I paid a visit to our duplicating agency, with the result that we shall have it next month.

The sketch hardly does Bill justice, for he is rather more cheerful looking than the artist has made him (did not Noel Whitcombe once call him the "jovial milkman"?) he is not quite so thin on top and has a healthy complexion. However, it will give all his customers all over the world who can have no hopes of seeing him in the flesh, some idea of what he is like.

When I called on him two days after the article appeared he showed me a basket containing a couple of hundred letters or more which had already reached him as a result, and the phone was continually ringing. He has had a lot more since; another illuminating example of the amazing interest there is in the old papers.

Bill is desperately trying to cope with his terrific mail and asks me to offer his apologies should there be delay in replying to anyone. I have a fellow feeling for him for my holiday has put me in arrears with my mail too.

The other article appeared in the "Daily Sketch" on September 24th, under a heading you could see yards away "The Bunter Fans take a Peep at Pearl". It told of those delightful Pearl White "Exploits of Elaine" and Perils of Pauline" films John Robyns puts

on at the Brighton meetings and which some of us had seen a few days before. Unfortunately there were a few of the usual errors. They called "Robby" Bobyns and missed the "r" of Bob Whiter's name. It was also stated that the O.B.B.C. owned some of the films; that of course isn't true, for they are Robby's own priceless property.

Bob Whiter had written the "Sketch" some time before the meeting. His writing is perfectly clear so the errors should not have arisen. Still it was another interesting page added to our astonishing story.

One more word. My grateful thanks to the score or more fellows who sent me cuttings of these two events.

* * * * *

THE TIME IS DRAWING NEAR: Only a little over two months to go and the Annual will be on its way, and take it from me it's going to please you. Yes, I know I've said it before, and I'm making no apologies for saying it again. Since I last mentioned it I have seen some of the articles in type, and, honestly they look a treat. Not only that, but you are going to get more for your money for I found that on a full page there will be about 150 words more than in previous years. In all I estimate we shall have at least 100,000 words, far more than the length of the average present day novel. The titling of the articles will look more attractive than ever before, and when I was at Wood Green I saw evidence that Bob Whiter was going to make a fine job of the cover.

If Mr. Gore-Browne has his way there won't be a comma out of place, and altogether I am confident it is going to be the most superb job ever done by the duplicator method.

Orders still come in encouragingly, but there are still a number of regulars who have not yet sent along. I feel confident I can rely on them, but it would make things easier if they made sure, and let me have their questionnaires. I'm going to have few spare moments in the next two months, so may I request that you make my task as easy as possible.

Yours sincerely,
HERBERT LECKENBY.

P.S. The cover picture this month would have been more appropriate in November, but as the one dealing with Bill Martin cannot be ready for this issue, we had to make a switch.

HAVE YOU ORDERED YOUR COPY OF THE ANNUAL?

HAMILTONIANA

Compiled by HERBERT LECKENBY

THE SCHOOL CAP: I had a very interesting letter from F. Victor Giles recently in which he told me that Basil Storey used to edit a paper called "Speedway Gazette" and that he has been for some years the speedway correspondent of the "Daily Express", a point which had escaped me. Mr. Giles says that judging by photographs Basil Storey will be in his thirties. This, of course, kills the theory that he might be G.R. Samways. Mr. Giles, however, clearly recollects that Mr. Storey once admitted that when a boy he was a devotee of Frank Richards (he said something similar in a letter to Ben Whiter) and drew direct inspiration from the Greyfriars stories.

Frankly, in his Rockcliffe stories he has not succeeded in getting the master touch, nevertheless the paper seems to be making a brave effort to keep going and it is a pity it has not had more publicity.

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All readers will be sorry to hear that Mr. C.H. Chapman met with an accident a week or two ago. He was knocked off his bicycle by a car. On being taken to hospital it was found he was suffering from a broken finger and three cracked ribs. He was able to return home after a few days.

Mr. Chapman's accident prevented him going to the Birmingham meeting, which was held the following weekend. It would seem he is fated to miss that event again.

I am sure all will wish him a speedy return to health.

* * * * *

TRIBUTE FROM A STAR: Said "T.V. Mirror" Sept. 19th, under heading "Musical Gem" - Billy Bunter fan is Arthur Askey. "When I was a kid" he says, "I used to do my piano practice with a copy of The Magnet or Gem on the music stand while I was playing "The Rustle of Spring". So Arthur did learn the piano.....
(Thanks to John Geal for cutting.)

* * * * *

YOU FIND THEM EVERYWHERE: On the first day of my stay in London, at the request of my wife I went out to Wimbledon to try and find

her brother who had settled there some time ago. I succeeded and over tea began to explain why I had come to London, and my interest in the collecting of boys' weeklies. Before I had mentioned any names the brother's wife exclaimed "Oh when I was a girl I used to read the "Magnet", I revelled in the stories of Harry Wharton and could hardly wait for publishing day. I remember Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, Coker, the Bounder Vernon Smith. When I was a girl of ten, and I don't mind admitting that was before the First War, I was really in love with Harry Wharton.

From then on I assure you that we had a very interesting conversation.

And when Bob and Eileen Whiter were in a hotel in Brussels whilst on holiday, Bob happened to mention the Magnet (nothing unusual for Bob that) and a gentleman near by overheard him. Said he "Did I hear the good old Magnet mentioned?" Followed an hour of real nostalgia. Marvellous, isn't it?

* * * * *

THOSE NAMES: Dr. Wilson of Glasgow tells me that on his rounds one day he noticed that the name plate on the door next to one of his patients bore the inscription "Mr. A. D'Arcy" and a little later on another neighbour's read "Mr. S. Singh".

And what do you think to this one? Bob Blythe informed me that near his home there's a big block of flats divided into "Houses". Three of these adjacent to each other are called "Quelch House", "Lee House" and "Blake House". Yes, honestly it's a fact. Blake and Lee are fairly common names, of course, but the Quelch touch makes it a real coincidence well worth recording.

* * * * *

BILLY BUNTER HORRIFIES HIM! In the Sunday "Observer" there appeared recently (thanks Peter Walker for cutting) a letter from a Balham correspondent who was distressed by the low morals of Billy Bunter by way of T.V. Said he:-

"A matter which seems to me deplorable is the very low standard of moral behaviour exhibited in most of T.V. Children's Hour plays. A not inconsiderable amount of my wife's and my own time is spent in teaching our son to behave and conduct himself properly; to speak clearly and precisely, to have good table manners, not to touch articles that do not belong to him, to respect grown up

people, and in no circumstances to shout at others or call them names such as "beast", "pig" and so on. Imagine, then, my horror when I watch such plays as "The Days of Billy Bunter" and "Desert Adventure".

In the first of these, the atrocious behaviour and speech of the main character is the chief content of the plays and is so presented that we are invited to laugh at him."

After some comments on Desert Adventure the distressed correspondent concluded:-

"Surely, sir, plays presented for children's viewing should set a high standard of moral behaviour. To put it in simple terms, right should be rewarded and praised, and wrong duly punished."

Well, well, after all these years we surely are not going to see a headline "Billy Bunter the Bad Boy Banned". I wonder if the correspondent has ever taken his son to a pantomime, I should advise him not to - he might have to make a hurried exit when the schoolroom scene comes on, with Idle Jack cheeking Dame Trot.

But perhaps we can reassure him. We can tell him that Greyfriars is not a "do as you like" school, that when Bunter misbehaves he is punished, that there's a master called Mr. Quelch who doesn't believe in these new-fangled notions for youthful delinquents. And failing Mr. Quelch there's Dr. Locke who despite his venerable age can still lay on with a heavy hand.

However, I've a good idea that all good Hamiltonians will agree with me if I Bunterise and say "The gentleman from Balham is talking "bally rot".

* * * * *

MORE "GOLDEN" ONES: A short time ago Vera Coates of the Northern Section O.B.B.C. was interviewed by a member of the "Yorkshire Evening Post" staff. It was good publicity and as a result Vera received several letters. In one she was offered some Magnets. The ever ready Gerry Allison got to work, the Magnets came along and lo! and behold, proved to be "red covers", including numbers 3, 8 and 9. They are now in the famous Northern Section Library, or, to be strictly correct, on loan to members of that library.

The late owner said he thought he had some more at the home of his mother who lived on the outskirts of a Yorkshire seaside resort, and promised to make enquiries. By a coincidence Gerry had booked a holiday at that same resort and set off there a few days later. As he strolled about I guess he would be thinking "so near and yet so far, maybe".

THAT ARTICLE IN "TIME": Following that article in the famous American weekly there appeared in the issue of September 14th, three fine letters paying tribute to the works of Charles Hamilton from correspondents in the U.S.A., Canada and South Africa! Once again they form a living proof of the great esteem with which the maestro is held all over the world, and of the fame of the Magnet and Gem. Here they are:-

"The Adventures of Billy Bunter

Sir: I was very interested to read your Aug. 24 article on the Magnet and illustrations from it. I used to follow the adventures of Billy Bunter, as well as all the others you mention, for many years before I came to Canada in 1925...but during the war I lost touch with such mundane matters. Although I am older than the oldest number of the Magnet, your story has brought back a desire to see for myself just what Bunter & Co. are doing now...

Beebe, Canada.

D.C. RIVETT.

Sir: Through your article I learned that friends still live whom I have long thought dead...I shall be most grateful if you can tell me if the Magnet is still being published...

Minneapolis.

JOHN A. MAXWELL.

It folded early in World War II, a victim of Britain's paper shortage. - Ed.

Sir: Even here in South Africa Frank Richards was a most popular name. The exploits of Harry Wharton & Co. in the Magnet were followed with intense eagerness by schoolboys between the years 1910-20. Our lives were actually influenced by the characters. In my own family, as youngsters, we didn't play "cowboys and Indians"...we assumed the characters of the Magnet and Gem...We developed a sense of decency and honour which has lasted all our lives. Even now...none of us smoke...

Johannesburg, South Africa.

J. TATVENBAUM.

* * * * *

THE RETURN OF THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL"

by The Rev. A.G. Pound

The two latest Mandeville publications, "Billy Bunter's Own" and "Tom Merry's Own" No. 5, together form the best approach to the "Holiday Annual" which has come since 1940.

When "Tom Merry's Own" appeared first in 1949 it was excellent

value for the money (7/6d). It contained, among many other things, a book-length story of St. Jim's, a half-book length story of Carcroft, long-short stories of Rockwood and King of the Islands and two long Barcroft Ballads. The one thing lacking was Greyfriars.

Harry Wharton and Co. appeared in T.M.O. No. 2, but although the price of T.M.O. No. 2 was higher than that of T.M.O. No. 1, its contents were only half in quantity of those of its predecessor. (Possibly due to the steep rise in cost of paper - H.L.)

T.M.O. No. 3, similar in size to T.M.O. No. 2, was distinguished only by its illustrations, which were execrable.

1952 saw in T.M.O. No. 4 a very much needed improvement. All the printed contents were Charles Hamilton's, and the illustrations, although not very numerous, were mainly by Macdonald. The quality of the stories was very good; and one in particular - a story of Jack of All Trades - was especially appealing.

The improvement has been maintained. Both "Billy Bunter's Own" and "Tom Merry's Own" No. 5 are well up to the standard of T.M.O. No. 4. There are more illustrations, of which more than half are by Chapman while almost all the others are Macdonald's. Outstanding among the illustrations are the two coloured wrappers, which are excellent, a full-page head and shoulders of Bunter and two pages of Bunter in various situations, all by Chapman, and a very lovely heading, by Macdonald, to a story entitled "Gussy's Island".

All the stories in B.B.O. and T.M.O. No. 5, except one very short yarn by his old friend, Clive Fenn, are by Hamilton. They are well representative of his art in what we may term, with admiration and affection, "the Indian Summer of Charles Hamilton". The marks of the Master Craftsman are all there; although we older ones may miss, somewhat, the superabundance of freshness and invention which appeared in earlier years.

It is good to have in B.B.O. and T.M.O. No. 5, stories not only of Billy Bunter but also of his sister Bessie and brother Sammy. They are both good yarns; and the little story of Sammy is exceptionally neat - perhaps the most artistic thing in both volumes.

A very welcome and satisfactory return is that of the Rio Kid. There is also a well-written tale of the Slackers of High Coombe. It is an interesting introduction for those who have never known the School for Slackers; it does not, however, add to what was originally published in Modern Boy. That best of all Charles Hamilton's later school-yarns needs no addition; it needs only

publication in book form.

Delightful originality of incident, if not of main plot, appears in a story entitled "Study Four at Felgate". Felgate is a very useful addition to T.M.O. I, personally, much prefer Felgate, with "Skip" Ruggles, to Carcroft and "Turkey" Tuck.

Charles Hamilton deserves congratulations for bringing B.B.O. completely up-to-date, by including a story of Mau Mau, entitled "Foes of the Forest". That story takes one pleasantly back to similar overseas adventure stories in the old "Holiday Annuals".

Well over half the pages of B.B.O. and T.M.O. No. 5 are occupied, and quite rightly with stories of Greyfriars and St. Jim's. But why 47 chapters of Greyfriars - as well as the tale about Sammy - and only 14 chapters of St. Jim's? Tom Merry and D'Arcy are just as attractive as Harry Wharton and Bunter. The atmosphere of St. Jim's is particularly charming. And, surely, if a volume is called "Tom Merry's Own" it should not be overloaded with Bunter!

May I make a few suggestions to the publishers, to whom we all ought to be most deeply grateful? Mandevilles, like Skilton's, have been our very good friends.

Why not next year have just one Annual of the size of the first Tom Merry's Own, and priced about 15/-? Why not have still more illustrations by Chapman and Macdonald, including appropriate tail-pieces? Why not abandon mere photographs, which clash with the other contents; and have a coloured frontispiece facing the title page? Why not end as the old Holiday Annuals did, with a Schoolplay in verse, of which I know Charles Hamilton has at least one waiting publication? And why not get Mr. Down, once Editor, to write one of his characteristic forewords? (I am sure he would readily do so).

The proper title for the new volume I leave to others to suggest. But now that we are getting so near it, do let us have, if at all possible, a real "Holiday Annual"!

MAGNET TITLES (cont'd). Note: No. 1220 was the last of the substitute stories. No.1211, Cracksman and Cricketer; No.1212, Foes of the Sixth; No.1213, The Schoolboy Cracksman; No.1214, The Shadow of the Underworld; No.1215, The Greyfriars Pretender; No.1216, Unmasked; No.1217, The Boy Who Knew Too Much; No.1218, The Way of the Wizard; No.1219, Bandits on the Line; No.1220,(S) Speedway Coker; No.1221, Billy Bunter's Bargain; No.1222, Bluffing the Beaks; No.1223, The Impossible Schoolboy; No.1224, The Night Raiders; No.1225, The Secret of the Oak; No.1226, Billy Bunter's Hat-Trick.

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

27, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22.

During the recent 'family' holiday, in company with Charlie and Olive Wright and spent at Folkestone, we had a day at Margate. The afternoon was spent, by kind invitation, with Mr. & Mrs. Norton Price, and I can assure you we had a most enjoyable time.

As many of you know, Norton is the 'King Pin' where the Sexton Blake Library is concerned, for he is the proud possessor of every one written (1422 to Sept. 1953) with the exception of two numbers.

(These are Second Series Nos.407 and 513, and if anyone can oblige him with either of these numbers both he and myself will be most grateful.)

In addition to this, Norton has 1090 Boys' Friend Libraries out of a total issue of 1488 (two series), to say nothing of a large number of Boys' Own and Champion Libraries, every Sexton Blake Annual and a complete set of Detective Magazine (insets to Union Jacks).

But Norton's collecting doesn't end at that - it only begins! In addition, he has thousands of cigarette cards, many very early and most valuable, books full of razor blade covers, cigarette carton 'fronts', cheese labels, milk bottle tops (cardboard) and match-box labels by the book full and box full, whilst his stamp collection in fine albums is enough to make one's mouth water.

Truly, Norton Price is the 'King Pin' of collectors!

Harry Homer, back for a brief while from Spain, was with us on Sunday Sept. 13th. Len and Harry at once got down to a discussion regarding the Blake Circle contribution to this year's C. Digest Annual, and I couldn't get a word in edgeways. But this I can say, the Sexton Blake Circle feature this year will be top-hole.

JOSIE PACKMAN.

* * * * *

THE THREE MUSKETEERS

By Josephine Packman

'The Three Musketeers'. What adventures those three words conjure up in our minds. Not, of course, the thrilling ones of

Dumas' original Musketeers, but the spectacular exploits of that trio of murderous crooks, Archie Pherison, Algy Somerton and Reggie Featherston.

Of all the characters created by G.H. Teed the Three Musketeers were surely the most ruthless. Three men without any thought for their victims, utterly callous, and yet hiding their ruthlessness behind a mask of smiling good-nature - just three young men-about-town, out to enjoy themselves dancing at the most popular night-clubs.

Curiously enough, although these characters appeared in only thirteen of the Sexton Blake stories, they became involved with many other famous criminals, such as Wu Ling, Rymer, Plummer etc.

Their first appearance was in Union Jack No.977 under the title of "The Wireless Telephone Clue", with a sub-title "The Case of the Three Musketeers". It was under this name that they were known to their friends, being always seen about together.

This first story brings them to the notice of Sexton Blake when he is called in to solve the case of an amazing burglary of pictures, gold plate and jewellery from a wealthy Member of Parliament. Whilst Blake is following up some business in Paris, Tinker listens-in on his wireless telephone and picks up a curious message, one that is obviously in code. The voice is also familiar to him, but it is not until Blake gets back from Paris, after being involved in a shooting affray, that the message is decoded and the mystery cleared up. The identity of the Three Musketeers is now known, but although Blake is able to outwit them and recover the stolen property, the three criminals escape for the time being.

The next story is in Union Jack No. 991 entitled "The Bandits of Bruyeres". All the action in this yarn takes place in France, where the Three Musketeers have fled for safety. They are soon indulging in criminal activity once again, this time kidnapping rich Americans and holding them to ransom. These exploits, however, are nipped in the bud by Sexton Blake and once more they flee, taking with them only a small portion of the ransom money they had been able to extract from their victims' families by threats of violence to the kidnapped men. This time they escape by plane and touch down in the desert; but in the words of Archie Pherison: "It was a close shave, fellows, and I hate to think of that million francs we had to leave behind, but we have covered up the trail while we can plan a new offensive".

Their next appearance is in Union Jack No.1000, "The Thousandth Chance", with a formidable array of criminals, banded together with the object of destroying their common enemy Sexton Blake. In the course of years Blake has built up a collection of wonderful art treasures which he keeps in a quiet house in a secluded part of London, the secret of which he retains to himself for obvious reasons. But these criminals have discovered the secret and plan to rob Blake of all his possessions. Among these treasures is the Ling-tse vase which Wu Ling is desirous of obtaining, and it is solely for this vase that he gathers together this band of criminals to aid him. Naturally, all these plans come to naught, and once again the trio of crooks go to ground.

The locale of the next yarn is Paris and Cairo. The title is "The Diamond Special", in U.J. No. 1001, and, as indicated by that title, the Three Musketeers indulge in a most elaborate plot and get away with a fortune in diamonds belonging to several of the wealthy diamond merchants of Paris. But it is in Cairo that Blake crosses their path again, and in U.J. No.1004 - practically a sequel - the Three Musketeers join up with Prince Hamad and Madame Soukolis, the beautiful Greek. (These two characters appear in subsequent stories as Prince Menes and Madame Goupolis).

In this Egyptian adventure Blake and Tinker arrive secretly in Cairo, in order to obtain evidence regarding the many murders of Englishmen. These murders are obviously inspired by one of the Secret Societies existing in Cairo which had as its leader Prince Hamad, and had vowed to turn the English out of Egypt. (A very familiar theme these days!) Blake adopts the disguise of an old Arab weaver and settles in a tiny shop in the native quarter, with only Tinker as his "son" to keep him company. Blake knows that he has undertaken a job which is fraught with great danger to both himself and Tinker should they be discovered, but it is only in this way he can secure the information he needs. In the course of his investigations Blake discovers that the Three Musketeers have once more crossed his path, for they are living in Cairo under the protection of Prince Hamad himself. After many exciting adventures Blake eventually compels the Egyptian prince to depart from Cairo. The Three Musketeers also manage to disappear, but not before Blake, or rather Tinker finds them and is able to recover many of the diamonds which had been stolen from the jewellers in Paris.

The three renegades next turn up in South America. Here,

Archie Pherison receives a letter from a mysterious person living in Boston, by name Mathew Cardolak. In this letter they are asked to consider a certain mission which the writer would like them to undertake, and the Three Musketeers travel to Boston hoping to go into action. They discover that Mathew Cardolak is a wealthy collector of art treasures, but not too scrupulous in the way he collects them. He is apparently known as 'The Mystery Man of Europe', with a finger in many affairs connected with the near East. The proposition put to the Three Musketeers is that they obtain for him the "Sceptre of Solomon" which is in the keeping of an obscure sect of Jews in old Malabar, India. The sceptre, traditionally known as a gift given to Solomon by the Queen of Sheba, is of fabulous value, being made of solid gold and studded with precious jewels - a worthy treasure to be included in any collection. The three criminals agree to make an attempt at stealing the sceptre and are successful.

They return to the United States in Cardolak's private yacht, 'Sultan', and remain on board as guardians of the sceptre until such time as Cardolak needs it for whatever purpose he has in mind. But alas for the schemes of these despicable crooks, the theft of the sceptre is quickly discovered. The news soon reaches London and one of the foremost Rabbis calls on Blake and asks for his help in tracing the sceptre. As this old relic is of such great value, it appears to Blake that any of the less scrupulous art collectors would be willing to pay quite a small fortune to secure such a treasure, and his subsequent investigations reveal traces of Cardolak's dealings in the matter. He discovers that Cardolak's yacht has recently been sailing in Indian waters, and that on board are three guests. Further investigations prove that these three are none other than the Three Musketeers, and once again Blake and Tinker start off on the track of this murderous trio who very nearly succeeded in killing the pair of them. But Blake triumphs in the end, for not only does he recover the sceptre but also secures the arrest of the Three Musketeers on a charge of attempted murder. This story appears in U.J. No.1018, "The Sceptre of Solomon".

In the sequel, U.J. No.1042 "The Case of the Crippled Monk", we find Mathew Cardolak casting avaricious eyes on another of the world's art treasures, this time none other than a wonderful golden monstrance (or vessel in which the consecrated Host is shown to the people), part of the collection of famous (cont'd page 306)..

adverts

WANTED: Collectors' Digest Annual, 1947; Collectors' Digest, 1, 34, 56. T.F. BELLFIELD, 24 GRAINGER'S LANE, CRADLEY HEATH, STAFFS.

FOR SALE: Collectrs' Digests, Nos. 31-41, 43-76, 78-90, Collectors' Digest Annuals 1949-1952. Old Boys' Book Collector Nos. 1-3. Available separately or in bulk. Offers to C.J. BARTLETT, 20 BROOMFIELD ROAD, BECKENHAM, KENT.

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(End of Part One)

* * * * *

THE SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY

SEPTEMBER ISSUES

No.295. The Case of the Unknown Heir. Anthony Parsons.

A smoothly told murder mystery. One of the best we have had from Anthony Parsons for a long while. The interest never flagged, and the plot was coherent.

Blake was good. His admission on page 56 that he had been wrong about the Optimistic Fisherman did him no harm. We are all wrong at times.

I had intended giving the yarn full marks, but on the very last page, the author once again brought out that prurient side of "Carter's" nature, which has so often marred his work before. The two Baker Street men had been invited to Amiens by the Chief of the Surete Generale in that city.

While Blake is fetching drinks, the revolting Edward sidles furtively up to the Commissaire, and whispers, with nauseating leeriness, "Say; apart from police work and all that, how are you fixed for les girls in Amiens? Any bright shows or anything? Any Folies an' that like? You know!"

Ugh, the gruesome Lothario! He made me feel like the
Young Lady of Spain, Who was horribly sick in a train,
 Not once, but again, And again, and again,
 And again, and again, and again!

No. 296. The Girl from Toronto. Hugh Clevely.

Quite a readable book, told in the rather scrappy style, which Clevely sometimes adopts. Dozens of brief episodes - you can hardly call them chapters - sometimes only a column or so in length.

However they do add up. The story was very like that kind of a game of chess where your opponent, (the villain!), seems to be in an impregnable strong position. No obviously bad move is made, but the game imperceptibly veers round into your favour.

In this story, the crooks, who had everything in their hands

at first, gradually found things going against them. Finally the whole organization just went to bits, and the few members of the gang who hadn't killed each other, were washed away in a flood on the East Coast. Blake was only a very minor character.

GERRY ALLISON.

NELSON LEE COLUMN

All communications to ROBERT BLYTHE
46, CARLETON RD., HOLLOWAY, LONDON, N.7.

The 2nd New Series gets the limelight this month as both our contributors take this as their subject. Norman Pragnell kicks off with what he calls

THE SECOND NEW SERIES

-

A NOT TOO SERIOUS REVIEW

It was during the latter part of 1929 that the first hints of impending changes in our favourite weekly were dropped. Odd paragraphs in "Between Ourselves" told of many of us wanting more stronger roles for Lee and Nipper, and the number of enquiries asking after the health of Cyrus Zingrave was almost embarrassing. We old cynics who are a little shrewder than we were twenty odd years ago, can see now that our worthy editor was flying a kite. Only the more unpleasant reader would mutter that this kite turned out to be a boomerang. Hints soon gave place to realities and in Number 193 of The First New Series we read the announcement that the Nelson Lee Library was "going to adapt itself to the age of speed and thrills, but Nelson Lee the famous detective, and Nipper and the other popular characters at St. Franks will of course be still featured - but in amazingly new and novel roles".

And so Number 1 of the Second New Series arrived and before we had read three pages St. Franks was no more, for Zingrave had destroyed it with his airship. Oddly enough many of us hardly considered their wanton destruction of our school an improvement, particularly those of us who had read the Nelson Lee for ten years or more. But then, we were old fashioned and incapable of moving with the times. However, Zingrave had arrived - but not for long, for the Green Triangle was soon destroyed and we were up against Dacca - The Devil Dwarf. Here was Edwy Searles Brooks at the top of his

form with a rattling good series. We can thank Nelson Lee and his cub detectives for saving London from being destroyed by a plague of poisoned rats.

We were also glad to note two improvements made firstly by the introduction of short stories every week and secondly by the termination of Brooks' weekly feature "Between Ourselves". Some of us were even prepared to shew our appreciation by borrowing our Headmaster's cane and taking up to Fleetway House and there putting it to good use. We will not give you the names of the short story characters introduced, for we would insult neither our genial editor Herbert Leckenby nor the readers of "The Collectors Digest" by asking him to print their titles. Dacca was eventually disposed of and we settled down to straight forward weekly detective yarns. These were fair stories but we didn't want too many of them.

By now we had had our three months of this new series, and should have adapted ourselves to the changes. But we could guess that all was not well at Fleetway House, for it seemed that some of us were misguided enough to want the school stories back again.

And so in number 14 a special announcement was made that St. Franks was being rebuilt and would soon be ready for occupation within the next week or two. And we nibbled our hands and waited.

We got St. Franks alright - eight pages of it, and an artist who made us, who were incapable of drawing a straight line at school, think twice about the results of our drawing examination. We were also introduced to K.K. Parkington and his Hotshots. Thank goodness Handy knocked him for six on his return to school. Oh why, oh why did you do it Mr. Brooks. In numbers 24-27 we were able to enjoy another first class series, this time taking a trip to the Sargasso Sea, that home of derelict ships, where our party discovered a minature "Lost World". Good stuff this.

By the time we had reached number 29 the powers that be had decided that the Nelson Lee Library should run full length school stories, the length of which were still to be curtailed by those everlasting short stories that clung to us like limpets.

We counted our blessings such as they were and felt glad to be back at St. Franks, with none of our favourite characters missing. And so we arrived at the stage of "As You Were" and read the first full length St. Franks story for nine months. We were surprised that Brooks did not give us any of the series that would remind us of bygone days. Instead we had humourous stories each week with

such titles as "Archie's Awful Aunt" - K.K.'s 'K'Ompany - Handy The Hyponotist, and similar others. We did have a half-hearted rebellion series and a mix up with Jake Diamond and his gangsters, this one a story best forgotten by us all. We also noted the introduction of the "Night Hawk" by John Brearley - they came in the form of short and long stories - but the Nelson Lee Library was not the right place for them. A year and a half had gone by now and the wheel had turned round nearly the full circle. And then it burst upon us. "Between Ourselves" was to come back again. We could hardly sleep that Tuesday night through wondering what Edwy Searles Brooks was going to say to us. And here we must quote some of his words, for to us readers of the Nelson Lee Library they are history.

"There's something of very great importance I want to get off my chest at once. The chief result of a number of chinwags between the Editor and I, is that the Editor has decided to hark back to the "good old days" when the St. Franks stories filled practically the entire paper. In other words the St. Franks stories in a fortnight's time will return to their old length. And to kick off we're having an adventure series, with all the old crowd - including Lord Dorrimore - and re-introducing some favourite characters you old readers will all remember.

And we were off to Northestria, then to deal once and for all with the menace of the Gothlanders. Here was a series well up to standard but somehow we did not feel too comfortable there. Possibly we were biased, but then we thought the first Northestria series that appeared in 1927 the finest story that Brooks ever wrote. However, we were quite happy. We had got rid of K.K. Parkington and also the irritating short stories. There were one or two who murmured they would like to get rid of Kenneth Brookes too, but perhaps they were a little harsh. The conclusion of the Northestria series saw us back at school again and we enjoyed ourselves reading some really good stories, among them being the Dr. Scattlebury series - St. Franks under Canvas and a top rate holiday yarn dealing with the St. Franks' boys adventures in Caronia. Yes, St. Franks was going along very nicely despite a reference made not so long ago that after St. Franks was destroyed by Zingrave, the school like Humpty - Dumpty could not be put together again. We did find however a very unpleasant fly in the ointment. In number 72, "Between Ourselves" was merged with "Our Round Table Talk", and within a few weeks we were bluntly told that we could no longer write to our favourite author,

but only to the Editor who would graciously pass over anything that required the attention of Mr. Brooks. What an insult to the man who had built up to its very high standard the Nelson Lee Library, and to us faithful band of readers who regularly every Wednesday paid out our twopence, which oft time could be ill afforded. We read too the stupid remark that Edwy Searles Brooks was not the editor of the Nelson Lee - as if we didn't know.

In number 91 we had a pleasant surprise for we met Ezra Quirk again - still up to his old tricks, and this time for good measure a few new ones thrown in.

After this came a "St. Franks in Disgrace" series followed by a Jimmy Potts story - good this, and then to a ripsnorter featuring our old friends Jim the Penman and Cyrus Zingrave.

And then a heavy blow fell, for out came the "Silver Dwarf" series. Many had read it before. We hadn't, but we tried to read it and couldn't. We didn't know then it was by Maxwell Scott, and quite frankly we didn't care - it could have been written by William Shakespeare for all we were interested.

Week after week we attempted to plough through dreary detective yarns that were certainly never written by E.S. Brooks. The wheel was now turning round for the second time and we wondered if it would ever stop.

It was number 142 that gave us a breath of fresh air, and we certainly needed it. Nelson Lee, Dorrimore, Umlosi and Handforth were off to a super new world in the Sargasso. This was the series we were waiting for - the excitement and the thrills were almost enough to make us forgive the editor his previous sins. There was of course some doubt as to whom was the author of this story. Our friend Bob Blythe thinks it may have been Dennis Wheatley, but we are not so sure, for in No. 140 the editor makes it quite clear that Edwy Searles Brooks was writing the story. ~~On the other hand it was odd that the Sargasso Sea should crop up twice in the Second New Series, so perhaps we will keep an open mind on this question.~~ Back again to the wretched detective stories written by heaven knows whom and then Brooks gave us another winner. The Professor Nerki series, complete with a haunted house and disappearing juniors. If you've got this story on the bookshelf get it down and read it, it's excellent.

Those of us who were still hardy enough to be still reading the Nelson Lee Library saw this Second New Series wind up with the final

group of stories entitled "The Fellowship of Fear", an interesting mixture of a detective and school story.

The last number of this series Number 161 gave us the startling news that the clock was to be turned back some sixteen years and we were to return to the time when Nipper arrived at St. Franks. The story of ~~those~~ twenty five numbers which comprised the Third New Series is outside the scope of this article, but we who have these twenty five issues on our shelves may feel like writing a few comments in a future Collectors' Digest on the last six months of the Nelson Lee Library.

To those of you who have read through these jottings we hope you will have some inkling as to what the Second New Series was about and to any Nelson Lee readers who still have some of the stories we have mentioned in your possession, we would urge that you get them down from your bookcase, blow the dust off, and read them.

NORMAN PRAGNELL.

* * * * *

Next, Derek Smith weighs in with an entertaining account of the influence of K.K. Parkington on the 2nd N.S. It is apparent that Derek differs from Norman in this.

As I've mentioned before I have never been particularly keen on this series and it's donkeys years since I read any, but after reading both articles I did (as I hope you will) what Norman suggested. I blew the dust off - and was pleasantly surprised.

K.K. - O.K!

by DEREK SMITH

When the blazing dirigible crashed on St. Frank's on that fateful day in January, 1930, it did more damage than the ill-advised editor of the Nelson Lee Library could possibly have anticipated. The school was to rise Phoenix-like from its ashes before many months had passed, but it was never quite the same grand old place again.

Whoever was responsible for the decision to bring to a close the fine series of long school stories which had begun in July 1917 in favour of a new series of rather indifferent detective thrillers - in view of the disastrous results, I suspect Professor Zingrave himself! - he soon found it necessary to rebuild St. Frank's and bring back most of the boys from Nelson Lee's short-lived Detective Academy.

In May 1930, the school re-opened. Editorial policy, however, restricted the stories to a few thousand words. Edwy Searles Brooks, who was still handling the bulk of the detective stories under a dazzling array of pen-names in another part of the paper, must have found himself in a dilemma.

He resolved it nearly. The stories were to be played for comedy. The twin themes of rivalry and japing were pressed into service. And an engaging new character strolled on to the centre of the stage.

Kirby Keeble Parkington "although...no more than fifteen...was a young giant. His jaw was square, his nose slightly upturned, and he possessed a mop of red hair." Also "his shoulders were excessive" - and he had a glorious sense of humour.

For no very apparent reason, he had left Carlton College with eleven friends - known variously as the Carlton Gang and the Red-Hots - and his avowed intention was to "come to St. Frank's - to conquer!".

K.K. had a good deal of that magnificent self-possession which characterized William Napoleon Browne, Vivian Travers, and Willy Handforth.

It was none of these stalwarts who most vigorously opposed him, however. It was our old friend, the immortal Edward Oswald.

Handy and his faithful chums, Church and McClure, considering the school couldn't properly be re-opened in their absence, had taken the day off from the Detective Academy. (Nelson Lee and Nipper were coping at the time with a Sky Pirate in mid-Atlantic, so they could hardly object.)

Handy promptly became involved in some slapstick adventures on the scaffolding around the Modern and East Houses, which had not yet been fully restored. His attempt at amateur brick-laying sparked off the first battle between the Old-Timers and the Red-Hots, which degenerated (or was sublimated) into the hilarious, crazy destruction of an early Keystone comedy.

When Handforth learned that Parkington had appointed himself Junior Captain, he charged - as always - into the forefront of the battle. He resigned from the Detective Academy and returned to St. Frank's.

K.K. received the K.O. Handy became skipper - a mixed blessing for the Remove!

The rivalry raged as merrily as before. Archie Glenthorne's

study was painted in hideous colours from floor to ceiling. Fortunately, the hated Mr. Pycraft walked into the booby trap prepared for Archie, and Trotwood used his ventriloquism to good effect. The Carlton Gang cleaned up the study under the impression Mr. Pycraft had ordered them to do so.

K.K. got his revenge when "Handyman Handy" did some paper hanging the following week. A little while after the ensuing chaos, Handforth pinched Parkington's home made glider, and crash landed on the roof of Moor View School.

These, and similar adventures, set the mood for most of the remaining short stories in the series. They all verged on slapstick comedy, they were all wildly improbable, and they were all very funny.

After a time, though the rivalry between the Red-Hots and the Old-Timers never died, it ceased to be the central theme of the stories. Alington Wilkes arrived as Housemaster, and there were signs - albeit fleeting - that Mr. Brooks was preparing to return to the solidly plotted yarns and nicely shaded characterization which had so delighted his readers in the Old and First New Series of the Old Paper.

A significant title was "'As You Were' at St. Frank's" when Nipper returned with his beloved gov'nor, who became the Headmaster.

K.K., like most of the pupils, had an eye for a pretty face. The new Housemaster's daughter Vera made an immediate impression on him. However - unlike most of his schoolmates - he was never a slave to his girl friend. Indeed, in "K.K.'s Secret" he showed his heart was really in the keeping of a certain Dolly Wilkinson - aged five and a half!

The japes really ended with "K.K.'s Birthday Party" and "Handy the Conjuror". Honours were substantially even, but K.K.'s days at St. Franks were numbered.

He showed to advantage in the struggle with the "Gunmen at St. Frank's" and in the last Barring-Out which disturbed the equanimity of the Old School. Yet I don't think it's ungracious to say that despite the gallant way he coped with every emergency he seemed a little out of place in the new (or rather old) style series.

Mr. Brooks seemed to see this himself. When the "Skeets" Bellton yarns came to an end, the author announced with evident satisfaction that as a result of numerous "chinwags" with the editor, he was returning to full-length stories about St. Frank's which

would stretch almost from cover to cover.

It was back to the Good Old Times. But there was sad news in store. Significantly, Parkington did not accompany the "old crowd" on their voyage to Northestria with Lord Dorrimore.

When the juniors returned to St. Frank's, they found that K.K. and his eleven friends had gone back to Carlton College. Nipper and Co. were sorry, but not heart-broken. As Dick Hamilton pointed out: "They were all very well, but they caused a lot of disruption in the Remove. We shall now be able to concentrate upon dishing the Fourth."

So it was good-bye to K.K. Parkington and his Red-Hots. Perhaps they could not be numbered among the all-time "greats" like some of the Old-Timers against whom they waged their merry war - but they kept the flag flying in the dark days at the beginning of the Second New Series.

K.K. was O.K!

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

L O N D O N S E C T I O N

Sept. 20th: Rambling in Sussex. Vacation time being over once again and the usual good natured scramble for the trains leading to the St. Jim's and St. Frank's country and the reunion, firstly at Bill Jardine's abode at Woodingdean and then the meeting place at Red Magnet Robby's. But what a view of the smiling Sussex Downs which conjured up names like Helmford, Bannington, Bellton, Cais-towe, Midshott, Abbotsford, Wayland and Rylcombe, plus the smiling waters of the river Rhyl. Lunch at Bill Jardine's with hostess Gladys providing fare that put Mrs. Mimble right in the shade, and the menu card with the map and poem inscribed on it. Well done Bill and Gladys and Frank Richards Jardine, the latter's antics providing the laughs especially for Vice President Herbert and chairman Len. Then the bus to Robby's and the meeting proper which commenced with Len's usual good remarks and repartee. Our Herbert then took over and gave us one of his good speeches that contained the good wishes from the Northern section and whetted our appetites for the coming 'Collectors' Digest Annual'. It will be the finest one to date, especially with the good work of the new duplicators. After the speeches, selected correspondence was read, including

one from Bransby Williams about his article on the demise of 'Chips' and 'Comic Cuts' and one from Basil Storey, editor of 'School Cap', the new school story paper for boys and old boys. The latter stated that the new paper would strive to follow in the footsteps of our worthy president's writings and wished the club all the very best wishes. Afterwards the librarians gave their reports, the Hamilton section being very good. Followed a grand spread and the bumper attendance enjoyed this to the full, well done Kay and Robby, you deserved the thanks of the largest attendance that has yet graced your portals. Resuming after tea with Hamilton librarian's, Roger Jenkins impromptu talk, very good this, and then a couple of episodes of "The Perils of Pauline" featuring the famous old screen star Pearl White. All too soon came the time for the return home and taking leave of the Robbys and Frank and Winny Keeling of Folkestone, we wended our way to Brighton station bound for the great metropolis with happy memories of a day well spent.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

* * * * *

NORTHERN SECTION MEETING - 239 Hyde Park Rd., Leeds,
12th September, 1953.

J. Breeze Bentley, returned from holidays had the pleasure of welcoming two more new members, Ernest Whitehead of Tingley, Wakefield and Denis Oliver, Huddersfield. Where the latter was concerned we have to thank "School Cap". How's that? Well, it was this way. Denis had bought a copy of the new paper and had shown it to his chum, John Charlesworth, our youngest member. John, a loyal Hamiltonian said I'll show you something to beat that" or words to that effect, and produced a "Magnet". Result, Denis came along to the meeting with John, joined up and departed with a pile of Hamilton lore. Nice work.

Business disposed of (bank balance £11. 9. 9.), Gerry Allison continued with the reading of "The Boy Without a Name". After rendering several chapters in real dramatic style, he was about to give up with the time nearing nine, but there were several Oliver Twists present so he had to give them more.

Gerry, by the way, has handwritten, in a handy notebook, the whole story, word for word! Verily a real labour of love.

The reading will be continued at the next meeting, October 10th.

H. LECKENBY, Northern Section Correspondent.

MIDLAND SECTION MEETING21st Sept., 1953.

We should have had Mr. Chapman, (latterly chief illustrator of the "Magnet"), with us this evening, but we had been very sorry to learn only a few days before that he had sustained a rib injury whilst cycling, and although he is progressing favourably, was unable to be with us.

Naturally we were very disappointed; for one thing we had obtained in honour of the occasion, a most spiffing and scrumptious iced cake, through the good offices of that very popular foundation member, Mr. George Smallwood.

After disposing of the usual preliminaries (minutes etc.), we settled down to enjoy a talk by one of our keenest and most valued members, Mr. Jack Ingram of Wolverhampton, on "Mr. Prout, Master of the Fifth". May I say in all sincerity that this talk was a truly magnificent one, comparing very favourably in lucidity and interest with any one could wish to hear anywhere.

Among the very interesting points made by Jack were:

Prout was the very antithesis of Quelch, and Frank Richards showed his superb literary skill and craftsmanship in creating these characters and playing off the one against the other.

Lean, angular Quelch, strict and stern, yet just and fair.

Prout a pompous, portly pedagogue. Although perhaps heavily drawn, yet Prout was no caricature. Although jumping slowly to wrong conclusions, and a crashing bore; yet he is kindly and indeed quite a loveable character. We like Prout and can only respect Quelch.

Mr. Ingram read a chapter from probably one of the very funniest of all Magnet series; namely Nos. 1656/8, "Coker expelled". In Jack's happy and apt phrase "Prout looked forward to a life of Cokerless ease".

How wrong he was! Poor Paul Pontifex didn't get it; Coker expelled was far more troublesome than Coker of the Fifth.

We very cordially agreed with Jack's concluding hope that "long may Prout's elephantine tread echo down the corridors of time and of Greyfriars".

During the refreshments the cake was cut and then we finished the evening with a discussion of various points of interest arising from the talk.

EDWARD DAVEY.

MERSEYSIDE SECTIONSeptember 13th

There was a large attendance at this meeting, and the chairman extended a hearty welcome to yet another new member, Mr. H. Gater, who soon made himself at home. The formal business was quickly dealt with by the secretary and the chairman then gave us all the "gen" on the forthcoming dinner. Everything has been more or less settled, and we are hoping that it will be a success; at any rate we are sure of a large number present on the night, including Gerry Allison from Northern and Mr. and Mrs. J. Corbett from Midland, and, probably Herbert Leckenby, en route from his London trip. The dinner discussion took up the major part of the evening, but there was time left for a game of "Eliminations", which was jointly won by Norman ("Nelson Lee") Pragnell, and Jim Burke.

No library this time - annual stocktaking!

Next meeting Oct. 11th.

FRANK CASE,

Sec.

GOODBYE! MR. CHIPS!

By HERBERT LECKENBY

On September 2nd, the following leading article appeared in the "News Chronicle".

FAREWELL

A fugitive sigh, a single sentimental tear, may be permissible today over the news that Comic Cuts, Chips and Wonder (or Funny Wonder, as it once was) are to cease publication next week.

It is not that the market for children's comic-strip papers is perishing. On the contrary, it is flourishing mightily. It is just that children are entranced nowadays by different images, in pursuit of different ends.

In 1890, when Comic Cuts and Chips were founded by the perceptive Lord Northcliffe, and for a long time thereafter, the adventures of Weary Willie and Tired Tim absorbed the attention of the British young; and Charlie Chaplin, in Funny Wonder, enshrined a fine weekly lark.

But in those days a young lady considered herself adequately entertained when afforded an evening's viewing of stereoscopic postcards, and a young man looked forward breathlessly to a

conversazione.

We have all grown more sophisticated and harder to please, and it would be querulous to complain now because juvenile tastes have veered towards space-men and atom ray guns. We are not, indeed, complaining, we are only recalling, and nobody, surely, can object to that?

Good-bye, Weary Willie. All the best Tired Tim.

Well, theres a wistful touch of nostalgia about that, a sigh for the placid days that are gone. Anyone of us might have written it, for we know that they can never return.

And, when the final numbers came off the presses of Fleetway House, maybe H.J. Garrish, who foretold their demise a few weeks ago, quietly piped an eye, for, if he was not there at the very beginning, he was when the three papers were very young, and in their heyday wrote many serials for them. And I, a looker on have known them almost as long as he, for did not I, as a boy of seven or so, packed off to bed early on a summer's night, smuggle up with me a copy of Chips, to revel in the adventures of Willie and Tim and the thrilling chapters of "The Fatal Seven" until twilight fell, o'er fifty years ago?

Chips, in particular, was a remarkable paper. The two famous tramps, who became household words, started their careers round about 1895, and continued uninterrupted until the end. Tom Brown, who became a very famous artist originated them, but it has been said that after a time he handed over to someone else as the task of producing them every week got on his nerves. Many clever artists followed him, but of late years Willie and Tim have been mere shadows of their former selves.

Then, on the back page their appeared for years and years the cartoons of the Casey Court Nibs with their Heath Robinson like contraptions. Really clever many of these and, oh so different to the Dead End Kids stuff of today.

The Comic Cuts characters were not so long-lived but Happy Harry and Lucky Lucas; Chokey Bill and Area Sneaker; and the inhabitants of Mulberry Flats made countless thousands laugh.

But it was not only the comic sections which made these papers so successful in more restful days; there were the serials. Until about the outbreak of the First World War these were written mainly for the elder members of the family. I don't mean they were not fit for children to read; in the manner of 'Adults Only' signs

outside the cinemas, just that their plots were more suitable for grown-ups, with plenty of love and intrigue. Even as adult stories they were unique, in a class to themselves somehow, different to those which appeared in other adult A.P. papers like, say, Answers, Forget-me-Not, or the Sunday Companion. Some, one can recall, which appeared in Chips or Comic Cuts were "The House on the Heath", "The House with the Red Blinds", "The Black River", "The City of Millions", "Madame Bluebeard", "The Man Without a Soul", "The Death Stone" and "The Smugglers of St. Ormes".

Hubert Trelawney wrote many of them; others were by Stanhope Sprigg and Colin Collins. Usually, though, the author's name was not given.

Later on the serials became more juvenile; there was "The Red Rovers" for instance, which ran in "Comic Cuts" for years. It was written by E. Newton Bungay and he once told me that he had as many as nine serials running in various A.P. comics at the same time. An almost equally busy companion was H.J. Garrish, usually writing as John EdmundFordwych.

The "Wonder" had a more chequered career; it changed its name numerous times, appearing as "Funny Wonder", "Jester and Wonder", "Penny Wonder" for instance. Outstanding among its serials was Henry T. Johnson's famous "Pride of the Ring" which ran for three years.

The final issues were numbered as follows: Comic Cuts, 3006, Chips 2997 and Wonder 1760. For a considerable period when the paper situation was acute the papers were only published fortnightly. The Wonder, of course, was much older for reasons already stated; that would be apparent by the number stated above.

There were several comments in the papers on the passing of the three "comics". That grand veteran of the stage, 83 year old Bransby Williams, under the heading "The End of an Era" in the "News of the World" said:-

"Death from natural causes" states the foreman of the jury. Yes, but what cause? That was the question I pondered when I read that never again will a schoolboy be seen reading a copy of "Comic Cuts" or "Chips" and "Wonder". Those three publications - surely as celebrated as any in the English speaking world - will be seen no more, except perhaps as collectors' curios.

Through most of my 83 years generations of boys have grown up with them, and though the memory of Weary Willie and Tired Tim may be

assured of immortality, nothing now remains but the inquest and the verdict."

Brandsby then went on to recall stories he had read in his early days; "The Fifth Form at St. Dominies" (in the "B.O.P." no doubt), how eagerly he had awaited the next instalment of "Handsome Harry" and how he had met G.A. Henty, his great favourite at the Savage Club.

The London "Recorder" commenting on "Comic Cuts" makes the surprising statement that its success was so phenomenal that it brought in almost immediately a profit of £25,000 a year! That was money in those days, equal to at least £100,000 today.

Well I wonder if T.V. Comic which takes their places will live as long.

One parting thought: The three papers started with eight large pages for a halfpenny; they died giving twelve smaller pages for threepence. Are the prices we pay for cherished copies of the Magnet, the Gem and their kind, unreasonable after all?



NICELY PUT

64, Dudley Road, Tipton, Staffs.

Dear Herbert,

9 Sept., 1953.

Thanks for welcome letter of 15 Aug.

Subs time rolls round again so 6/- P.O. enclosed for Oct-Dec issues (this is one of the few payments that I make with pleasure!) I note that in this month's C.D., you are approaching retiring age - my comments being that as long as you don't retire from Club activities, all will be well!

Anyway, more power to your elbow, and very best wishes.

from Sincerely yours, RAY BENNETT.

(Thanks Ray, I'll aim for No. 200, anyway - H.L.)