

The COLLECTORS' DIGEST 3'

No. 1. NEW STORY BOOK

THE
Magnet $\frac{1d}{2}$
No. 1 LIBRARY
The Making of
Harry Wharton



HE TORE

1908

*Greyfriars
Golden
Jubilee Number
Feb. 1958
Vol. 12 No. 134*



Bob Whiter



1958

WHERE I CAME INBy Basil Adam

My first introduction to the "Magnet" happened to be through a friend giving me some old copies to read when I was ill.

By sheer good fortune they turned out to be Frank Richards finest stories, the "Harry Wharton Downfall" series of 1924-1925.

From then on I became a devoted reader of the Magnet from 1929 until 1935. So you see the truly golden age of the Magnet just fell into my lap! How eagerly I looked forward to the Magnet coming out every week and devoured hungrily each Greyfriars story in a single night.

I am afraid I took these magnificent stories so much for granted, never realising at the time how much skill Frank Richards put into them.

Having, like most people, frittered most of my Magnets away, excepting the "Downfall" series, I have managed by hook or by crook to regain most of them again.

My favourites are the:

'Dick Lancaster' 'Courtfield Cracksman,'
 'Ravenspur Grange' 'Cavandale Abbey'
 'Sahara (1924)', China, Stacey and
 Holiday Annual 'Hiking' series and all
 holidays at Wharton Lodge stories.

A toast to Frank Richards for such treasures:

May he be with us for many years to come.

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THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Vol. 12 No. 134

Price 3s. 0d.

FEBRUARY, 1958

Editor: HERBERT LECKENBY,
12 Herbert Street,
Hull Road, York.

or

c/o YORK DUPLICATING SERVICES,
12A The Shambles, York.

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

THIS SPECIAL OCCASION: Last month I said not many articles for the enlarged Golden Jubilee Number had reached me, but I was not worrying for I knew I could confidently rely upon you. Well my faith was indeed justified for since copy has flowed in; in fact it may be that I have too much. If so my apologies to those who may unavoidably have to be left out.

Dr. Robert Wilson, lucky owner of a vast collection, has often told me how after a hard and tiring day among his patients, he turns, not to the classics, but to the Magnet or one of its companions for a little light relief. Many of us, whatever our vocation, will cordially endorse that.

To all who have helped to make this a memorable number my sincere thanks.

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THE ANNUAL: Since I wrote last, letters have poured in praising the Annual; there has hardly been a single note of criticism. Every article has been praised and tributes paid to the excellent work of the York Duplicating Agency.

One or two errors crept in, but there were quite a lot of words weren't there? Checking is a tremendous job I can assure you. It is so easy for errors to slip through when the printed word is concerned.

Here is an example. Tickets for the 3rd Round Cup Tie between Leeds United and Cardiff City were printed with the date given as July 4th. That is a printing works with men specially trained to look for errors.

Well, on to next years. I won't promise there won't be any errors again but I'll do my utmost to see that there are not.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY

REQUIRED: good condition Magnets:- 412, 413, 416, 418, 419, 420, 437, 441, 447, 475, 505, 510, 511, 517, 540, 546, 553, 882, 903, 904, 1034, 1043, 1046, 1047, 1076, 1089, 1090, 1092, 1096, 1099, 1100, 1117, 1126, 1132, 1160, 1162, 1170, 1174, 1175, 1179, 1180, 1191, 1194, 1244, 1245, 1259, 1273, 1280 (Several others in 1200s) 1335, 1397 and 1400.

WILL EXCHANGE: Magnets:- Several "Reds" some in early 400s and 576, 584, 586, 587, 590, 781, 782, 783, 794, 797, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 814, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 827, 828, 832, 833, 838, 839, 840, 845, 851, 857, 861, 870, 871, 878, 911, 1302, 1313, 1314, 1324, 1472. Also a number of good Greyfriars S.O.Ls. - All good condition. Suggestions welcomed. In need, my "inferior" copy thrown in, in most instances, for anything offered. Write airmail.
CHAS. V. RENEN, BOX 50, UITENHAGE, SOUTH AFRICA.

WILL EXCHANGE: Blue and White Magnets. One for one, for the following 779, 808, 826, 899, 960, 961, 962 963, 970, 1005, 1011, 1013, 1017, 1028, 1029, 1035, 1111, 1112, 1130. 7/6 offered each for S.O.Ls - 231, 229, 173, 171, 169, 167.
G. THOMPSON, 53 WALLASEY PARK, OLD PARK ROAD, BELFAST.

EXCHANGE: Magnets - 1359, 1379, 1397, 1398, 1465, 1467.
Gems - 1422, 1442, 1566, 1594, 1595. S.O.L. 401 (St. Jims)
GREENWOOD, 63 GRIFFITHS DRIVE, ASHMORE PARK, WEDNESFIELD, STAFFS.

WANTED: Sexton Blake Libs. 1st and 2nd Series, any numbers. Also Union Jacks 1917 to 1933. Boys' Friend Libs. 1st Series, No. 669. 2nd Series No. 79.
JOSIE PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E.22.

Blakiana

conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

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

I am very pleased to announce that an article will shortly appear in these pages on one of the most gifted - and certainly the most popular - Blake writers of all times; indeed, in the opinion of many (including myself) this man was the greatest of them all. I refer of course to George Hamilton Teed. Much has become known of many Blake authors, and a lot has been written about them. In the case of Teed, however, information has always been very meagre, and, as a consequence, articles on him very few. As many of you will guess we have to thank Detective Bill Lofts for this new information.

Members of the Sexton Blake Circle will be meeting very shortly, and a report of this will appear in Blakiana in due course.

* * *

ON TOUR WITH SEXTON BLAKE

By Walter Webb

Stories centering around the criminal activities of Gunga Dass, the Hindoo, were almost entirely devoted to the pages of the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY, in which they enjoyed a fair measure of popularity.

Three authors were concerned in recording the coups of the Indian crook - H. Gregory Hill, the originator of the character, Coutts Brisbane, famed creator of Dr. Ferraro, and Anthony Parsons, who was, perhaps, responsible for the better of the stories. We now follow Blake to India, in his first encounter with the unscrupulous Hindoo, in a case which is known in the famous Baker Street Index as the case of

(No. 5) THE IDOL'S EYE

Author - H. Gregory Hill

During a trek through the Central Provinces in quest of big game, Edward Hartley, an adventurous young Britisher, younger son of a baronet with a large estate in Essex, was badly mauled by a tiger. He was discovered in the jungle by Josef Agran, a Parsee, a descendant of the one time great Ayran race of Central Asia, worshippers of the true God of creation, known to them as Ormuzd. Agran, a dealer in precious stones, was on his way home to the village of Kudderal, where

he lived with his wife and daughter Zenda. The friendship which immediately sprang up between Hartley and Zenda quickly ripened into a deep affection, and, eventually, the two planned to marry. But there was another who cherished the affection of the girl, and he was Bhur Singh, an educated Hindoo of good birth. In order to marry the girl of his choice, Hartley renounced his religion and embraced the faith of the woman he loved. At the Temple of Ormuzd in Bombay, the conversion and marriage ceremony duly took place. As a marriage dowry Josef Agran gave his daughter a huge and magnificent blood-red ruby, after which the betrothed pair set sail for England, little realising that the rascally Bhur Singh had made a solemn oath of vengeance against the girl who had spurned his advances.

Twenty years pass by.

Sexton Blake was invited by Sir John Currier, C.B., to attend a party the baronet was giving in honour of his son's engagement to Lillah Hartley, one of the season's prettiest debutantes. In those twenty years, dramatic happenings had occurred. Edward Hartley had been killed two years previously in a motor accident; Zenda, now Lady Hartley, was left alone with their only child, Lillah. After the dinner and the speeches which followed it, Lady Hartley presented her daughter with the betrothal gift, the magnificent ruby which she had received from her father twenty years previously at the time of her own wedding. In a speech, Sir John recalled a sensation which had occurred in India exactly the same number of years ago when the great Kali ruby, which formed the eye of the goddess Kali, was stolen from one of the Hindoo temples. To this day nothing further had been heard of the idol's missing eye, and the ruby remained undiscovered. Blake, watching Lady Hartley, was puzzled at the sudden agitation the woman showed at Sir John's words. That agitation was intensified a little later when she received a written communication from Bhur Singh, who knew that the famous ruby had been in her possession. Should Singh make public that knowledge Lady Hartley knew she would be a doomed woman. She was aware of the terrible vendetta that had been sworn by the high priests, for to those of the Kali caste the ruby was more precious than life itself.

Sexton Blake was hurriedly summoned to the residence of Lady Hartley when, on the following morning after the betrothal dinner, her ladyship was found lying unconscious on the floor of her bedroom, with the body of Bhur Singh beside her, dead with a dagger protruding from his neck. Puzzled by Lady Hartley's reluctance to tell all she knew of the murder, Blake questioned her daughter. Lillah told him that

her mother had asked her to give back the ruby she had given her at the dinner and when, later, she had asked her mother where it was, her parent told her she had lost it.

Blake's investigations led him on the track of a Hindoo named Gunga Dass, servant of Bhur Singh. At the inquest on the latter, Lady Hartley was found guilty of wilful murder and a warrant issued for her arrest. Blake was convinced of her innocence, however, and firmly determined to track down Gunga Dass, whom he felt was the actual murderer of Bhur Singh and who now possessed the Kali ruby. Realising that Dass's objective would be to get back to India with the jewel, in which case the search for him would be well nigh hopeless, Blake was naturally anxious to prevent him from leaving the country. He also entertained a shrewd suspicion that Lady Hartley was not of pure British birth, which partly explained her reticence at the inquest.

Despatched by his gov'nor to endeavour to get some news of Dass's whereabouts, Tinker visited the "Lotus Flower Cafe", in a small street off the East India Dock Road. He discovered that Gunga Dass had shipped as a fireman on a tramp steamer called the Sea Spray, bound for Port Said, Bombay and Karatchi. But, in trying to capture Dass single-handed, Tinker came a cropper, and ended up a prisoner on board the Sea Spray. Blake, alarmed at his assistant's continued absence, set Pedro on the trail, and, accompanied by Detective-Inspector Rollings, an intelligent and efficient friend of his attached to the Yard, set out for the East India Dock Road, where on board the Sea Spray, the luckless Tinker was found and rescued from his predicament.

Blake's suspicions of Lady Hartley grew into certainties; he became convinced that she was in actual fact a Parsee. Knowing that Sir John Currier was intensely prejudiced against the coloured races and would never give consent for his son to marry Lillah should the fact become known of her mixed blood, Lady Hartley was prepared to sacrifice her liberty by allowing it to be believed that she murdered Bhur Singh. It behove Blake to get on Dass's trail without delay, and with that end in view he and Tinker sailed for Bombay on a faster boat in order to apprehend the Hindoo on his arrival there. Passing the Sea Spray in the Red Sea midway between Suez and Aden, Blake and Tinker arrived in Bombay ahead of Gunga Dass, a gharry taking them to the Regina Hotel amidst a colourful throng of fiercely moustached Pathans, military Sikhs, shaven-headed Tamils, Rajputs, Mahommedans and creamy skinned Parsees. When Blake learned that Bhur Singh was a high

priest and keeper of the temple jewels at Khan Dur, Dass's object in killing Singh was clear to him. On restoring the ruby to the temple Bhus Singh's position would be his as a reward, and then, as possessor of the keys of the treasure chamber Dass would be free to make a clean sweep of the lot.

Disguised as an emissary of the Head Priest of the Temple of Mahana on the banks of Mother Ganges (a piece of characterisation which, in Tinker's opinion, beat to a frazzle anything Matheson Lang or Martin Harvey could do!), Blake interviewed Dass in a cheap native cafe in Grant Road (the Whitechapel of Bombay, as the author described it). He was on the point of bluffing the Hindoo into handing the ruby over when Dass noticed the unusual colour of his - Blake's - palms and instantly realised that he was being duped. The tables turned, Blake and Tinker barely escaped with their lives.

Arrived at the London Road Station of the G.I.P. Railway, the Baker Street pair embarked for Khan Dur. The next move in the battle of wits was made by Gunga Dass. As the train was rumbling its way through Poona, Blake and Tinker awoke in their bunks to find that each had a scorpion on his bed as a sleeping companion. Although both were strung by the poisonous reptiles, Blake managed to pull the communication cord before he collapsed. At the wayside station of Khadahar, a madah - an aged Hindoo doctor - with a reputation for charming away the evil effects of scorpion bites, treated them, and under the influence of the antidote he administered to them Blake and Tinker gradually recovered.

Arrived at Khan Dur, the jungle city of India, they made their way to the temple. Dass, having handed over the ruby to the Dhermer Rajah, was being exalted to the rank of priesthood. Blake's intervention and denunciation of the Hindoo criminal came as a dramatic surprise to the priests, who would have avenged the death of Bhur Singh by killing Dass had not Blake begged the Dhermer Rajah to hand the crook over to him in order that he be made to stand his trial in England for murder. Before the Commissioner of Madras, Gunga Dass was made to sign a confession to the murder of Bhur Singh, after which an extradition warrant was obtained, and Blake and Tinker were homeward bound again. Blake under-estimated the cunning of the Hindoo, however, and Dass managed to escape as the ship was coaling up at Port Said.

Due to the detective's intervention with the signed confession Lady Hartley was proved innocent of the crime of which she was accused, and released from custody. The only fly in the ointment then was Sir John Currier and his bitter feelings against all those of native blood.

But when Blake told the baronet of the story of Lady Hartley's sacrifice and Sir John released just what Zenda had endured in order that her daughter's happiness should not be jeopardised, his fierce and prejudiced old heart melted, and the consent he gave to his son's engagement to the pretty Lillah was both warm and heartily given.

And, having described Sexton Blake's first encounter with Gunga Dass, a few points of interest about the Hindoo will not come amiss. Twenty-four years previously he had been a Subadour-major in the service of the Emperor. A white sahib, the officer in charge of his regiment, accused him of stirring up sedition among the Pathans whilst they were quartered in the cantonment at Peshawar. Not being able to deny the charge, Dass was drummed out of the service. For years he became a soldier of fortune and a wanderer. As a serang in the services of the B.I. Company, he travelled in many countries. Possessed of a refined Sankrit accent, Gunga Dass had the well-sculptured features and jaunty bearing of one of high caste.

In conclusion "THE IDOL'S EYE" was published in S.B.L. No. 198 (First Series) in November, 1921.

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UNION JACK TITLES - YEAR 1918 (JANUARY - JUNE)

No. 743	The Case of the Hidden Fortune	
" 744	The Mystery of the Standard Ships (F. Lord)	S. Drew
" 745	The Secret of the Allotment	E. Alais
" 746	His Lordship's Valet	A. Murray
" 747	The Vanished Man (The Bat)	R. Murray
" 748	The Oil King's Secret (Plummer)	M. Osbourne
" 749	The Affair of the Premium Bonds (F. Lord)	S. Drew
" 750	Rescued by Aeroplane	E.S. Brooks
" 751	The Bogus Bat (The Bat)	R. Murray
" 752	The Golden Reef (Loseley)	C. Hayter
" 753	The Mystery of the Vloa Vase (The Bat)	R. Murray
" 754	The Secret of His Birth	W.M. Graydon
" 755	Absent Without Leave	A. Murray
" 756	The Mystery of Alazion	C. Hayter
" 757	For Political Reasons (F. Lord)	S. Drew
" 758	The Amazing Mystery of Frederick Fennell (Mr. Reece)	R. Murray
" 759	The Tragedy of the Top Floor Flat	A. Blair

Union Jack titles continued

No. 760	A Dead Man's Hate (F. Lord)	S. Drew
" 761	The Baker Street Mystery	W.M. Graydon
" 762	In Sheep's Clothing	A. Murray
" 763	A Mid-Ocean Mystery (Mr. Reece)	R. Murray
" 764	The Learmouth Chambers Mystery	
" 765	A Golden Stratagem (F. Lord)	S. Drew
" 766	No. 13 Broughton Square	C. Hayter
" 767	The Lost Letter (Mr. Reece)	R. Murray
" 768	The Mount Stonham Murder Mystery (N. Lee)	E.S. Brooks

Number 743 is dated 5 January, 1918, and Number 768 is dated 29th June, 1918.

MAGNETS WANTED: 1532-7, 1539, 1541-2, 1546-7, 1563, 1572-5, 1586.
Mint condition only and fit for binding.

I have for exchange 140 Magnets between 529 and 1351 and will give TWO FOR ONE to complete long run for binding.

S.A.E. with enquiry please.

F. COCKROFT, HAWBER HOUSE, SILSDEN, NR. KEIGHLEY, YORKSHIRE.

THE LONDON CLUB LIBRARY would be grateful to purchase the following in order to complete series:- Gems - 587, 589, 1346, 1348, 1350.

Magnets - 1121, 1647, S.O.L. 247. Also interested generally in Hamiltonian S.O.Ls.

ROGER JENKINS, FLAT 6, 6 PEMBROKE GARDENS, KENSINGTON, LONDON, W.8.

WANTED URGENTLY: I offer 10/- each for any copies of Chips from January, 1916 to October 28th, 1916. In good condition.

LEONARD PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E.22.

200 1923-1933 Old Boys Papers comprising "Magnet" "Skipper" "Adventure" "Rover" "Wizard" "Vanguard" "Triumph" "Champion" 2/6 each or £20 lot. Five 1923-25 "Chums" 51/-

Three 1912-14 "Boys Herald" "Journal" 31/-

Seven scarce 1912 "Diamond" Libraries - "Straight Left" (Series)

"Monarch of Seas" "Dixon Brett - Detective" (All 1912) 10/6 each.

"British Boys' Annual" - 1922 - 10/6

LAWRENSON, 44 BLEAKHILL ROAD, ST. HELENS, LANCs.

HAMILTONIANA

SPECIAL GREYFRIARS GOLDEN JUBILEE SECTION

Copy assembled by Herbert Leckenby

Well, here we are with a record number of pages to celebrate a notable not to say, unique, occasion. There are memories from the maestro himself, an account of the career of his colleague over many many years, Charles H. Chapman, a tribute in verse by the Rev. A. G. Pound, an article by an old friend, Peter Walker, others from Eric Fayne and Roger Jenkins without whom this section would be strange, Bob Whiter and his splendid cover and others who have known the Magnet through the years. Yes, I think I can say with confidence, a real feast of reading.

We'll start off with the man who just 50 years ago sat down to write "Send Master Harry to me".

* * * * *

FIFTY YEARS ON!

By Frank Richards

"EHEU fugaces!" remarked Horace twenty centuries ago. And "eheu fugaces" Frank Richards feels like echoing as the Greyfriars Golden Jubilee comes round.

— Swiftly glide the years, says old Horace. Swiftly indeed! Fifty, since the first number of the Magnet was typed on a No. 7 Remington and Greyfriars came to life: its author frequently lifting the carriage to see how Harry Wharton and Co. were getting on: for that was before the days of visible typing.

Many things have heppened in those years: a couple of World Wars were among other things. Poles north and south have been explored. Flying men have girdled the earth: and Russian sputniks the heavens. And all the while Billy Bunter has been rolling on his plump way unperturbed. Men may come and men may go: but Billy Bunter just

keeps rolling along!

In the early Magnet numbers he had but a minor role -- pardon the pun -- later he stole the show. In more recent years he has blossomed forth into books, already with twenty-one volumes to his credit and spread himself over the television screen. It really looks as if he will last as long as his author: which will be quite a long time yet, for after all, what is eighty or so?

It is odd to remember that he might have lasted nearer sixty than fifty years by this time, if a certain bright young editor in 1899 had so decided. But that bright young man didn't "see much" in him: and Frank Richards rather hastily slipped a pen-and-ink manuscript back into his pocket: the discussion went on about other things, and that was that -- for the time! Frank was a young man in those days, a little diffident. His Bunter went into cold storage, and might never have emerged therefrom but for the advent of the Magnet. And then it was quite casually that he slipped on the type-writer; Frank Richards never dreamed that he was going to turn up weekly for thirty-three years, and after that continue his fat career in books and on T.V.

I have often been asked, whether I like Bunter. Of course I do. How could one help liking the companion of half-a-century! We are told that Conan Doyle became so tired of Sherlock Holmes that he had to kill him off. I never had that experience with Bunter, or with any other character of whom I have written. In fact, I don't understand how any author can tire of his creations. They are the children of his imagination and become like real children to him: more so if possible. One cannot, perhaps, admire Bunter, but one can like him. At any rate I do. I have always enjoyed everything I have written -- I like King of the Islands, and the Rio Kid, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and Jimmy Silver, and Jack of All Trades, and Cedar Creek, and the Packsaddle Bunch, and all the rest of them: but I am always glad to get back to Greyfriars -- and Bunter. Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, Hurree Janset Ram Singh, the Bounder -- everyone of them has a place in my affections. I could never tire of them. And least of all of the least admirable -- William George Bunter.

It is fifty years ago, but I remember it as if it were yesterday that afternoon at the old Camelite House, when the editor of the Gem told me that he was planning a new paper, and astonished me by adding that I was to supply the whole of the copy for it -- and the sub-editors fit of inextinguishable laughter when I said that I would! I was writing not only the Gem at that time, but any number of short stories and serials, so actually it was rather a tremendous order!

But I was in my early thirties then and full of beans. Certainly I couldn't have done it if I had been still wielding the pen that lasted from 1890 to 1900. But in the first year of the present century the typewriter had replaced it. And if the pen, as we are told, is mightier than the sword, undoubtedly the typewriter is mightier than the pen! How the keys flew under the fingers in those happy days!

Fifty years on!

Looking back over half-a-century it seems very pleasant. The Greyfriars Saga has gone on and one and on: written in all sorts and conditions of places -- on Swiss mountains, by Venetian lagoons, amid Roman and Pompeian ruins, French vineyards, Dutch canals, and German beer-gardens -- and now? Now Father Time has fixed its author in a sunny spot by the sea in a pleasant county, and his wanderings are over: but his fingers are still active on the keys. Greyfriars celebrates its Golden Jubilee: and Frank Richards, who has quite decided to make his century, looks forward to its Diamond Jubilee!

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MAGNET MILESTONES

- No. 1 dated February 15th, 1908 - price $\frac{1}{2}$ d.
 No. 106 Price increased to 1d.
 No. 397 The cover was changed from "red" to white.
 No. 437 Pages reduced to 16.
 No. 529 Price increased to $1\frac{1}{2}$ d.
 No. 770 Price increased to 2d with a change in cover illustrations two colours used for the first time.
 No. 1553 The cover again changed to salmon coloured paper.
 No. 1683 May 11th, 1940 - Final number.

The pages varied between 16 and 28 plus covers.

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CHARLES HENRY CHAPMAN - ARTIST OF THE MAGNET

By Charles Boorman

One winter morning several years ago, when I was editing a monthly magazine called the "Reading and Berkshire Review" a small, lean, wiry man of over 60 years climbed the 50 odd stairs, two at a time, to my office on the top floor and asked to see me. He entered the room with a light, springy step (in spite of those stairs), a jaunty air, and a smile that flowed into a thousand creases. With his twinkling blue eyes (no glasses, mind you) impish features and chuckling laugh he looked perennially young.

He introduced himself: Chapman - Charles Henry Chapman - for 30 years artist of that most prized of boys' papers "The Magnet."

Did I remember "The Magnet"? He wanted to know. Did I remember! What a question! The years rolled back. Why, there was never a boy of my generation (I'm speaking of 40 to 50 years ago) who thought that life was life without it. Dear Old "Magnet" How we revelled in those Frank Richards stories of Greyfriars School and the Famous Five (remember them? Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Janset Ram Singh), and above all the irrepressible Billy Bunter, the Fat Owl of the Remove, whose podgy blundering assinity upheld the richest tradition of schoolboy humour. How we hoarded our weekly ha'pence to make sure of the next copy of the paper, and rushed round to the newsagent to get it the moment it arrived. How we swapped copies and each one passed from hand to hand, growing more tattered in the process, until it literally fell to pieces. Did I remember "The Magnet" indeed!

And now here, sitting in front of me and talking as though we had known each other all our lives, was the artist of The Magnet himself, the hitherto unseen minister of our boyish entertainment, who week in and week out, for full three decades, had dramatised the Greyfriars saga in line and wash and brought to pictorial life the characters we had grown to love. He now became, for me, part of The Magnet story, which had long been, as I sensed, an intimate part of his own.

In terms of "copy" Chapman's visit to my office was a gift. We wrote him up in a double-page spread illustrated with a reproduction of one of the old front covers of The Magnet and some of his own sketches of Bunter and the rest. The public's response was astonishing. Although ours was a local magazine, applications for copies of

it came from old Magnet fans in all parts of the United Kingdom and some from abroad as far afield as Australia. We were sending them out for months afterwards.

Here was impressive of the nostalgic appeal of The Magnet and, more than all else, I think, of the popularity of Billy Bunter, who at about this time returned to the modern world through the medium of television, and incidentally, brought both Chapman and author Frank Richards to the screen to the delight of millions of viewers.

Charles Henry Chapman is a very remarkable man. He is one of those rare people who not only know what they want to do but who also by single-minded concentration of purpose, succeed in doing it. From the earliest days of his long life (he will enter his eightieth year on April the 1st, 1958) he had made up his mind to be an artist. He was born with more than an ordinary share of artistic talent and with unlimited zest for it too. He could never stop drawing.

When he went to Kendrick School in Reading, he told me, the drawing lesson was the only part of his education that really interested him. Even in the classroom he began to lay down the lines of his future career. He started a school magazine which he called the "Kendrick Comet" and naturally, as editor-in-chief, he made a feature of illustrations. He found contributors among his pals and even among the teaching staff. Produced by means of a hectograph, "The Comet" ran to a net sale of more than seventy copies, for which the boys paid a penny each and the masters (as a gesture of encouragement) twopence.

So the young Chapman's course was set, and as an avid reader of such popular boys' papers as "The Captain" and the "Boys' Own Paper" he already had a business eye on a likely field for future enterprise. On leaving school he studied drawing under the late Allen W. Seaby, Professor of Fine Art at Reading University, and then became an apprentice to an architect at Basingstoke.

Of that experience he observed, "It was fine excellent training for a budding artist, and I put in lots of practice, but...."

Well, he did not mean to be an architect, and with his bent for humour and the comic it was not long before he was sending sketches and cartoons to London editors and publishers.

In 1900 he celebrated his majority by getting a drawing - his maiden effort - in "The Captain." From that day his success was assured. For the next five years he contributed regularly to such papers as "Chips" "Comic Cuts" "Jester" "Penny Pictorial" and "Boys' Friend." A year later his work was appearing in the Daily

Graphic, "The Scout" "Big Budget" "Scraps" "Marvel" "Pluck" "Boys' Herald" "Boys' Own Paper" and "Chums".

By this time his lively, vigorous style and gift of humorous characterisation had caught the eye of other editors and in 1903 he became the interpreter of the inimitable "Ally Sloper", a seedy, tippling aristocrat with a bulbous nose whose misadventures, with those of his family, were pictured in a humorous weekly paper named after him.

Ally Sloper was a popular figure in the comic literature of the period. As Chapman puts it, "If you didn't know Ally you didn't know anyone." And his special appeal was that whatever he said and did reflected some contemporary event. The action was always topical. Thus, when Ally was at the height of his fame Bleriot amazed the world (much as the Sputnik has now) by making the first cross-channel flight in an aeroplane. Readers of the next number of "Ally Sloper" only two days later saw their hero emulating Bleriot's exploit with all the frills of fantastic burlesque. I remember that cartoon very well.

"Ally Sloper" was folio size with a cartoon completely filling the front page. Chapman did all those cover drawings for eight months.

In 1911 he joined the staff of "The Magnet" and began his long fruitful and happy association with Frank Richards, author of the Greyfriars stories, Richards, too, was a very remarkable man. Charles Hamilton was his real name, but he made use of a dozen or more pen-names as the writer of boys' and girls' stories among them Owen Conquest, Martin Clifford, Winston Cardew, and Hilda Richards. His output over a period of several decades was prodigious. He wrote something like a million-and-a-half words a year for the Amalgamated Press Publications and earned enough to enable him to live near Monte Carlo.

Although this author-artist collaboration lasted so long and worked so well, the two men saw very little of each other. Chapman recalls that they met and shook hands once or twice in the editor's office, but with the one pounding away at his typewriter in the South of France and the other busy at his drawing board in London they had neither time nor opportunity for the intimacies of personal friendship. Yet each served the other well. Week after week with unfailing regularity these 25,000 word typescripts from Monte Carlo were delivered to The Magnet offices in London, and week after week, quickly scanning them, Chapman gave to the highlight of incident the added attraction of vigorous illustrations.

It is interesting to speculate how, in terms of visual creation, those Greyfriars characters evolved. Like most characters in fiction they were based on people in real life. Billy Bunter, for instance,

was an amalgam of several plump persons known to the author. So far as Chapman is concerned Bunter, like Topsy, "just grewed". This is how he described the pictorial build-up of the Fat Owl.

"Bunter started off as a fat boy such as you'd find in a crowd of schoolboys anywhere. Then we made him shortsighted and fitted him up with glasses. Next we parted his hair in the middle with a couple of quifs and put him in check trousers. So, with a few special extras like these, Bunter came to acquire the character in which he was finally established and which made him the unique, recognizable personality that he was.

"Many people have been puzzled about these check trousers. Why should Bunter be allowed to wear check trousers when all the other Greyfriars boys wore regulation striped ones? Well, it was done just to make Bunter more conspicuous and especially to distinguish him from Johnny Bull, who, you will remember, was a fairly plump youngster.

"Those check trousers were always too tight, too. That was merely to emphasise Bunter's corpulence."

What of the other boys? How did they evolve?

"Well" says Chapman, "I suppose all the characters of Greyfriars as in most good stories, were drawn from real life. At any rate, the Famous Five were all decent, healthy specimens of British schoolboys. I've known boys who were the living counterparts of Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry.

"They were very genteel, of course, and even Bunter, whose habits were not always genteel, wasn't a Bounder. In fact I couldn't help liking him. And you can see how popular he still is."

As to other models for his characters, Chapman told me that when he got married - about the time when he first joined The Magnet - he went to live at Woodcote, on the Oxfordshire border not far from Reading. There he became Churchwarden to the Vicar of St. Leonard's, the Rev. Hubert Nind, who, having kept a prep. school for boys destined for Eton, knew the inside story.

"And more", Mr. Chapman goes on, "for with his dignified scholarly presence, plus his side whiskers, he provided me with an ideal model for Dr. Locke, the Greyfriars Head, and with suitable modifications, for Mr. Quelch, Form Master of The Remove."

In time, of course, Chapman became so familiar with his characters that he could almost draw them with his eyes shut. And I must record here that a few years back, as one of a panel in a local "What's My Line Quiz?" he amazed the audience by sketching Bunter on a Blackboard in nine seconds.

"I've never regretted that day I joined "The Magnet", Chapman assures me. "Every week, as I worked on those illustrations, the boys and their masters became real to me. I joined in their adventures and shared their experiences. I look back upon those years as among the happiest of my life.

"Of course, it always meant a devil of a lot of hard work, but I got a great kick out of it because there was always something new to think up every week.

"For instance, I shall never forget the novelty of introducing Bunter's sister Bessie (she was then charming the readers of the "Schoolgirls' Own") into Greyfriars School, and what consternation it caused in that masculine establishment. Billy returned the compliment later. The pair of them used to appear in the "Holiday Annual" which was connected with the Greyfriars tradition and which I helped to illustrate for 20 years until 1940.

"Bunter had a young brother too, a small edition of himself, with the same capacity for tucker which, believe it or not, caused Bunter major to accuse him of greediness!

"Although Bunter was no hero, in the sense that schoolboys understand, he proved the most popular of all the characters. Without him the Greyfriars stories would never have lasted as long as they did. Many of the plots revolved round him, and he became indispensable to the Greyfriars legend."

Apart from a period of six years from 1928, when he shared the work with Leonard Shields and R. J. Macdonald ("The Gem" artist), Chapman did most of the illustrations for "The Magnet", including the front cover, until, in 1940-41, the paper shortage brought the old favourite and other like it to an end.

"At that time "The Magnet" was at its peak," he observed. "It had a huge circulation - nobody knows how vast it really was."

The end of "The Magnet" however, was not the end of artist Chapman - not by any means, True, he retired, but only to find that, though "The Magnet" was dead, the memory of it among its one-time readers of all ages was still very much alive. During the past few years he has been an honoured guest at meetings of Old Boys Book Clubs which, in various parts of the country, exist to collect back numbers and preserve the memory of Bunter and other outstanding characters of schoolboy literature.

Inevitably there came a demand for the resurrection of Bunter, so much so that the Greyfriars stories were dramatised on television. And Chapman is again as busy as of old with brush and pen illustrating

Bunter's adventures, and, of course, there is "Billy Bunter's Own"

Why this enduring interest in the schoolboy literature of the past? Let Chapman suggest an explanation:

"I think it may be that there is nothing today to take the place of such papers as "The Magnet" and "The Gem". Boys now get a raw deal. Some of the stuff served up to them is very poor indeed - terrible stuff. The great appeal of such stories as Greyfriars was that it brought boys close to life as they would have it and reflected values which in Church and School they learned to accept."

Today, like Bunter, Chapman never seems to grow old. He still bubbles over with energy and vitality, enjoying his share in Bunter's current escapades and keeping himself sprightly and fit with long walks, bicycle rides and (quite true) a morning cold bath all the year round. His hobby, when he has time for it, is landscape painting. You could no more stop him drawing than you could check the flow of Niagara. And with that superb skill he still does it!

* * * * *

OLD BOYS TO GRAND OLD MAN

Sir, we salute you - we who have oft found
Rapture in witnessing Removites' pranks
In stately Greyfriars, on her neighbouring ground,
In Courtfield Lanes and on the Green Sark's banks.

Five decades past your genius made you weave
Out of your thoughts that throng of Boys and "Beaks"
Whose record - that convincing make-believe -
Held us enchanted for un-numbered weeks.

Sir, we salute, and thank you. It was good,
In our ascent from infancy to prime,
To share the pulse-beats of that brotherhood
Of fancied Youth uncynicised by time.

For mirthful tale, with moral deftly wrought,
We hale the Master Scribe of Schoolboy sport.

REV. A. G. POUND

* * * * *

THE MAGNET AND IBy Robert Wilson.

It was about the year 1907 that I forsook the pictorial delights of the Katzenjammer kids for the more solid pleasure of the printed story. By the generosity of a chum's elder brother, Pluck, Marvel, Boys' Friend and other weeklies swam into my den. And how I revelled in them. Then came the day worthy to be marked with a white stone, when my weekly pocket money was doubled to one penny. This meant that, as well as the large bag of sweets on which the original halfpenny was customarily disbursed, I could also purchase a weekly of my own. This was the key by which could be opened the door of entry to the "swap" group, in which each member bought a different periodical and these were handed round the circle after being read by the original owners. I was admitted to this select circle by right of purchase and as a new papers was just being published, I was commissioned to buy it every week. This new paper was indeed, the Magnet. As each boy in the group was known by the paper he bought, I was denominated "the Magnet". That was how Billy Bunter & Co. entered my life, to remain a part of it for fifty years.

Like many other enthusiasts, I was stunned when the Magnet disappeared in 1940. I wrote to the publishers pleading with them to rescind their decision. I had at that time about twenty Magnets and a dozen or so Greyfriars Schoolboys' Own Libraries and for the next nine years they were read and re-read ad infinitum. How I longed for a bundle of old Magnets and how that longing was at length satisfied, can be told in a train of events starting with a Saltburn-on-Sea address in E. S. Turner's Boys will be Boys, continuing with the receipt of a copy of Collectors' Digest from Herbert Leckenby and ending with the delivery at my house of several hundred Magnets in mint condition.

Now my serried ranks of Magnet volumes loom large in my life. Never a day passes but I lose myself in a Magnet. It may be for only a few minutes, it may be for an hour, at any time of the day or night. What pleasurable relaxation it is for an occupation like mine. To leave the world of ailing humanity for a brief space and open the magic casement o'erlooking that hidden land of perpetual youth, Greyfriars. Yes, I owe more to Frank Richards than I can ever adequately express. Through days of sorrow, disappointment, depression and fatigue, the Magnet has never failed to lighten my gloom and I have every reason to bless that day, fifty years ago, when the words "Send Master Harry to me" rang through the Corridors of Time.

FIFTY YEARS OF GREYFRIARS: SOME MISCELLANEOUS REFLECTIONS

By Roger M. Jenkins

It seems almost incredible that half a century has elapsed since the first Greyfriars story appeared in the Magnet, halfpenny paper which rode to success on the crest of the triumphant wave of the Gem. Separated as we are by two world wars, that bygone age now appears firmly sunk into history, and most of the Greyfriars stories of the time bear the unmistakable aspect of historial relics. Who could have foreseen half a century ago that it was Greyfriars which was destined to become so renowned and that St. Jim's would be remembered only by the faithful few?

It is likely that neither the publishers nor the author of these school stories had a suspicion of the trend of future events. The Gem was then nearly a year old, St. Jim's nearly two: the paper was selling well, and was to be doubled both in size and price. Why not cash in on the popularity of Martin Clifford by letting Frank Richards write a junior edition? Why not, indeed!

The first two numbers of the Magnet still read well today; the picture of the sulky boy forced to go to school against his will and encountering trouble when he got there is both interesting and authentic, but after the first two numbers the vital flame departed from the Magnet for some two or three years, and there appeared a succession of second rate tales, not quite pot-boilers but nonetheless giving the impression that they were written in the spare time left after composing the weekly story for the Gem. That this should have been the case is quite understandable, as is the fact that in 1909 the circulation of the Magnet dropped so alarmingly that the paper nearly suffered a total and permanent eclipse. Fortunately, the editor of the companion papers had faith in the future of the Magnet and decided to keep it going. It is a little ironic to think that no editor in the Amalgamated Press has the power to make such a decision today: the accountants now keep a supervisory watch on all circulations and in these days no amount of sentiment can keep going another "Answers" and no amount of blind faith can keep going another "Magnet". This is, after all, not unreasonable, since publishers are not philanthropic organisations: they are in business to make a profit, a somewhat disagreeable fact that all collectors must face. But one can't help wondering whether the policy of playing safe and taking no chances is in the long run the most profitable one to adopt. Certainly

if the accountants had held sway in 1909 there would have been no more Greyfriars and the Amalgamated Press would have been financially much the poorer as a result.

From the middle of 1911 both the Magnet and the Gem improved greatly, though the standard of the Greyfriars tales remained below that of the St. Jim's stories until 1925. Nevertheless, the circulation of the Magnet had improved and it never gave cause for concern again, right up to the end in 1940 when it stood at a quarter of a million.

It is true that the Gem was first in the field, but it was the Magnet which enjoyed the longest run of continuous school stories, and it was in the Magnet that Charles Hamilton displayed his finest craftsmanship. It was Greyfriars which triumphed in the end.

What is the significance of it all? Was it just nothing but a jolly romp, a form of weekly entertainment to be read lightly, and then cast aside and forgotten? Surely there was more to it than that. Quite apart from the characters who seemed so real and the style of writing which could at times give older readers such deep pleasure, beneath it all lay a code of morals and a pattern of behaviour which could not have failed to have had some effect upon the youth of 1908-1940. Some years ago Charles Hamilton wrote: "I have never liked the idea of sermonizing young people: but it has always seemed to me that a writer for youth should merge some moral hints imperceptibly into his story - though certainly not to the extent of making it unreadable as so many writers in my own boyhood unhappily did I hope this won't give you the impression that Frank Richards is an old sermonizer. But it has always seemed to me that a man ought not to write a story at all unless he feels that it may be to some extent useful, as well as entertaining, to young readers whose characters are in the process of formation. I am really letting you in behind the scenes as it were. Even our fat old friend Bunter is mainly a warning to thoughtless fellows not to slip into the easy path of unveracity." It is a common experience that, in later life, when most of the details have been forgotten, old readers of the Magnet still retain an impression of the moral that lay beneath the amusement, or what the author of the stories likes to refer to as "the pill in the jam."

The character of Harry Wharton was deeply involved in the moral aspect of the stories. As the hero he was inevitably the one to set the standard for the others to follow. Let it be said at once that a boy of fifteen or sixteen is a very difficult character to portray: he must not seem too old for his years, but on the other hand the hero

of the stories cannot be an irresponsible youngster. Harry Wharton was not exactly a model hero, but he had the genuine stamp of a Public School form captain: his background, his sense of honour and responsibility, and his general demeanour all combined to impress the reader as having the authentic touch. Although he made mistakes he was never gauche or lacking in the accepted decencies of conduct, and no matter what situation confronted him he was equipped with the certain knowledge of how he ought to act. As someone else has already remarked, breeding tells. Yet withal Harry Wharton never ceased to be likeable and could at times be very amusing. There is no doubt that in this case the pill in the jam was dispensed to a masterly prescription.

The prescription was not always written up in so sure a hand. For instance, there were a number of unusual characters introduced, presumably with the intention of disclaiming any prejudice on the part of the author: there were poor boys like Penfold and Linley, and boys of other nationalities like Dupont. Without being snobbish or insular one feels that they would all have been better omitted. Greyfriars was, after all, intended to be one of the top ranking and most expensive Public Schools, and boys so embarrassingly poor as Penfold (who had to go and help his father in the cobbler's shop) or Linley (who was always sending money home) would never in actual fact have taken a place there under such a terrific handicap: they would probably have gone to the local grammar school. What was far more touching and realistic was the occasional reference to Bob Cherry's being always short of pocket money and his ambition to purchase certain objects - when he could afford to. This restrained touch was extremely effective, but Linley and Penfold were so poor that one's sympathy for them rapidly became exhausted and was replaced with something like impatience. All the unusual characters played small parts and then only in minor stories. Like Dutton and his deafness, they held up the plot by the very reason that attention had to be paid to their oddities. In short, the idea that lay behind their presentation was a good one, but in practice it proved almost impossible to carry out.

The end of the Magnet was an event of considerable significance not only does the year 1940 constitute the final date of interest for the vast majority in the collecting world, but it was also the date at which all Hamiltonians were obliged to look back, since they then had nothing to which to look forward. In other words, they began to gather in old copies and take stock of past stories, and many old tales which might never have been looked at again were granted a new

lease of life. The death of the Magnet was the birth of popular collecting on a large scale.

If the Magnet had not ended in 1940 there would have been no Story Paper Collector, and if there had been no SPC there would probably have been no Collectors' Digest. And if there had been no CD, would there have been any Old Boys' Book Clubs? That this is not mere conjecture may be proved by the statistics in the 1957 CD Annual. Of the 228 who completed the questionnaire only 34 had no interest in Hamiltoniana, whilst 136 (or nearly 60%) placed Hamiltoniana first. Of these 136, 86 gave first preference to Greyfriars. How many of these would be collecting or even subscribing to the CD if new Greyfriars stories were still being issued in the Magnet and old ones still being reprinted in the Schoolboys' Own Library?

It seems a fair conclusion to draw that Hamiltonians form the backbone of the collecting world today, and that their active participation in such large numbers acts as a spur not only to each other but to those whose interests lie in other fields of old boys' books. Hamiltonians would not wish to lay claim to 60% of the space in the Collectors' Digest every month because they realise the right of the minority groups to be over-represented, but if other sections detect a note of smug self-satisfaction in Hamiltoniana this month they must excuse it on the grounds that the fiftieth anniversary of the first Greyfriars story is an event that holds some significance for all collectors.

By a most improbable turn of events, Greyfriars is today more famous than it ever was. Thanks to the combined effect of the Bunter books and the television plays it is now a household word. To the inveterate collector, however, none of these modern manifestations has quite the attraction of the good old weekly paper he once read in his youth.

The Magnet is dead. Long live the Magnet!

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BACKGROUND TO WARby Peter A. Walker

It was November, 1940, and we in Bristol were just beginning to feel the first effects of Hitler's war. For several weeks there had been the nightly drone of German bombers. Isolated "incidents" had occurred in various parts of south-west England. But on this particular evening of the last Sunday in November of 1940 it became apparent that poor Bristol was to be the latest victim of Nazi barbarism.

The sirens sounded at 6.0 p.m. and after the usual "calm before the storm" period, the barrage and bombing started. So intense had it become by 7 o'clock we decided that discretion was the better part of valour and sought the comparative safety of our re-inforced room. It was then that I decided that to sit "waiting for it" was rather ridiculous, so somewhat nervously I climbed to a top floor attic and after a few minutes search returned with a copy of a paper which, in company with others, was to afford me much relief during those long nights of terror. It was, of course, "The Magnet", and the issue was dated 1918. December 3rd, 1918.

A Christmas number entitled "The Greyfriars Christmas Party" the cover, in colour, bearing the curious title "Four from the East". Not by any means, a classic example of the art of Frank Richards. In fact, as I have since discovered, was by one of the so-called substitute writers. But, strangely enough, on that night of blitz it brought back many vivid memories.

I remembered, for instance, that it was probably one of the first Magnets I ever bought as a small schoolboy in 1918. And I recalled that during those latter months of the First World War, I was then sheltering, shivering in semi-darkness, with the old Magnet for company, during a Zeppelin raid on London.

How the Magnet has given followers of Charles Hamilton a sense of permanence and security during troubles times! In those shelter days of 1940 I have re-lived the days of youth, when the hot sun shone on the old quad at Greyfriars, and there was a whirr of bicycles in Friardale Lane. Uncle Clegg was cheerfully dispensing ginger pop and ice-cream, and Vernon Smith was nipping into the Three Fishes to lay a quick bet with Lodgey, the bookie.

Old Wingate and Gwynn of the Sixth, the seedy Price, and the debonair Hilton. Claude Hoskins and his piano, and the burly Hobson

CHORDS IN THE MEMORYSet by Eric Fayne

How well do you know your Magnet? If you know it well, you will be able to place every one of the following quotations at a glance. Each is a piece of dialogue taken from some of the Magnet's most famous series: each contains a clue to the series in question; to make it fair to those who may have joined the clan in later years, the series are those which appeared from 1930 onwards.

In each case you are required to state (1) Who said it? (2) To whom he or she was speaking (3) The name of the series in questions. In the case of the answer (2), a collective one, e.g. The Famous Five, might be sufficient.

This little puzzle is for your amusement, to strike chords in your memory, but to add to the fun a postal order for 5/- will be sent to each of the THREE readers who send in the most correct answers. The time factor may be taken into consideration - that is to say, the prizes will be awarded for the correct answers first received. Jot your answers, and post to the Editor.

Closing date:- 28th February.

- (a) "I never asked you to this study that I know of. You're not the kind of fellow I want in my study. I haven't locked up my things"
- (b) "I'm not having a bad time. The only trouble is that they overdo the hospitality. They really make a fellow eat too much. It's a fault on the right side, of course, but they overdo it."
- (c) "His Lordship would hardly listen to a person who told him what he had read in a private letter, sir. He would naturally despise such a person, sir."
- (d) "You young donkey! Major Cherry has a nephew."
- (e) "How long have I been in there? I thought the air wouldn't last, but it must have lasted all the hours I've been shut up in that horrible place."
- (f) "There was nobody to help me, only the chap you're all down on. He looked sick enough when he heard what I'd done, but he did help me out, and you didn't."
- (g) "We may never see him again, but I trust that, whatever may be said of him, you - his friends - will always remember him with kindness."

- (h) "Come to tea with me next week. In the meantime, you are in an exhausted state, and I will give you a nip. But keep it a secret"
- (i) "As I have said in my ridiculous letter, I regret terrifically having overstayed my welcome in your absurd residence."
- (j) "I am bound to point out, sir, that a schoolmaster - more especially a temporary master engaged for a short time - has no concern with a boy when he is away from school, in charge of his parents and friends."
- (k) "You have changed very much for the worse this term, Wharton. I fear that you must have come under some bad influence during the Easter holidays."
- (l) "At St. Olaf's they would have booted a pilferer out of the school."

Example answer (not to be taken seriously):-

- (b) 1. Horace Coker. 2. William Gosling. 3. The Caffyn series.

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

(In this series, Eric Fayne touches on certain matters of interest to students of the Hamilton papers. He gives his own views superficially. If you will write to him expressing your opinion on the topics he discusses, he will summarise readers' views in a future issue.)

No. 11. DID WE SUFFER FROM TOO MUCH BUNTER IN THE MAGNET?

I would say no. Though Harry Wharton is my favourite character at Greyfriars, I love my Bunter, and I have never found him the thing too much.

Frank Richards has stated that "Billy Bunter made the Magnet." Certainly Mr. Richards should know, but I feel it too sweeping a statement. Bunter, undoubtedly, helped to make the Magnet the great paper it was, but in the early years, when the foundations were laid, he was nothing like so prominent in the stories as he became in the fullness of time. But, although Bunter hogged the limelight characteristically in the last two decades of the paper, I, personally, felt that we never suffered from too much Bunter. I would go further and suggest that anybody who disliked Bunter could never claim genuinely to like the Magnet.

I have wished sometimes that in the post-war stories we might have Bunter as a part of the strong supporting cast rather than as the star, but, as well we realise, that is purely wishful thinking. Bunter has been built into a great national figure, and there is little likelihood that he will ever again play second fiddle. It is assumed, not unnaturally, that the supporters of the Bunter books want Bunter, more Bunter, and still more Bunter. We, who remember the greatest series of the Magnet, would possibly prefer a little soft pedalling of the "old fat man" but, so far as I am concerned, it is a mild preference, for, as I said before, I love my Bunter.

A memorable series in which Bunter did not appear at all was that of Ravenspur Grange. This series has been criticised as being out of place in the Magnet, but I have read it many times, thoroughly enjoyed it, and regard it as among the Magnet's most entertaining - though it did not feature Billy.

Coker, now, like spinach, is an acquired taste. If we dislike Coker we can leave him alone. There are hundreds of stories with no mention of Coker.

But Bunter can hardly be regarded as an acquired taste. He is no hors d'oeuvre. He is a main dish. If we dislike Bunter, the only thing to do is to change our restaurant - in other words, to leave the Magnet alone.

Was Bunter handled consistently down the years? Not entirely I think. A stupid fat boy in the beginning; an unscrupulous young rascal between the white covers; irritating and unpleasant in the early twenties; with a subtle attractiveness and, I think, at his very best, in the late twenties and very early thirties; stubbornly snobbish and rather unpleasant in the mid-thirties; funmaker in chief, and very lovable today. And always, whether in 1908 or 1958, having a pull of his own - like the Magnet.

My favourite Bunter series? Difficult to say. Maybe Bunter at Whiffles Circus or Bunter in the attic at Wharton Lodge. Good old Billy Bunter. May his shadow never grow less.

It's just my point of view. What's yours?

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CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 9. WHICH WERE THE BEST XMAS NUMBERS?

GEORGE SELLARS writes:- The finest Gem Christmas Numbers were (1) Nobody's Study. (2) Mystery of the Painted Room.

I remember quite clearly when I read "Nobody's Study" for the first time (I was 14 years of age) and the story impressed me so much that for years I liked to believe that the real ghost was not laid. Even now, as I am writing, I still like to believe that Nobody's Study is haunted. Read this story again, and you will understand what I mean - especially the incident when Tom is alone in the haunted room, waiting for the ghost to appear.

Gem 41 and Gem 197, both entitled "The Ghost of St. Jim's" were a pair of good, old-fashioned Xmas yarns, and last, but not least, "Tom Merry's Christmas" and "Talbot's Christmas."

My choice of Magnet Xmas numbers is the same as yours, all three splendid Yuletide stories. I think that "Jimmy Silver's Xmas Party" should not be left out - the finest of all the Rookwood Xmas stories.

* * * * *

THANKS FOR THE MEMORY

By Maurice Kutner

It is often noted how a tune, a colour, or even a smell, can bring back memories. A conversation of long ago may boil itself down to one to two half-remembered words, but visual images cling tenaciously through decades. The memory of someone's adam's-apple dancing lives longer than the words which the vocal chords formed; a facial expression, or expressive gesture of the hands, lives on.

The visual art of illustration, in that respect, is a most important one in books and reading. Not only does it create a visual aspect that the mind can readily seize upon and remember, but also forms an atmosphere which varies in different artists. Each brings his own personality to bear, and once the stamp of his art is impressed on the characters, he not only creates an atmosphere but a tradition too.

A Dickens' edition illustrated by a Harry Furniss, or Frank Reynolds, never reads the same, or has the same atmosphere as an edition which contains the drawings of Phiz, whose style of depicting the well-meaning and benign Mr. Pickwick, and the rolling loguaciousness of Mr. Micawber is a tradition closely related with lovers of Dickens' works.

We may be more the slaves of tradition in illustration than we think. When the first Tom Merry's Annual was published many of our

circle complained, and rightly so, at the poorness of the illustrations which were signed "Abbey". Again, when the Goldhawk Tom Merry books appeared, this time with a cover by an artist the equal, and even superior, to most of those employed by the A.P., the complaints still persisted. Fundamentally it had nothing to do with the question of good or bad drawings. Unconsciously it was the expression of our frustration at the use of strange illustrations when R. J. Macdonald, who was the mainstay of the St. Jim's tradition, was at that time still alive and presumably quite willing to take over from where he had left off. The publishers, realising to the full the force and power of tradition, took note of the complaining reader, met him half-way, and C. H. Chapman was quickly brought on the scene to illustrate the St. Jim's stories. This did not satisfy tradition to the full, but Mr. Chapman was as welcome as the flowers in May; we knew his work, and the pleasure he had given us over many years. Our sub-conscious desire to keep the "foreigners" out was satisfied.

Tradition and atmosphere go hand-in-hand; the atmosphere of St. Jim's; as we all know, was created by R. J. Macdonald, though Warwick Reynolds almost created another St. Jim's by his excellent work for the Gem, particularly the St. Jim's Gallery in the first world war. That of Greyfriars was formed by Arthur Clarke and, at his death, carried on so successfully for many, many, years by C. H. Chapman and, the gods be praised, he is still happily creating for us the magic atmosphere of Greyfriars. Rookwood means G. W. Wakefield, while Arthur Jones, whether we criticise his drawings or not, set his seal on the St. Frank's stories. To those of Blakiana only one artist, Eric Parker, has gripped the imagination and formed a visual Sexton Blake that is life-like in its intensity, a superb piece of fluent artistry drawn, seemingly, with a minimum of effort. Eric Parker introduced to A.P. book illustration a modern vigorous outlook, a technique consisting of an economy and accuracy of line, possible only by a first class illustrator. The famous Punch cartoonist, Phil May, always did a very careful and detailed pencil drawing of his subject, and then inked-in only the most essential lines. The apparent ease of the consummate artist is in all cases due to much hard work behind the scenes, and Eric Parker was no exception.

A satisfying period in illustration in the Magnet and Gem was perhaps that from 1916 to 1919 when C. H. Chapman and Warwick Reynolds were the respective artists. The characters they drew were often so easily recognisable that one could distinguish between Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull, or G. A. Grundy and George Herries.

It was surely a pity that this policy was not continuous over the years, for in due course of time we were left with numerous schoolboys who all looked alike, but we were still left with the distinct likenesses of Billy Bunter and D'Arcy, perhaps only because no artist could surely avoid clarifying those two characters!

Most of the illustrators whom we revere had one common factor; their drawings of the eternal female were suprisingly unsatisfactory. Even Warwick Reynolds, whose work was of a very high standard indeed, failed dismally with his drawings of Cousin Ethel and Doris Levison. Curiously enough, his best effort was of George Kerr impersonating a young lady, the title role in the Gem story "Sister Mabel."

The most successful, however, were G. W. Wakefield whose cherubic, girlish flappers in colourful dresses and picture hats were most distinctive; Leonard Shields, with a fine, healthy, comradely type of schoolgirl; the virile female characters of Eric Parker, excellently drawn with bold, vigorous strokes; and last, but certainly not least, J. Louis Smythe, whose work for the A.P. comics 40 years ago was prolific and of a very high order, and who drew the exotic, sophisticated and mysterious type of women (especially female spies,) who abounded so freely in the serials and short stories in the A.P. comics of those days.

We raise this point of our artists and their female characters only because we are convinced that the interest in them, by boy readers between 12 to 15 years of age, is unknowingly greater than is generally admitted.

Many of our circle have confessed to a re-awakened interest in their boyhood reading after a lapse of many years. It is normal for a waning of interest from the age of 16. The cares and stresses of growing up and "getting somewhere in life" claim us, but as the years roll on, oft in the still night comes the wee, small voice of the past, the yearning to renew acquaintance with our juvenile "friends" which, to the nostalgic, becomes over-whelming. At long last, when we do re-possess those books of our youth, we then see just where our memories have led us astray and played us tricks. Visual memories, however, are fairly reliable, and that is where our artists have the advantage. That drawing of Horace Coker which appeared, oh, so many years ago, the one in which he stands with feet firmly planted on the ground, body half-turned and tensed, two great lam-like fists, closed and threatening as though they've just cleared the board with one mighty sweep and quite prepared to execute further destruction, that rugged, excitable visage with the jutting and pugnacious jaw - that drawing, we say, lives in

our memory and reminds us in a flash of his short way with fags, his frequent attempts to gain due respect for his seniority over them, his eternal laying down the law to those unreliable henchmen, Potter and Greene, his fumbling schemes, and the frequent displeasure of Mr. Prout booming in his ears. No caption need be attached to that picture of the mighty Horace and our inward eye will see it eternally.

The colours and illustrations on the covers of our old boys' books are remembered when the contents therein are forgotten, so we have much to thank the band of artists who made our reading so much more enjoyable by the presence of their drawings.

They once trailed behind the author; times have changed however, and in these days of strip-cartoon "reading" the authors now stand in the background while the artists are busily creating visual scenes and characters which the youth of today are assimilating, and which they will lovingly remember very vividly, and in many cases with nostalgia, in the long years to come.

Then too, will say of the artists of their boyhood periodicals, "Thanks for the memory!"

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I WELL RECALL THE DAY

By Herbert Leckenby

In February, 1908, I was a printers apprentice in my fourth year. My wage was 3/6 per week, out of which indulgent parents allowed me to keep one shilling. The greater proportion of this was spent on boys' weeklies of the day, the Boys' Friends, Boys' Realm, Boys' Herald, Union Jack and the Gem among them.

The week ending February 15th brought a problem, I had to find another penny, for the Gem was being raised to a penny, and there was to be a new paper, the Magnet priced ½d, about which our appetites had been whetted for weeks by announcements in all the other papers. I managed it somehow and as soon as I had drawn my wages I made a dash for my newsagent, who looked upon me as one of his best customers. I used to get all my weekly supply of papers together, and I quickly turned to the new one with its golden cover. By the light of the newsagent's window I read what are now historic first words - "Send Master Harry to me". Little did I think that evening in the dusk that fifty years on I should be writing about them. Who would? After all it was just another humble halfpenny paper.

Later when I got through my favourite serials in the Boys' Friend etc., read the Sexton Blake story in the Union Jack and with approval the enlarged Gem, I turned to the new paper. Having digested that too, my verdict was, if I remember rightly, "As good as the Gem. This chap Frank Richards knows his stuff." I knew at the time that Martin Clifford was Charles Hamilton for the simple reason that I had read the St. Jim's stories in Pluck, but I had no idea of course, that the "new" author was Charles Hamilton.

From that day the Magnet was added to my weekly feast of reading matter. I won't say I bought all the 1683 numbers as they were published but I never completely lost track with it to the day it died.

Incidents concerning certain numbers stand out for no particular reason. I recall a night in July, 1911, whilst working on a morning newspaper, sneaking into the cellar to read a chapter or two of Bob Cherry in Search of His Father. There was the August Bank Holiday Saturday in 1914, when I read "The Match with St. Jim's" in the railway carriage on my way to Harrogate, to see the girl I was to marry a month later. There was talk of war in that carriage yet I enjoyed that story despite the fact that my thoughts kept straying to the responsibility I was taking on. Perhaps I was consoled by the remark of one of my fellow passengers whom I remember saying "Oh well, if war does come it will be over by Christmas."

Then there was the night in May 1916 when whilst on duty in that army telephone exchange I have cause to remember so well I was interrupted in my reading of "Cokers Conscript" by the roar of a Zeppelin overhead and the dropping of bombs which brought death and destruction in the near vicinity. And I recall I had a copy of the Magnet on my desk when a bomb dropped close by from a different type of aircraft in another war when the life of the paper with the amazing record was drawing towards its close.

Yes, the Magnet provided me with countless hours of pleasant reading throughout its long career but there was one thing I certainly never dreamt that long after its death it would be the means of bringing me countless friends all over the world. No, that morning when my newsagent told me there would be no more Magnets, I never thought of that.

Now, just a little fantasy. Let's suppose that in that far off day in 1908 I had taken it into my head to consult a seer, one of those venerable gentlemen with a long white beard and a cone shaped hat, as to the prospects of that little halfpenny paper with the golden cover. Having accepted the silver coin I had raised from somewhere let's again

again visualise the proceedings going something like this:

Having scanned the paper he peered intently into his crystal ball and then said "My boy, I can see far into the future. This little paper of yours will go on and on through the years long after you have risen to man's estate. You will have a son who will read it. It will grow in size, grow smaller again, then get larger once more. It will change its appearance several times, but on and over on it will go through a Great World War, and part of the way through another one. And all the way it will tell of the escapades of the boys I see mentioned here, and many more.

Then, peering again into his crystal he said "In the far distant future I can see an old gentleman wearing a skull cap and clad in a dressing gown. He is tapping away at one of those type-writing machines and the words he is tapping out are about these same boys. He spells Bunter many times. And he is the same gentleman who wrote the words in this book of yours only he is fifty years older." Looking again intently and tugging at his beard my seer muttered, "There will come a day my boy, when you too, are half-a-century older when you will be able to sit in your own home and see displayed on a screen living pictures of the schoolboys very little changed, just as you can see animated pictures in tents on this fair-ground.

Then, if, as the seer handed my No. 1 of the Magnet back to me he had advised me "Cherish that little paper of yours my son. There will come a day when it will be worth several golden sovereigns."

Yes, if that seer of my fancy had said that I should have turned away saying to myself "Pooh, he's been talking rot. I've a good mind to ask for my money back."

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THE BEGINNING OF THE BUNTER BOOKS

By Charles Skilton

Do you ever speculate on the extraordinary chain of events sometimes set up by the quite small happenings of life? Think back and see if it is not so in your case. Or, to take a celebrated example, consider how the assassination of an Archduke in an out-of-the-way spot in 1914 set in motion the deaths of millions of men and most of the

troubles to which the world has been subject ever since.

I was working one evening in the office of the hospital where I was employed in 1945 when a tap came at the window. A nurse from the Hebrides wanted someone to talk to; we became friends, and, although I did not marry her, it was through a visit to Stornaway to see her that I met my future wife. (In the meantime I had left the hospital and was running my small publishing business full-time.) On our honeymoon in Oban the following year I picked up in the hotel lounge a copy of "Picture-Post", a magazine which I came across only very occasionally in dentists' waiting-rooms and at the hairdressers. In that particular issue was an article about Frank Richards and it at once struck me that a series of books about Bunter and Greyfriars would be a very safe bet for a publishers only comparatively recently established.

Reckoning that Mr. Richards would be flooded with fan-mail I waited for a few weeks before approaching him (I would not be so green now as to let the grass grow!). Probably I was very diffident too about the reception I, an unknown publisher, would get from a very well known writer. In that respect, at least, I need not have worried, for later, in his AUTOBIOGRAPHY, Frank Richards disclosed that he "regarded a publisher as of infinitely more importance than the whole of the Baronetage." I have noticed, too, in the years that have passed since, that Frank Richards has always been willing to discuss business arrangements with anyone who does not mess about, however unknown they may be - and at that time there must have been no publishers more unknown than myself! One does not have to be Monster, Million and Co. Ltd., to get a friendly reply from Frank Richards.

Within a month everything had been settled, the Amalgamated Press who at one time were cavilling at the idea of Bunter being published else-where, having withdrawn their objection. I see from my files that the contract was signed on October 4th, 1946 and on December 4th I had the manuscript in my hands, had chuckled with laughter over it and knew that I had a winner of a book in BILLY BUNTER OF GREYFRIARS SCHOOL.

I suppose someone else would eventually have had the idea if I hadn't, but the now familiar series of yellow spines would probably not have been brought out in the same way: just possibly, not at all. Certainly, without the tap on the window, it is very unlikely that I should have had the great pleasure of knowing the Perfect Author, I have written more about him in an article which I hope will appear in "Everybody's" to mark the Jubilee of the "Magnet" - unless I yet collect a piece of paper probably unknown to Mr. Richards: the rejection slip! Later, if Herbert Leckenby is really desperate for contributions one month, I

may rustle up a few more notes which might interest C.D. readers.

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AVE MAGISTER

By Stanley Smith

Many people have written telling of their appreciation of the work of Frank Richards. Many more have expressed their great enjoyment of his stories. I go further - I enjoy his stories and I appreciate his great work, but I have for Frank Richards a debt of gratitude that I can never hope to repay.

He, and no-one else, was responsible for giving me an interest in life at a time when I was desperately in need of it. He restored in me the joy of living and caused me to determine that, come what will, I was going to be as other boys and do for myself those things that I read about in his wonderful stories. All this is self-evident to anyone who reads this poor tribute, but I am convinced that Frank Richards did even more than these things for me. I cannot see how I could possibly have retained sanity itself had it not been for those great stories that he wrote week after week and the wonderful characters that he created.

I had the misfortune that I spent a very large proportion of my early days in hospitals. From the age of seven until well over the age at which one is supposed to have the key of the door, my life was one dreary round of illness, hospital, operation, convalescence, a short few months as a normal boy or young man and then the same old routine would recommence. During that time I spent just under nine years in hospitals and convalescent homes of various kinds. My particular trouble was regarded as incurable and, as far as medical science and knowledge of those days went, it was generally accepted that my life was not destined to be long and that what there would be of it was likely to be much of a pattern.

I had some early schooling and could read but that was about my only accomplishment. The day of hospital education was in the future. In those days of the first world war and the early twenties few hospitals took any steps to help their patients in any except medical or surgical ways.

But life really started for me one day in 1916 or 17. I had been in that hospital for some months, I was about eleven years old, I was in pain, I had read all books brought in to me by my kind friends and relations or supplied from the very meagre hospital library, I was tired, I was weary of everything, I was fed-up and I was bored as only a boy can be.

All the other patients were, to me, old men. But on that day a new patient was brought in - a boy of about my own age. He was to have an operation on the morrow and we began to talk across the ward. But he was rather ill and the conversation did not last long. One thing he said, however, will never be forgotten. It was simply, "Would you like to read this?" and, as he asked, he held up a paper.

Of course I wanted to read anything and I can remember, as if it were only yesterday, the call of "Nurse!" and the request that she should fetch the paper over for me.

I took the paper and looked at it with interest. It was a book of a type that I had never seen before. Of white paper, its cover was headed "The Penny Popular" (War time price 1½d.) and below this was a picture of two boys in an exciting scene on the bank of a frozen river.

I opened the pages of this book and, in doing so, I opened the door into a new world - a world with its own limitations of possibility and probability, with its own high standards and peopled by individuals whom I was going to look on as close friends within a very short time.

I read a story of some boys at a school called Greyfriars and, such was the magic of that story, I felt that I was meeting friends and that I already knew Bunter and Bulstrode, Wharton and Wun Lung, Cherry and Coker and all the rest of them.

Then there was a story of some more boys, this time from St. Jim's, and a tale of yet another school at Rookwood.

I read that book from cover to cover. I revelled in it. Gone was boredom, gone was tiredness and, even more wonderful, gone was pain - or, at least, the close presence of pain that had been with me for so long.

When my relations came to see me on the next visiting day they were greeted by a demand that henceforth I should be supplied each week with a copy of the "Penny Popular" and also of the other papers mentioned in it - the "Magnet" the "Gem" and the "Boys' Friend."

As the months went by life became so much more interesting. I was still in hospital but I had friends to share my weary hours. I

had the Greyfriar's boys, Gussy and Merry and the rest from St. Jim's and I had the Fistical Four and their pals of Rookwood. As time went on I made further friends - and enemies - when I was introduced to St. Frank's, to the saga of Sexton Blake, to Jack, Sam and Pete, to Wycliffe and so many others who were to share so many more happy hours with me.

And other things happened as well! Even the doctors noticed the improvement in my condition and that feeling of near-pity that has for so long been the atmosphere of my visits became a thing of the past. Interest in life and a zest for living had come. This was followed by something quite different - a determination to be like those fellows that I read about and (if not now, at any rate, in the future) be able to do the things they did and go to the kind of places they went to. I began to develop an interest in education - not as a thing of itself but because this was a necessary step. Laying in bed I started correspondence courses in all sorts of subjects and was able, many years later, to claim Matriculation standard. But, in the meantime, when I did get those odd few months out of hospital and go to school myself I ceased being the total dunce and was almost able to take my full place with my own age groups in most school subjects.

All this I owed to Frank Richards!

Then later came the determination to do things like my heroes and I began to get better. My absences from hospital began to last longer, I just wasn't going to let myself go back there if I could help it.

This determination I owed also to Frank Richards!

And when I was finally, completely cured, I knew that it wasn't simply a matter of improved medical science. I knew that had it not been for Frank Richards I would have been, if not an invalid for the whole of my life, at least very much behind everybody else in every way.

What I am I owe more than I can possibly say to the master of all boys' writers - Frank Richards.

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WANTED: S.O.L's. 9, 40, 58, 157, 264.

PORTER, OLD FIELDS, CRADLEY HEATH. STAFFS.

TO FRANK RICHARDS

In good King Edward's Golden days,
 The Magnet first was printed,
 Frank Richards wrote of Greyfriars School,
 And value was not stinted.

Now Billy Bunter's JUBILEE,
 We celebrate together;
 May he and his GREAT AUTHOR too,
 Both live with us for ever!

GERRY ALLISON.

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THE CUPBOARD WAS BARE or THE DAY I GOT THE BIRD

By Frank Unwin

We moved into our present house in September last - an oldish, modernised house, complete with one of those cock-lofts which are almost unreachable, and, not owning a ladder, unexplored until very recently.

Came New Year's Eve, and a delightful evening at the Webster's, where, like our dear old fat friend, I ate not wisely, but too well! Full of good cheer, and good food, I went to bed and dreamed - a most delightful dream. I dreamed that I borrowed a ladder and climbed up to the cock-loft. Pushing open the door, I gazed in. What a wonderful sight met my eager eyes! How my eyes gleamed greedily as they beheld --- no, not a bag of gold, nor a sack of coal, but an old book-case, and on each shelf were rare copies of the Magnet, Gem, Popular and Union Jack - all in mint condition. Now, I am a strong Nelson Lee enthusiast, and the surprising thing was that there wasn't a single Nelson Lee to be found. This was a little disappointing, but - no matter; you can imagine how positively thrilled I was to collect up all this "treasure" and search through it with trembling fingers and gloating eyes.

Alas! I woke up. Now I know how Bunter felt when he awoke to grim reality after dreaming of luscious jam tarts. Disillusionment! Disgust! Depression! Deflation! All of these, and some more. How cruel dreams can be!

When I got up, however, there was a new light in my eyes. After a cup of tea, that light was shining with a new conviction. Not having a Joseph in the house to interpret my dreams, I came to the exciting conclusion that somewhere up there in the cock-loft was hidden a treasure-ward of precious old books.

No time for shaving! No time even, to borrow a ladder! The situation called for prompt and instant action. Now, my son, Keith, is a very useful lad in an emergency and he's very interested in the Greyfriars and St. Jim's books, especially St. Jim's. Like the Pharaoh's butler and baker, I acquainted him of my dream and we got busy.

A table was placed under the cock-loft on which was placed a large chair, then a large wooden box, then a stool and I could reach the door! Terribly precarious, but not time to worry about danger - I scorned danger in fact. However, I gave Keith strict instructions to hang on tightly to the chair and stool etc., and climbed. Like Sir Edmund Hillary, I reached the top, not without considerable hazard. Pushing open the door, I swung up and got my knees on to the ledge; then with a last supreme effort, I was in and trembling with exhaustion, (or was it excitement?) I shone my torch and began exploring.

Alas, again! How many of these lovely dreams come true? Why did the prophets of old attach so much importance to them? Yes, you've guessed it - there were no books - nothing at all except dust and damp - and an ancient bird-cage lying in the corner. I picked it up and gazed at it ruefully. Then came the dreaded descent down Everest. Thick with dust, with my shins full of bruises and my heart full of sadness, I managed to reach terra firma, carefully avoiding Keith's eyes.

A bird-cage! I thought sadly of the old saying "It disappeared from his gaze like a beautiful dream." How very true!

Nothing at all, except an old bird-cage. I didn't even possess a bird. But I got it from Keith - a very large one, with a very sharp beak. And every day since then he's been giving me the "bird". He calls it the "cock" loft bird!!!!

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FRANK NUGENT

By Don Webster.

It is only fitting in the Golden Jubilee year of the "Magnet"

to make some reference to a character who appeared in both the first and last issues; namely Frank Nugent. Besides being Harry Wharton's best friend, and often counsellor, Frank is the most unassuming member of the Famous Five.

He has fair hair, is intellectual, quiet, good-natured and tender-hearted - though he can be lion-hearted when necessary. Very good at games in the Red Magnet era - he taught Wharton to box, and usually opened the innings at cricket, as well as being a useful change-bowler, added to which he was an automatic choice at inside-right at soccer. Franky nowadays has to be content as twelfth man, or reserve (we couldn't have the Famous Five comprising half the team, could we?).

His brother, Dicky, (whom he idolises, goodness knows why!), seems the only person to disturb the even tenor of his way, and this brotherly affection has formed the basis of many fine stories. I can only remember three or four stories dealing with Frank Nugent as the central character - a great pity, for he was an ideal model for a boy, as the "maestro" has indicated.

His weaknesses were shown in "The Greyfriars Pantomime" and "Frank Nugent's Folly", but his strength was to the fore in "The Fellow who Funked". Amateur actor, artist, all-rounder, and one of nature's gentlemen - that's Frank Nugent.

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FRANK RICHARDS - AN APPRECIATION

by Walter Fleming

What memories that man Frank Richards conjures up.

Having been a constant reader of Magnet and Gem since Christmas 1926 until the demise due to paper shortage at the beginning of the war, and of all his books since the war, I would like to thank Frank Richards and I am sure that I speak for thousands more of my generation, for the very many happy hours of reading he has given us.

Now that Billy Bunter has reached his 50th Anniversary this seems to be the moment to say,

"Thank you Frank Richards, for the excellent work that you have done in the last 50 years. It is with complete confidence that I can place your stories in front of my children and know that they will enjoy not only an excellent story but also a clean and wholesome one untouched by sadism and horror.

I sincerely hope that in 10 years time we shall be suitably

celebrating Billy's Diamond Jubilee.

Once again Frank, for many happy hours, I would like to say
Thank You.

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A TIP. I should just like to draw the attention of all Hamiltonians to Walter Webb's review of Sexton Blake Library, No. 400. There's a character therein who midst the perils of the seas whilst in Russian convoy turned to the Magnet for relaxation.

21 1933-1934 "Magnets" £4 7s.0d. Best offers for beautifully bound volume 1928 "Nelson Lees". (Nos. 113-136) "Arizonaways" "Vermont Life" Mags, coloured 16/- selection. 29 1931-1940 Comics, "Hotspur" "Skipper" "Champion" "Triumph" 60/- o.n.o. 1940 "Magnet" bound 62/6. 1939 "Magnet" bound £7 5s.0d. 1936 "Magnet" Bound £7 10s.0d. 100 S.O.Ls. (S.A.E. Lists) "Punania" (1867) by Hon. Hugh Rowley 15/- "Century Historical Stories" 1022 pages. "Fifty Eastern Stories" "Anthony Adverse" 1022 pages. 10/6 each. Bound "Munsey" Mags 1918-1919 10/6 each. "Tom Brown's Schooldays" (illustrated from film) 13/- "Our Empire Story" (Lovely coloured plates) 17/6. Gorgeously coloured edition of "Wind in the Willows" 25/-. "Girls Golden Annual 1927" 7/6 "Bunter's Own" 12/6. Arthur Mee's book of Everlasting Things 12/6. "Chimney Corner" (1926) 7/6. Back Nos. Annuals 4/6 sample copy. Good old bound school yarns of early 1900s. "Triple Alliance" "At School-land away". "Mobsleys Mohicans" 10/6 each. "Fifth Form at St. Dominics" (1932) 7/6. "Lost Treasure of London" 5/6. "Collectors Digest 1957" bound. "Collectors Digest Annual 1957" 12/6.
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OLD BOYS BOOK CLUB

LONDON SECTION

The 10th Annual General Meeting took place at "Blakiana", East Dulwich, Len and Josie Packman being the host and hostess. Elected Chairman for the ensuing year, Len gave a sparkling talk and treatise on his fine collection of comics. Producing them from the excellent leather case that he keeps them in, Len showed round the very numerous specimens. Enough to make the old timers mouth's water, especially the very brilliant coloured ones. Next Len's colleague from Greenwich, Charlie Wright gave his "Collections and Recollections" paper which held the company present almost spellbound, Two very fine items which made the two quiz competitions pale into insignificance. Yet the two latter were very enjoyable especially - Don Webster's effort, which the St. Frank's team won. H. Roberts very kindly proposed the next meeting at his abode at 12, Clairview Road, Streatham, London, S. W. 16 on Sunday, February 16th. This was gratefully agreed to and Mr. Roberts then proceeded to take some photographs of the company present. Don Webster proposed the vote of thanks to Josie and Eleanor Packman for the 'feed', a fairly good sale and exchange took place, and finally the rest of the retiring committee were re-elected 'en bloc'. And so to the conclusion of a very fine meeting with happy thoughts of the forthcoming Streatham meeting, the "Magnet" Jubilee "C.D." and "Billy Bunter's Bargain" in March, this is Uncle Benjamin signing off.

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NORTHERN SECTION MEETING - JANUARY 11th, 1958

There was an unusual circumstance about our gathering on this occasion for both Chairman and Secretary's chairs were vacant. Both had been prevented from attending for business reasons. I took over the chair and Gerry Allison read the minutes in place of Secretary Ron. Hodgson. A long discussion followed on the Exhibition in the Leeds Public Library to celebrate the Greyfriars Golden Jubilee. The work is in the capable hands of Gerry and he said it was to be hoped to run it for three weeks from February 1st. It is hoped that all members who possibly can will visit the Exhibition on the date of the next monthly meeting, February 8th if not before. The Public Library authorities are giving strong support with, for instance, streamer

headings, properly printed announcing "Billy Bunter's Jubilee," "Fifty Years of Greyfriars" and "The Amazing Frank Richards."

Other business dispensed with Gerry read some hilarious chapters dealing with Rookwood barring-out from a copy of the 'Boy's Friend'. The magic words of the master were added to by the emphasis Gerry put into them.

After refreshments the same entertainer put on a game on the lines of "Down You Go."

Don't forget, Exhibition and Meeting, February 8th.

HERBERT LECKENBY

Northern Section Correspondent.

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MIDLAND SECTION MEETING HELD 16th DECEMBER, 1957

An excellent night's programme was enjoyed by the twelve members present. For this, our last meeting in 1957, we had the use of the Chamber of Commerce Club Lounge. Apologies were sent in by the Chairman, Jack Ingram, and Ted Davey. Also by George Chatham detained on business. We hope all members will be present on January 27th to welcome Herbert Leckenby. The main and practically the sole item for the night was the re-arranged talk by Jack Corbett, chairman for the occasion. This was the Cavandale Abbey Holiday Series, generally bracketed equal with the Wharton Lodge and Mauleverer Tower yarns by Frank Richards. The story started on an unusual note with the Famous Five being successful in escaping from the misfortune of Bunter as a holiday companion. Alas for them, the fat Owl with his usual good luck (and cheek) somehow wangled himself in the good books of Lord Cavandale of Cavandale Abbey; a mansion not far from Wharton Lodge. It was inevitable that the "Five" had to spend the holiday at the Abbey. The usual pot-pourie of ghosts, midnight alarms, sinister secretaries, snipers and snoopers all contrived to make an amusing yarn. For good measure we had Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake to provide a "detective" atmosphere. The whole story well told by Jack and garnished by excellent readings from various Magnets. Naturally this latter was in the capable hands of Mrs. Corbett. Little time was left at the end and to finish off a very fine programme Norman Gregory obliged by a short talk on Dick Turpin (quite a remarkable departure for the Midland.) This having a Christmassy connection and as Norman had several Dick Turpin papers for illustrating his points, all who were left had a pleasant quarter of an hour. Perhaps Turpin's ride to

York will remind members "who" is riding from York on January 27th and make for a bumper attendance.

HARRY BROSTER,
Secretary.

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MERSEYSIDE SECTION MEETING - SUNDAY, 12th JANUARY

After our delightful Christmas meeting in December, this one appeared quiet in comparison, yet most enjoyable for all that, in spite of the unavoidable absence of the usual writer of these notes - Norman Pragnell. Norman is such a wonderfully loyal member of our little band that his very rare absences help us all to appreciate that fact.

Don Webster cheered us up by announcing a new supply of books for the Library, all of which vanished into members' pockets even more rapidly than jam tarts down Billy Bunter's capacious throat. Don also provided a game which we have enjoyed before, called "Talk yourself out of this", in which members have to talk themselves out of highly suspicious circumstances involving the various schools and characters. What weird and wonderful fibbers we have in the Merseyside Section - and one or two out and out cads, too, judging by some replies. This game was really hilarious.

Jack Morgan then supplied a really excellent crossword puzzle which was just sufficiently difficult to make it ideal, and it made a very pleasant change.

A very cheerful letter was received from Mr. Switzer, one of our best-loved members, in which he told us that he was still not sufficiently well to attend the meetings. We really miss you, Mr. Switzer, so hurry up and get well!

Next meeting - Sunday 9th February at 7 p.m. so let's have a bumper attendance.

FRANK UNWIN

S.B.L. REVIEWS

February, 1958.

STAIRWAY TO MURDER (No. 399)

Arthur Keny

Who killed Alice Childs the novelist, and why? It was in order

to solve the mystery of her death that sent Blake and Paula to a seaside hotel on the Kent coast. After being received by June Carroway, the pretty receptionist, we are given an effusive welcome by Peter Saunders, the hotel manager. In due course, we are rubbing shoulders with the assassin. Who? Jimmy Wallis, or his wife, Glory? Marynelle Rolls, the dead woman's closest friend? Or, maybe, Colonel Larkin, ex-commando? Even Faulkner, the mild little family man perhaps? Then there is Michael Randle, who walks in fear of the mysterious Instructor, leader of a smuggling organisation carrying out operations on the coast. Could be either James Bennett or Harold Wright, associates of Randle and members of the smuggling gang. And who is the Instructor, who ordered the killing of the author?

The who-dun-it seems to be the most popular form of reading entertainment in these times. Of its type this is a fine example. Incidentally, outside the story and dependent upon the development of your powers of observation there is a publishing error somewhere in the book. But you will have to be very observant to spot it the first time.

Rating.....Excellent

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THE SEA TIGERS (No. 400)

Peter Saxon

Peter Saxon does it again! After reading his story of the last days of Berlin I thought he had reached his peak. But I feel sure it will be the general impression that he is even more successful here. This is the story of the terrible ordeals and privations of a British convoy to Russia. In the convoy is a traitor, a man who is in communication with the Germans, with the result that traps are being set and men and ships are being lost. Find this traitor! That is Blake's assignment. It is established that he is on board the flagship, the cruiser CALEDONIA. As the new doctor, Lieutenant-Commander Blake makes unobtrusive investigations and observations among the ships officers, Among the finely drawn naval characters the identity of the traitor comes as a real surprise. You may suspect all and sundry, but you are never sure until the final denouncement.

But the character most likely to afford chief interest is Hazel, the Gentle Giant and man of peace, to whom the safety of the convoy seems of secondary importance to his love - the reading of the mis-adventures of Billy Bunter, the Owl of Greyfriars (see Chapter 5).

This is a more than merely good Blake story - it is an epic.

Rating.....Excellent.

WALTER WEBB.

NELSON LEE COLUMN

BY JACK WOOD

Nostaw, 328 Stockton Lane, York.

Phone: 25795

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As this is essentially a Hamiltonia month, I may, perhaps, be pardoned for discussing a story which has caused a great deal of controversy as to its authorship. I refer, of course, to Saints versus Friars which appeared as the school story in Nelson Lee Library, 2nd Series, No. 43 dated November 15th, 1930.

It followed the famous Edwy Searles Brooks' fireworks week story in the previous issue when K. K. Parkington, leader of the famous Carlton "Red Hots", induced the Removites to indulge in a night game of football wearing luminous shirts. Unfortunately the luminosity faded when rain ruined the game, but up to then the idea had been very successful.

However, our story breaks into the general trend of St. Frank's stories of the period - the full return to a rebuilt school. The author is un-named, and the story lacks both the breezy informality of a genuine Brooks story and the more leisurely, skilful characterisation of Hamilton. Yet the author obviously has more than a useful passing knowledge of his characters, and the story, though comparatively short, is full of incident.

It opens with Nipper preparing for the final between St. Frank's and Greyfriars for the Dorrimore Cup offered for competition by 64 public schools, and scheduled to be played at St. Frank's, the finest ground of them all. Wally Freeman, the school's football coach, has persuaded Nipper to enter the Junior XI, and on the way to the final Highcliffe, St. Jim's, River House, Redcliffe and Yexford have been beaten.

Nipper intervenes to stop Forrest bullying a fag, Tommy Hobbs, the altercation is overheard by headmaster Nelson Lee, and Forrest is flogged. The scene is set for revenge, and to get it Forrest and Gore-Pearce seek to win a bet on Greyfriars in order to pay off a total debt of some £50 to Jabas Cook, the Bannington bookmaker. Essence of the plot is to draw Nipper away by a telegram purporting to come from Nelson Lee who is in London on a detective case.

Nipper receives the telegram on the morning of the match and

goes off to London, leaving the team despondent. The team is Handforth, McClure, Parkington, Christine, Boots, Dodd, Pitt, Travers, Nipper, Gresham and Glenthorne. Glenthorne is moved to the centre and Fullwood, who has been out of form, is to come on to the wing in Nipper's absence.

Fortunately, Nipper finds Lee away in the North, realises he has been hoaxed, and sets off for St. Frank's in his governor's Rolls Royce Special. He sends a wire to Boots, the acting captain, who decides to delay the start of the match if possible and turn out temporarily with 10 men until Nipper turns out. On the way, Nipper is making good time when, owing to the craftiness of Gore-Pearce, he crashes into the wall of the Gore-Pearce's new home at Helmford.

Meanwhile, the game has begun, with Fullwood hanging back and the start delayed half an hour. Dr. Locke is there, so are the Blue Crusaders, the Moor View girls and hundreds of other distinguished visitors. Greyfriars are in blue and white, while, if the illustrations by Kenneth Brookes are to be believed, St. Frank's are in the clashing red and blue stripes.

As the game developed, St. Frank's 10 men did wonders, but it could have been no surprise when Greyfriars went ahead. Brown's shot tested Handy and as the ball came back off an upright Wharton beat Parkington for it and shot into the empty net. At the moment Lord Dorrimore who had been delayed by a puncture arrived - with Nipper, whom he had picked up at the scene of the crash.

Nipper's return, just as Fullwood was about to take the field, revitalised St. Frank's. He beat Squiff to equalise just before the interval, and in the closing minutes he headed the winner.

Apart from Squiff, Wharton and Brown, other Greyfriars players mentioned in a grand story are Inky, Cherry, the Bounder and Bull.

Squiff and Nipper were the heroes of a grand game at which even Dr. Locke was heard to forget his dignity by cheering!

Although not attributed to him, and certainly lacking his usual short, snappy paragraphs, the story may have been written by Brooks. If, as the internal evidence suggests, it was not, who did? A. S. Hardy was writing at the time and may have written the yarn. Alternatively, there have been suggestions that his brother, L. H. Brooks may have occasionally deputised for E. S. Brooks, and it could well be that this was one of the occasions.

The odd thing is that the St. Frank's Football League and its associated Dorimore Cup Competition was not founded until No. 84 dated August 29th, 1931!

And now, here is our first report from our special correspondent as St. Frank's, James Cook.

From your resident correspondent, St. Frank's College, Belton, Sussex. . - January.

A very extraordinary thing happened the other day when I was having a chat with Nipper in the Triangle. Mudford the postman, came in with the mail and Nipper noticed a letter addressed to Ezra Quirke. And everything seemed to stop. Nobody spoke. Then Nipper told old Muddy to take it to the Head. Perhaps he knows where Quirke went to. I noticed that the postmark on the letter was Market Donnington. It's strange how Quirke's name keeps cropping up these days.

When Reggie Pitt returned from London a couple of days ago he spoke of seeing Starke near Marble Arch. Reggie had gone up there to visit a relative who was ill. Pitt passed the former prefect without being recognised and Reggie says he expects to hear of a large scale bank raid in the vicinity of Marble Arch any time now.

Nelson Lee is looking very fit and well these days. He returned from Spain a few days before Christmas, where he had gone to investigate a political upset. The Spanish sun must have been very fierce as it left him very bronzed. And there was nobody more pleased than Nipper at Lee's return.

Willy Handforth has had a slight bereavement lately. A budgerigar which he had nursed for some days had succumbed to pneumonia. Consequently he had neglected his other pets somewhat with the result he has another illness on his hands. Marmaduke has caught a chill from exposure which shouldn't have happened if Willy had done his job.

Handforth major has up to the moment made no comment on the tragedy. He is taking up most of his spare time practising Yogi. Church found him standing on his head in the study and making strange faces. But I think it's only a phase. McClure ignores it.

Asian flu has not missed St. Frank's. Nelson Lee tells me there were at one time thirty fellows in the sanatorium. But all of them were out in time to go home for Christmas. The unfortunate one was Buster Boots. He didn't get a clearance from Dr. Brett which made old Buster very sad. He had to spend the Yuletide with Timothy Tucker. The great T.T. defied his parents and stayed on at school. He says Christmas is a weakness emanating from Capitalism....a period boosted up by the Capitalists to make you spend your money. When I told him poor Boots was in the Sanny he said he would keep him company. T.T. would give J.B.B. a bit of brainwashing.

I have to report that Fatty Little is actually slimming. He has been warned by Dr. Brett that unless he takes off some weight something may happen to him, with the result that Fatty is cutting out snacks during the night.

Postscript: 3.30 a.m. January 28th. I have just got home after a visit to Birmingham. I spent a happy afternoon at the hospitable home of the Rev. and Mrs. Pound and then escorted to the meeting of the Midland Club. It was my first visit, but if I have anything to do with it won't be my last, for the reception I received warmed my heart. Eight hours travelling, but my word it was worth every minute of it.

More Hamiltoniana:

I MEET THE MAGNET

By Eric Fayne

I can't imagine that anybody bothers a tinker's cuss how I first came to meet the Magnet, and some of the less charitable, who have been bored to tears with my articles, might think it would have been a good thing had I never met either the Magnet or the Gem. But the Editor has asked for it, so here goes.

On Sunday evenings, on our way home from Church (where I had "syrupstitiously" eaten Rowntree's Blackcurrant Gums throughout the service), my mother would call on a near neighbour, a Mrs. Allen. She was a vague, kindly little woman, who would entertain us by playing Moody and Sankey hymns on an ancient harmonium. My mother was religious - she must have been to have enjoyed hearing Mrs. Allen on the harmonium.

On one of these visits Mrs. Allen, in the kindness of her heart, said, "Perhaps the little darling would like to look at some of Horace's books." (Horace was her son, then a soldier at the front.)

So while Mrs. Allen played "Dare to be a Daniel", Mother sat in the armchair against a big fire, and the little darling squatted on the floor behind the armchair and sorted through a box of Horace's Magnets. Then he started to read his first Magnet story, "The Greyfriars Insurance Company", that classic yarn about Fisher T. Fish.

When we left, Mrs. Allen said, "If you would like that box of

books dear, take them. Horace will never want them again." (I have often wondered whether poor Horace had any views about this when he came home on leave).

Later in the week I read "The Hidden Horror" by candle-light, in bed. After an hour's reading I yelled out frantically that there was a snake under my bed, and Mother came rushing upstairs to her own hidden horror - "hidden" under the bed-clothes.

Perhaps I should not mention that I had met the Gem a few months earlier, when my sister read me "D'Arcy's Libel Action" as I wallowed in a zinc bath before the sitting-room fire. The bathroom was too cold for Mum's boy.

After that, I bought old Magnets and Gems every Saturday in Gravesend market at 2 a 1d - one stall even sold them at 3 a 1d.

So I became a Magnet fan as if anyone cares.

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INTERESTING ITEM:

"Picturegoer" dated 1st February contained a very interesting interview with Dan O'Herlihy our member in Hollywood and owner of a huge collection of Magnets and Gems. There is also an excellent photograph.

Dan is working on a film "Home Before Dark" in which he co-stars with Jean Simmons.

Look out for it.

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In order to complete a years run for binding, I require the following in good condition: GEM 1406, 1407, 1412, 1413, 1418, 1432, 1435, 1436, 1437, 1441, 1443, 1445, 1447, 1448, 1449, 1450, 1452.

Price to: R. HODGSON, 5 SILVER STREET, NEWTON HILL, WAKEFIELD.

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