# STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

## MARCH 1971

GRAND NEW SERIAL STARTS IN THIS NUMBER.


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STORY PAPER
# COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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

COLLECTORS' DIGEST
Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

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## CARTOON CHARACTERS

A number of volumes from the I.P.C. files were withdrawn from a recent exhibition in London, owing to the company in which they found themselves. So far so good. The Daily Mirror reported that the head of the I.P.C. juvenile magazine section commented: "When we loaned the comics, we did not expect ... etc."

It seems odd that anyone of any day and age could call the Union Jack, a volume of which was one withdrawn, a comic. Something has changed. Either values or outlook.

Billy Bunter is referred to as a cartoon character. And, of course, that is what he has become. His thirty odd years as a piece of characterisation in the best school fiction of all time is forgotten, and the majority remember him only as a caricature in a comic paper.

At least the name of Bunter lives on.

YOUR EDITOR MOVES

The editorial office of this magazine has now moved to Fleet in Hampshire. It is, perhaps, not inappropriate that the Skipper should go to Fleet.

It is said, and I think it is true, that when one says good-bye to a house where one has lived for many years, one leaves part of one's heart behind. It is certainly true in my case, for I had some wonderful times at Excelsior House in Surbiton. By no means least have been those many occasions when the London club, often augmented by members from our other clubs, came there for delightfully memorable meetings.

The estate agents described Excelsior House at Surbiton as "a Victorian mansion." I had never thought of it as a mansion, but I suppose the description was accurate. For many years it was, of course, one of the buildings of the Modern School, and the voices of boys and girls, long gone, always seemed to echo down its corridors and in its lofty rooms.

There, in the thirties, we ran our Gem evenings. It was at my request that the editor of the Gem had started reprinting the old tales, and it was up to me to back him up. We ran countless social events devoted to helping the circulation of the Gem. We had Gem dances and Gem whist drives. Any Modernian could attend - but he or she had to carry the current issue of the Gem. We had many literary competitions - criticisms of Gem stories - with all sorts of prizes. The essays were sent to the editor of the Gem who read them and judged them, sending us back his findings. His comments were always shrewd and fascinating, and caused great interest. A young fellow named Herting won first prize at one of our Fancy Dress dances which he attended as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. I had him photographed, and sent the picture to Charles Hamilton who was delighted.

There was a butler's pantry at Excelsior House. It became the projection box of our school cinema. We were the first school in the country to have a school cinema, professionally equipped, and we played films direct from the commercial renters, often in the first week of

release. It was, in some ways, a hobby, and a large school made it possible to realise the hobby. A look over my film booking volumes is, veritably, a look over the history of the cinema over many years.

Naturally I was sad to leave the town in Surrey which I had known for so long, but my sadness is tempered by the realisation that things are not what they were. Even when, as a callow youth on the verge of my career, I went to Surbiton in the mid-twenties, its reputation as the Queen of Suburbs had slipped and was fading. The wealthy people who had once made up all its population had moved further down the line. A gardener who worked for me at Excelsior House before the war could remember when every family in the road possessed its own horse and carriage, and its servants in caps and aprons. But those days were long past when I arrived.

Its gas-lit streets seemed quaintly old-fashioned to me even then. The trams were running - London United. They were reliable, very frequent, and cheap. I liked them. Nearly all the shops had been established in Victorian times, and were family owned and operated. Still far distant were the days when every independent shop in the main centre would be swept aside to be replaced by supermarkets with wire baskets and clicking tills. Now, many shops stand empty, and have been dark for years - waiting for what?

The trams have long gone, and only the old stagers remember the excellent service they gave. The gas-lamps have long been replaced with blazing standards which turn night into day. The pleasant, quiet streets which I remember are now lined with parked cars (many of them unlicenced), the owners of which sweep their rubbish out on to the paths every Sunday morning. Many of the lovely old houses have been swept away to be replaced with ugly blocks. The remaining large houses are multi-occupied. Even the little newsagent's shop, from which Mr. Andrews failed to send me my expected Magnet one spring day in 1940, has long gone.

The lovely church, where, every summer on the Sunday which marked the start of our school Cricket Week, we held our Rally Service - we packed the church from one end to the other, with our own boys and girls filling all the central pews, and relatives and friends filling the side pews, we chose our own favourite hymns, our boys read the lessons,

a master played the organ, and I myself gave a short address - we decorated the building with our school flags and house flags, and masses of flowers in red, white, and green - and every single boy and girl wore the school blazer of red, white, and green, making a central blaze of colour in the church, and a sight for sore eyes - the lovely church has been closed down now for several years. The tiles of the roof are falling off, the building is in decay - a symbol, perhaps, of people who have put something else in place of God.

No doubt, very soon, they will pull it down and replace it with a characterless block of flats. I hope that someone will save the pulpit, which Arthur Mee, in his Book of Surrey, described as the finest stone pulpit in the country. Though, maybe, such things do not matter any more.

So Surbiton, the Queen of Suburbs, is no longer the place I once knew. Its charming majesty has given place to something else, though, even now, nestling sweetly as it does on the banks of the upper Thames, with a superlative train service, there are probably few places within easy reach of London to compare with it.

But it is no longer a place to live in. It is just a dormitory town from which most of the population trail away early each morning. So many of the things which form part of my mellow memories have gone - and now I have gone, too. To Fleet. This issue of C.D. should surely have come to you on the crest of a wave, but, unfortunately, the post office strike proved a wreck in the channel.

THE EDITOR

## PLEASE REMEMBER

Your Editor's address is now

Excelsior House,
113 Crookham Road,
Crookham, Nr. Aldershot.

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## THE POSTAL STRIKE

As a result of the postal strike, our publication dates will be a little disorganised for a month or two. We shall do our best to get back to normal publication times as soon as possible.

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TO OUR ADVERTISERS: Please print your copy-matter clearly. Some ads sent to us are difficult to decipher.

# DANNY'S DIARY

MARCH 1921

There are strange posters all over the town. Three-quarters of each poster is blank, but printed in large black letters at the top of each are the words THE KID IS COMING. It is quite a poser for everybody, but I have something of an idea what it may mean.

The cost of living is still going down. This month the price of milk has dropped to 5d a pint. And, hip, hip -- Cambridge won the boat race.

It has been rather a disappointing month in the Gem, with only one story by the old writer of St. Jim's. Too bad, after the two previous months being so promising.

"The Best of Pals" was a stodgy story about the chums of Study No. 9, with Cardew in the star part, and Doris Levison popping in and out. But next week "Wildrake's Knock at Knox" was first-chop. Knox got the idea that Wildrake was carrying a six-gun. It was all good fun.

Next week came "Through a Terrible Ordeal," and the editor said it was based on real life, and a tale we would never forget. He may be right. Figgins knocked down a Grammar School boy named Gell who offended Cousin Ethel, and Gell did not arise after the thump. He was dead. Naturally, Figgins felt himself a murderer. It turned out that Gell died from heart failure.

Then "Gore's Great Conquest." Gore was offered £100 by his uncle if he could pinch a round phonograph record which Mr. Railton was minding. So Racke took the record, and tried to get the £100. Fearful slush, really.

The Grand National was won by a horse named Shaun Spadah.

In the Sexton Blake Library there has been an excellent tale named "The Gnat." He was an elusive thief whom Blake caught at the finish.

Another weak month in the Magnet, though the first story was by the real Frank Richards. In "Thin Bunter," Bunter was sent to the doctor who said he was overweight, and advised he should have long walks. So Mr. Quelch arranged for Bunter to have 3-mile walks each day with, in turn, Bob Cherry, Harry Wharton, Jack Drake and Rodney.

It is the first time I remember reading of Drake and Rodney in the Magnet. So Bunter lost weight, and took Flummox's Fattening Fluid to build him up again. But it made him really ill. Fairly good fun, and quite original, so far as I remember.

"The Schoolboy Protectors" told of Blundell who had a cousin Leonard Blundell, who thinks that Blundell of Greyfriars has injured him. But Leonard had had a bang on the head which unhinged him for a time. He got back on his hinges at the end.

"Bunter the Swot" had lied to his uncle Joseph, pretending that he was a good scholar. Finally, in "Rivals of the River," Sir Hilton Popper presented a silver cup to be rowed for by various boats at Greyfriars.

Mum and I went to visit some friends who live near Kew Bridge. They took us to the first house at the big and lovely Chiswick Empire, and we saw a most unusual revue. It was called "Splinters of 1921" and it starred Hal Jones who is a grand young Lancashire comedian, and Reg Stone who is billed as a "perfect lady." In fact, all the "ladies are gentlemen" in the show. I didn't think I would like a show without any real girls in it, but this one was great. They are all ex-soldiers who staged a concert party at the front during the war, under the titles of "Les Rouges et Noirs." It started off with them all dressed as pierrots and pierrettes. There were some fine sketches and really good songs.

As we went home, from Richmond station, we saw from the bills that "Splinters" is to be on at the Richmond Hippodrome next week.

In the Boys' Friend, all the Rookwood tales have been about a fearful bullying new master of the classical fourth. He is Mr. Cutts. The opening tale was "The Amazing New Master" in which Tommy Dodd arrived pretending to be Mr. Cutts. Then came "Bolshevism at Rookwood," "The Reign of Terror," and "Cutting Christopher Cutts," in which the fourth had a terrible time before Rookwood finally saw the end of Cutts. The old master, Mr. Bootles, has now become a rich man, and has left Rookwood.

The two opening Cedar Creek tales were "The Ten Thousand Dollar Trail" and "The Hunting of White Blaze." A bank messenger was

attacked on the trail by Red Pete and Yuba. Frank Richards & Co. rescued him, but his horse, with 10,000 dollars in the saddle-bag, got away and disappeared in a cloud of dust. So Frank & Co. went hunting the horse, White Blaze, and eventually got him back from the Indians who had caught the animal.

In "Todgers, the Terrible," Chunky decided he had a good voice, and took lessons from a broken-down tenor named Signor Malvolio. Quite funny.

Finally "The Robbery at Cedar Creek" in which Frank Richards was sent by Mr. Slimmey to Miss Meadows' study. But Yen Chin had stolen a 10 dollar bill and 100 dollar bill. And, at the end of the story, Frank was under grave suspicion.

At the pictures we have seen Charles Ray in "Scrap Iron." Charles Ray has financed a film company, and is now making his own pictures, though I was not so keen on this one. Douglas Fairbanks in "The Mark of Zorro" was excellent; William Farnum and Louise Lovely were in "The Orphan;" Houdini was exciting in "The Terror Island," though I liked his serial better; Nazimova was in "Madame Peacock."

There is a new series of 2-reel Sherlock Holmes stories, with Eille Norwood as the detective. The two opening episodes were "The Yellow Face" and "The Dying Detective," and I like them very much.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT: Danny's reference to Richmond Hippodrome this month is interesting. I have known Richmond for many years, but never a Richmond Hippodrome. Almost certainly, it was the name given, at that time, to the famous Richmond Theatre - known to all and sundry as "The Theatre on the Green." Can anyone confirm this?

Cecil B. De Mille, in his autobiography, refers to Charles Ray as an over-ambitious young man who had considerable but limited acting talents, and who had inflated ideas of his own importance. When De Mille refused to pay Ray what Ray thought he was worth, he put all his money into his own productions, mismanaged things incredibly, failed, and died in poverty. A sad story for those who, like Danny, have happy memories of Charles Ray.

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## ZENITH — WITH AND WITHOUT

by Chris Lowder

A year ago (last Christmas, to be exact) a certain "Anon" wrote an article for Blakiana. In it he referred to Anthony Skene and Skene's own special contribution to the Blake mythos, Zenith the Albion. The article was entitled "The Worst and Best of Sexton Blake," and I think it can be safely assumed that "Anon" included both Skene and his creation under the former category.

"Anon" wrote: "In my opinion, Anthony Skene never gave him (Zenith) the exciting stories he deserved. In the hands of Gwyn Evans he would have scintillated. Under the guidance of G. H. Teed or Robert Murray he would have become really memorable."

A moot point, of course, And over the past year it's been mooted about very ably by Messrs. Bridgwater and Swann (March and September C.D's, respectively) - Mr. Bridgwater in particular getting a couple of nice shots in, bang-on target. For who can argue with Dickens or Lord David Cecil?

It would be hard (though this is, of course, a purely personal opinion) to class "The Rainmaker" (U.J. No. 1505) as unexciting. Or "The Box of Ho Sen" (D.W. No. 8), or "The Seven Dead Matches Mystery" (D.W. No. 14), or ... but the list is too long, the space too short. Read the above, and make your own judgement.

One more point, before I launch out on a slightly different theme. It is said that there are four fictional characters whose names are known to all the world: Sherlock Holmes, Robinson Crusoe, Mr. Pickwick and Billy Bunter. Mention any of these, and you will get a positive reaction wherever you go. The same sort of thing applies to the oddball crooks who have, over the years, crossed swords with Sexton Blake. Whether you were born in the 1900's or after the Second World War (and even discounting your own particular favourite amongst

the thousands of scoundrels, rogues and felons who have machinated in vain), five characters immediately spring to mind - Waldo, Huxton Rymer, Leon Kestrel, George Marsden Plummer and Zenith the Albino. The Big Five. It cannot, then, be fairly said that Zenith is not "really memorable."

On the other hand (and here we launch out), would Zenith have been memorable on his own? If Skene had never written for the Sexton Blake papers, but had created his cynical albino purely as a solo villain (like Barry Perowne's version of Raffles, for instance) would Zenith have clicked?

I don't think so. There was a time (during the mid-'30s) when the Detective Weekly went through an odd phase - when editorial policy (never a reliable thing, under any circumstances) decreed that "Sexton Blake" should be banished from its pages, and that the paper should carry a novelette, a short story and a serial, making it a sort of bitty Thriller.

During this period, Skene contributed a number of stories - I have two in front of me as I write - about Zenith on his own. He appears to have been relatively law-abiding at this time - even helping the police to a certain extent, and becoming quite chummy with a certain Inspector Peel. What is worse, he (the great Lone Wolf) has a band of confederates with him ... Princess Astra ("the peerless Princess Astra") and Prince Oscar; who, collectively, are known as the White Trinity.

Unfortunately, Princess Astra does little save cross her legs languidly, carry the torch for Zenith (though, alas, in secret, poor dear) and get abducted by gross, hulking villains with names like Jos Bawch. Even so, sometimes she has her uses. Unlike her brother, Prince Oscar, who does nothing at all and is definitely a handicap.

Why Zenith should have got himself saddled with this pair of nonentities is quite beyond me. And even he has lost his old spark. The thought occurred to me that he was just another crook albino - which, when you come to think about it, is a pretty funny thought.

As far as I can see, the series had no redeeming features at all. Zenith was just not Zenith, the plots were sub-standard, Peel was a poor Coutts. Indeed, as to the latter, he was no Coutts at all.

How refreshing then to get back to the Union Jack of 1932 and, for instance, "The Goldmaker" (No. 1510) - where we are immediately swept up in a typically crazy situation (conference of crooks held in London hotel; Zenith shot by Oyani; convict sprung from jail by means of a man-carrying kite; and so on), and where we are presented with a definite duel between two equals: one, Blake, on the side of law and order, the other, Zenith, outside the law.

I've always maintained that the two best writers, as such, who contributed to the Blake saga were Skene and John Drummond. Maybe one of these days I'll enlarge on that statement. For now, suffice it to say that they were both impeccable stylists, both had off-beat minds when it came to thinking up involved plots, and both took considerable risks with their grammar. They knew their craft.

Drummond, under his real name of John Newton Chance, was a successful thriller writer outside the Blake mythos. Skene, on the other hand, concentrated his best efforts on Blake and, in Zenith the Albino, created a giant of a character whom no-one else could have handled with the same skill.

Not so strange, then, that when Zenith went solo he was a comparative minnow. Blake needed Zenith just as much as the melancholic Albino needed Blake. And Skene needed both of them.

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# PLEASE REMEMBER

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Excelsior House,
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Telephone Number: Fleet 22450. (STD code 025 14)

Come back with us, to Edwardian days, for this 60-odd years old story.

# THE ONLY WAY

Sir Hilton Popper glared round at the crowd of boys, and grasped his riding-crop a little tighter. He had come to Greyfriars in a towering rage, and his interview with the Head had given the finishing touch to it. Hot Indian suns had warmed up the baronet's temper: and in the army he had been as a little god, and men had been in terror of his temper. He wanted to see the whole of the public regard him as terrified Sepoys and unfortunate Tommies had regarded him: and he never could be satisfied upon that point.

"Huh!" gasped the baronet, glaring at the grinning faces. "I will teach you to poach my birds, you young scoundrels!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" exclaimed Courtney, sharply. "We don't like names like that, and the less you use them, the better."

Sir Hilton fixed his eyes upon Courtney.

"I think you are very likely the young thief who was in my woods last night!" he exclaimed. "You look as if you might be. You look like a young scoundrel!"

"Cheese it!" said Courtney sharply. "If you weren't a man old enought to be my father, I wouldn't allow you to speak like that. But that's enough, anyway."

"You'd better go home," said Wingate.

"You impertinent young rascal!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Yes, shut up!" exclaimed Bob Cherry indignantly. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, sir."

The baronet exploded then. He made a rush at Bob Cherry, and caught him by the collar. His riding-crop sang through the air, and came down with a sounding thwack across the Removite's shoulders.

Courtney ran forward, and grasped the baronet's arm. He tore the riding-crop away, and tossed it out into the Close.

"You'd better get out," he said.

Dr. Locke hurried down the passage. The good old doctor's face was much perturbed.

"Stop! Stop!" he exclaimed. "Boys, stand back! Sir Hilton, I appeal to you! This is disgraceful."

"Hold your tongue, sir!" roared the baronet.

"What!"

"You have encouraged your boys to poach upon my estate --"

"Sir, I have already told you that, if any boy is found to have poached upon your land, I shall expel him from Greyfriars," said Dr. Locke. "I can say no more than that. I now beg you to retire without making any further disturbance. This is not conduct becoming a gentleman, sir."

Sir Hilton Popper shook his fist in the Head's face. He was so enraged that he hardly knew what he was doing. Certainly he could not have intended to actually strike the reverend Head of Greyfriars, but that was the impression he made upon the boys who were getting excited too.

"Chuck him out!"

The fellows made a rush. In a moment Sir Hilton Popper was grasped by a dozen pairs of hands and whirled away from the doctor.

He struggled furiously in the grasp of the Greyfriars fellows.

"My dear boys!" gasped the Head, "I beg of you ---"

But the dear boys were not listening.

They rushed the furious man to the door, struggling vainly in their grasp. They hurled him forth, and Sir Hilton rolled down the steps.

He lay gasping at the foot of the steps till his groom picked him up, to be rewarded by a torrent of abuse.

Sir Hilton mopped his perspiring forehead with his handkerchief, and glared up at the swarm of grinning faces in the doorway.

Words failed him: there was nothing in the English language to express his feelings, and he swung away to the dogcart and clambered in. The vehicle dashed away towards the school gates.

"The cheek, to shake his silly fist at the Head!" exclaimed Harry Wharton indignantly. "We ought to have bumped him!"

The dogcart disappeared in a cloud of dust.

"Boys!" exclaimed the Head.

"We had to chuck him out, sir," said Wingate apologetically. "We couldn't see him being disrespectful to you, sir."

"Ahem!" The Head could not help feeling that the boys had been pleased with an excuse for handling Sir Hilton Popper, but he was not ungrateful: and he was glad to be rid of his terrible visitor on any terms. "Dear me! This unpleasant scene has upset me very much!"

And the doctor wiped his brow.

"Sir Hilton Popper came here to make a complaint, my boys," he said. "He declares that his keeper saw a Greyfriars boy in the wood last night, taking the partridges. I need not say how serious an offence that would be, and I hope sincerely that there was a mistake: in fact, I am sure of it. But I must say that, if it should turn out to be true, and the culprit should be discovered, I should have no resource but to expel him from Greyfriars. Please bear that in mind."

And the Head retired to his study.

The boys, discussing the matter excitedly, dispersed. The general impression was that Sir Hilton Popper was on the wrong track. But there were some fellows who knew better.

Valence strolled away with his hands in his pockets. In the Sixth Form passage, Courtney tapped him on the shoulder. Valence turned round with a very unpleasant expression upon his face.

"What do you want?" he exclaimed.

"You heard all that?" said Courtney.

"Certainly!"

"It was you in Popper's wood last night?"

Valence shrugged his shoulders.

"Was it you, Rupert?"

"Mind your own business," said Valence coolly. "I've told you I don't want you meddling in my affairs any further."

Courtney bit his lip.

"I don't want to meddle," he said. "But you heard what the Head was saying - he's going to expel the chap if he's found."

"Then the chap will have to be careful."

"The keepers will be on the watch more than ever now, Valence. Won't you stop this silly game? It's no good, and it may lead to awful trouble for you and your people."

"Have you finished?" asked Valence.

"Not quite. If you are determined to make a fool of yourself, you might think of your sister - think how cut up Violet would be if anything happened --"

"Oh, leave my sister alone!" said Valence angrily. "You jolly well won't see her any more, anyway. And I don't thank you for your advice - I've had too much of it. I don't want your meddling, and I don't want your friendship. Is that plain enough?"

Courtney set his teeth.

"Yes, that's plain enough," he said. "You won't be troubled with either in the future."

And he walked away without another word. Valence shrugged his shoulders.

* * * * *

The Remove had gone to their dormitory. When Wingate looked in all the juniors were in bed, and looked as if they were comfortably settled for the night. The captain of Greyfriars glanced up and down the dormitory.

"Good-night!" he said.

"Good-..ight, Wingate!"

The light was extinguished, and Wingate retired. Then Bob Cherry sat up in bed.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he said cheerfully. "Who's going to stay awake and keep me company?"

"Go anything to eat?" asked Billy Bunter.

"Ha, ha! No."

The Owl of the Remove grunted.

"Then I'm jolly well going to sleep, for one," he said.

"I'm going to stay awake," said Harry Wharton, sitting up. "So is Frank. We three will be enough to give Valence his dose, I think."

"Better get out of bed, or we shall nod off," said Bob Cherry, slipping out of his be'clothes. "We've got a good time to wait, but I haven't got the stuff ready

yet."

Bob lighted a candle-end, and it glimmered dimly in the long, lofty room. He did not wish to turn on the electric light: it would have been seen from the Close, if any belated senior or master had happened to be out of doors. Wharton and Nugent turned out, too. The other fellows watched them with interest. Bob Cherry drew a bucket from under his bed, and half filled it with water from the jug.

"What on earth's that for?" asked Bulstrode.

"Valence."

"Eh?"

"He's going out poaching to-night," explained Bob Cherry.

"How do you know?"

"Oh, I happen to know!" said Bob. "We're going to try and save him from his wicked ways. Not that he deserves saving: he's an utter rotter. But he's got a nice sister, and she's a friend of Miss Rosie's, so I think we're bound to do something."

Bulstrode chuckled.

"Are you going to save him from his wicked ways by pouring water on him?" he asked.

"That's the idea! We're going to wait for him at the end of the Sixth Form passage, you see, and mop it on him as he comes out. Of course, he's not going to have pure water. It's too good for him: and ink is cheap. So is soot."

Bob Cherry had made his preparations during the evening. He produced a large square packet, and opened it at one end, and a stream of soot shot into the pail.

"My hat! He will repent of his wicked ways if he gets that little lot on his napper," chuckled Tom Brown.

"I guess so!"

"Oh, that's not the lot yet!"

Bob Cherry emptied two bottles into the pail - one of red ink, and the other of black. Then he began to stir the terrible concoction with a cricket stump.

"Are you really going to slop that horrid stuff over a senior?" exclaimed Vernon-Smith. "There will be an awful row."

"I don't see how he can complain, without explaining what he was up in the middle of the night for," said Bob Cherry coolly.

Ten o'clock had rung out from the clock-tower.

"We shall have to wait an hour yet," said Nugent, with a yawn. "The seniors won't all be in bed before eleven, and Valence won't try to bunk until they've turned in. It would mean trouble for him if Wingate or North caught him."

"I guess it would," said Fisher T. Fish. "I shouldn't wonder if Courtney keeps an eye on him too."

"Of course, Valence will wait till they're all in bed," said Bob. "You fellows may as well have a snooze. I'll stay awake."

"You'll go to sleep, you mean, and forget all about it till morning," said Wharton, laughing. "Better leave it to me."

"I'll borrow Carlton's alarm clock."

Carlton, the Slacker of the Remove, grinned.

"You can have the alarm clock, and welcome," he said. "I'm not using it. No more early rising for me now the exam's over."

Bob Cherry wound the alarm, and tied the clock round his neck with a piece of twine. Then he blew out the candle, and laid down on his bed dressed. He was asleep in two minutes, in spite of the ticking of the clock close to his ears. Bob Cherry was a healthy sleeper.

The chatter in the dormitory died away, and all was quiet and still. Bob Cherry had timed the alarm for eleven, and as the hour boomed out, echoing from the clock-tower, the alarm clock started operations.

The sleeping junior gave a wild jump as the buzz of the alarm sounded close to his ear.

He grasped the alarm, and turned it off. It had awakened half the dormitory by the time he stopped it. There were growling voices on all sides.

"Shut up that blessed row!" exclaimed Bolsover. "What the dickens do you mean by waking me up in the middle of the night?"

"I wasn't waking you up, my son," said Bob Cherry, slipping off his bed. "I was waking myself up. Are you awake, Franky?"

Nugent grunted.

"Blessed if I see how a dormouse could sleep with that row going on!" he said. "Mind it doesn't start again! I'm ready!"

"So am I!" said Wharton.

"Then come on!"

Bob Cherry groped for the pail of mysterious mixture and picked it up. The three juniors stumbled towards the door in the darkness.

"Mind, don't make a row!" whispered Bob.

"Don't biff against me with that pail," said Wharton. "What was that knocked on my chest?"

"The pail."

"Oh, you ass!" breathed Wharton. "You've spilled it over my trousers!"

"Sorry! But never mind, there's plenty left."

"Plenty left!" howled Wharton. "I'm not thinking whether there's plenty left, you chump! I'm thinking of my bags."

"Oh,rats! This isn't a time to think of bags," said Bob Cherry severely. "A chap ought to be ready to make small sacrifices to save a sinner from the road to ruin: good little boys in story-books always do."

"Well, I'm not a good little boy in a story-book," growled Wharton. "Besides, Eric never had soot and ink spilled over his bags."

"You'll wake the blessed house!" said Nugent. "I think Bob had better go back to bed, and leave this to us."

"Rats!" said Bob Cherry.

He opened the dormitory door. There was a glimmer of light in the passage, and Bob carried the pail very carefully. Harry Wharton and Frank followed him, taking care not to get too close to the pail again.

They crept cautiously towards the Sixth Form passage, making little or no noise in their stockinged feet. They reached the end of the passage and found it totally in darkness.

There was no light from under a single door, showing that the Sixth were all gone to bed.

The Sixth Form at Greyfriars did not sleep in a dormitory like the juniors, but had bed-rooms to themselves, the studies being also bed-rooms. If Valence came out that night, he had to come along the passage to get downstairs, and he had to pass the corner where the three juniors had posted themselves. At that hour, of course, nobody had any business to be coming along the passage - at all events, without a light. There was little possibility of making a mistake.

"Here we are," whispered Bob Cherry.

He set the pail down.

"We may have to wait some time," Wharton muttered. "The masters are not all in bed yet, and Valence may wait till all is safe."

"Or he mayn't go out to-night after all, since Sir Hilton Popper came," Frank Nugent suggested.

"Well, you are a pair of blessed Job's comforters, I must say!" growled Bob Cherry. "Shut up, for goodness sake! I sha'n't wait here long. If Valence doesn't come out, I shall take this stuff into his romm, and mop it over him in bed. I'm not going to get ready to reform a chap, and then not do it simply because he leaves his sins over for another night."

The juniors waited. In the distance they heard a sound of a closing door, as some master went to bed. Then all was quiet again. There was no sound in the Sixth Form passage. The half-hour rang out in muffled tones from the clock-tower. The juniors began to feel angry and uneasy. Suppose Valence had already gone - suppose he was not going at all! It would be decidedly exasperating to have all their trouble for nothing. These thoughts were in the minds of Harry Wharton & Co., when they heard a sound in the passage.

It was the sound of a door opening quietly.

"He's coming!"

Footsteps!

Faint and cautious, but unmistakable in the deep silence of the night, the footsteps came towards the corner where the juniors waited.

Closer and closer! Bob Cherry, with his hands shaking with excitement, raised the pail and stood ready. The moment had come!

(ANOTHER INSTALMENT NEXT MONTH)

# NELSON LEE COLUMN

## CARNIVAL OF THE ANIMALS

by Len Wormull

Willy Handforth had a "way" with him where animals were concerned which he himself could not explain. Animals of all kinds were attracted to him, taking to him instinctively. This "animal magic" was often put to good effect in stories, particularly when resolving a tricky situation. A case in mind is The Mystery Of Edgemore Manor, New Series No. 96, which brought to St. Frank's Claude Gore-Pearce, the cad. When Willy was called to 'turn on the 'fluence' it was not uncommon for brother Ted to be shown in a disparaging light, and on this occasion we witness the rare spectacle of Handy running away from danger.

On a storm-swept night, Handforth & Co. and Willy, are returning late at night from the cinema at Bannington. Obstinate as usual, Handy refuses to drive through a pool of water, makes a detour, and ends up ditching the Austin Seven and injuring McClure. Refuge is sought at nearby Edgemore Manor, only to be ordered off by the irate earl of Edgemore .... 'Then suddenly, and to the utter consternation of the juniors, two enormous mastiffs leaped clean over the balcony and came hurtling to the ground, their eyes gleaming greenishly in the moonlight!'

"Look out!" yelled Church wildly.

"Oh, my hat!"

"They're coming for us!"

"Run! Run!" shouted McClure.

With one accord, the juniors fled across the grass-grown wilderness. Handforth was the only fellow who hesitated. He always hated to give in; and even now, in spite of this dramatic turn, he wanted to stay and face the danger.

"Handy! Handy!" shouted McClure hoarsely. "Come on! They'll kill you!"

Even Handforth turned then, for there was untold horror in McClure's voice.

The great mastiffs, prancing ferociously, were not merely level

with the boys, but in advance. They were baying throatily, and had bared their teeth viciously. Yet, to the relief of the juniors, the dogs did not actually attack them.

"Look!" screamed Church, with sudden terror.

For some reason, the great mastiffs had left Handforth & Co., and now, as Edward Oswald turned, he saw something that chilled his blood. Willy, running some distance away, was suddenly felled by both the mastiffs. Willy went over like a ninepin, rolling in the thick grass and weeds. And there he struggled, the great dogs mauling him, tearing at him, snarling and baying.

"Oh, Willy!" choked Handforth. "They've got him, you chaps! They've got Willy! We've got to rescue him! Look! They'll tear Willy to shreds!"

And then came another surprise.

"Willy!" shouted Handforth, as he came tearing up. "Willy, old son! We're coming - we'll kill these brutes!"

"Rats!" gasped Willy. "Don't be an ass, Ted!"

"What!" gurgled Handforth.

"Don't be such asses!" said Willy, struggling to his feet with difficulty, and instantly being bowled over again by one of the mastiffs. "These things are only puppies!"

"Pup - puppies!" stammered Handforth blankly.

"That's all!" grinned Willy. "I've just been having a game with 'em!"

"Game!" hooted Handforth. "Why, you - you spoofing idiot! We thought you were being half killed!"

"I can't help it if you make these silly mistakes!" said Willy coolly. "It didn't take me two ticks to spot that these dogs were friendly. They make enough noise, of course - but I know a bit more about animals than you fellows, and I spotted that they were only out for a bit of fun. I expect the earl only set them on us to give us a scare."

Rain-soaked Willy, nonchalant as ever, had once again proved master of the situation. With a diversity of talents bestowed upon the leader of the Third, it was not altogether surprising that Handforth minor emerged as one of the major stars in the St. Frank's firmament.

## BROOKS AT HIS BEST

by R. J. Godsave

For those in their early teens death is something that is only vaguely spoken about. At the same time it is all to the good that young people are made aware that life is not everlasting.

E. S. Brooks wrote a short series of four Nelson Lees relating to the supposed death of Walter Church. New Series Nos. 76/79. This is one of the series in which Brooks rose to the heights. His description of the collapse of Church on the football field and the subsequent attention given by Handforth and McClure can hardly be bettered.

The reader becomes aware of a stronger attachment between the chums of Study D than is usual amongst schoolboys. The attachment was regarded somewhat as a joke in the lower school. To see one of the trio on their own was a rarity.

The following extract is from "The Doomed Schoolboy," No. 77, New Series. This is Brooks at his best and lifts the series high out of the usual run.

— 'While speaking, Handforth had tried to release his hand from Church's gentle grasp. And then he made the staggering discovery that Church's fingers were stiff - they gripped him in a kind of mechanical way. He shook that cold grip away, and flung himself on his knees by the bedside, seizing Church by the shoulder and shaking him.

"Church," he panted hoarsely. "Church, old man!"

But there was no reply from the still figure.

"He's not breathing!" said McClure, shrill with fear. "Handy - I tell you he's not breathing! Feel his heart! Quick! Feel ----"

"Be quiet!" panted Handforth huskily. "He must be breathing Mac! Oh it's too awful to believe - no, there's not a sign - not a single sign! His heart's stopped."

"Stopped!" shouted McClure, staring with wide terrified eyes.

Just for a moment they gazed at one another, and then they looked at that pale, wax-like figure again.

"He's dead!" shouted Handforth madly.

"Dr. Brett - Dr. Brett! Come here - come here."

"He's dead." ' —

Handforth was one of Brooks' best characters, and regular readers were well aware of his streak of obstinacy. Once an idea entered his head it became a fixture. Athough Dr. Brett had confirmed the death, Handforth, after a while, refused to believe his chum had died.

How Nelson Lee, an expert on poisons, found the antidote for the poison that had entered Church's system and caused him to go into a trance which gave the appearance of death, makes great reading.

From the above it would appear that Brooks treated his readers as though they were beyond their years. Such a series must have given the original readers much food for thought.

# # #

## WELL, DID HE?

Did E. S. Brooks write better school stories than those of St. Frank's? He himself certainly thought so, and a first-time copy of Collectors' Digest No. 11, has just come to hand to prove it. A letter from the author appears by courtesy of Jack Wood, in which he refers to his wartime writing for Swan's in the 4d Schoolboys' Pocket Library. In his opinion, these stories were far and away better than his old St. Frank's yarns. Well, this is the voice of E.S.B. in 1947, when he was busily engaged on detective novels. Over the years we have come to accept his almost contemptuous regard for the stories which so charmed us in boyhood, and not even this depressing thought can dim the enthusiasm of his faithful followers. To me, the most astonishing aspect of the writer's long years with St. Frank's is that he was unable to single out one particular favourite among stories - not even Ezra Quirke! When asked in 1955 to name the finest St. Frank's story he ever wrote, he replied: "This is a poser, and I'm afraid I cannot give you answer."

Apart from Bill Loft's recent article on publisher Gerald S. Swan, in which he gives the pen-names used by Brooks, I can trace no mention of these 'superior' school tales in my collection of C.D's and Annuals, which I admit is not complete. Can any Lee fan testify that these later stories were in fact "far and away better" than those the author came to make famous?

LEN WORMULL

## LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

### No. 156. A QUESTION OF QUALITY.

Recently I came on a letter which Charles Hamilton wrote me in May, 1948. He said: "I have just finished a new full-length Tom Merry story entitled Tom Merry's Christmas Quest. It will be published in September."

I was puzzled. The title eluded me. I said to myself that I had never heard this title before and that it had never been published. However, I sought it, and, lo, and behold, I found it. It was a long story which appeared in the first Tom Merry Annual, published in September, 1948.

I am ashamed that I forgot it, for I have often referred to the fact that Charles Hamilton, in a post-war story, reminisced on the time when Binks, the page, played ghost and went about in a secret passage, tapping on walls as the old ghost of the St. Jim's monk was supposed to do. For that piece of reminiscence, Hamilton went back to the Gem Christmas Number of 1908. It was an astounding jump into the past.

Yet I had forgotten the very story which contained that reminiscence to which I had referred on a number of occasions.

Why, then, did I forget? How many of us could outline the plots of most of the post-war Bunter books? Offhand, I could not give the gist of "Billy Bunter's Beanfeast" or "Bunter Keeps It Dark" or "Bunter the Bad Lad" or plenty more of them. Could you? Could you sketch the plots of the Tom Merry stories in Mandeville or in the Goldhawk series? I could not.

Yet there is hardly any genuine story in the Magnet and Gem during their long lives of which I could not give a fairly good precis of the plots. There is certainly none in the nineteen-thirties. Why, then can I remember so much of the pre-war tales but the post-war tales have not lived on for me?

The cynic has the reply easily on his tongue. "It's what we have declared all along. You're a victim of acute nostalgia. You're enjoying re-living your boyhood. The tales you read as a child live on in your

memory, but the same settings and the same characters written into stories now you are grown up have but little appeal for you."

Nostalgia plays its part - and a big part. It really is absurd to suggest, as one reader did in a letter to me recently, that nostalgia plays no part at all, and that we love the old papers just because they were so wonderful. But that is only part of the answer.

I was no child in the nineteen-thirties. I was an adult, seriously engaged in the work of educating young people in the way they should go. Yet the stories of the thirties live vividly in my memory. This, surely, cannot be nostalgia. I was an adult who had the Magnet and the Gem delivered regularly each week.

Once again the cynic has an answer. "There has been so much change, and so many of the changes have not been for the better. You are sick to death of the greed and violence of modern life; sick of strikes, and protesting students, and long-haired layabouts; sick of an era when it's useless to save because money loses its value every month; sick of the filth and the swearing in so-called entertainment. So you turn to the memories of years ago."

What the cynic may say is, at least, a half-truth, but there is more to it.

I have turned up "Tom Merry's Christmas Quest" and read it in 1971. It would seem, on the surface, to have everything which a Hamilton fan asks in one of his stories. It is a Christmas tale; it has snow; it has secret passages, and the atmosphere of ghosts; it stars the old favourites; it has a Christmas kidnapping. Yet it cannot remotely compare in quality with "The Painted Room," "Nobody's Study," or "The Courtfield Cracksman" - or, in fact, with most of the old stories.

I find the pace pedestrian. Too much of the dialogue is irrelevant and space-wasting. The plot is contrived. Plenty of the old Hamilton stories were contrived, but the contrivance was clever and so subtle that one did not notice it. But in "The Christmas Quest" the contrivance is painfully obvious.

I found the story worth while, simply and solely on account of the author's recalling that old tale of 1908 when Binks was "The Ghost of St. Jim's." But the effect was one which the author certainly never

intended - to make me yearn to turn up my old 1908 volume and read again that ancient tale which I have remembered while the 1948 tale has been forgotten.

Brutus was once told that his failings were his own fault - "the fault is in ourselves and not in our stars that we are underlings." I ask myself whether it was something in me, and not any lack of something in Hamilton's later writing that has caused me to forget and be indifferent to the post-war saga, while I still remember and love the tales of the Magnet and Gem.

I feel certain, in my own mind, that the quality slipped. That slipping is obvious when one compares the latter-day Magnet with the golden age. The later Magnet was competent and readable, and fairly memorable. The post-war stories were competent, and almost all of them were readable, but few, if any, were memorable.

Just for my private satisfaction, I took out that old 1908 Christmas story, and have read it after many years. I enjoyed it far more than the 1948 story, though I can see now that it should have been better than it was. There is a psychological angle of the humble lad who found power in scaring the school, but that side is neglected, and the tale slanted far too much towards comedy. Nevertheless it is satisfying. There is, of course, a surplus of inconsequential dialogue, though much of it is very amusing and natural. Some of the sequences are really irrelevant, though one ignores this under the influence of the bubbling, joyous fun. It has atmosphere. I loved Taggles with his lantern; Manners lighting a bicycle lamp to help them to cross the quad in the fog; Tom Merry turning down the gas in his study.

Is it only quality which makes the difference between an early blue Gem and a post-war Tom Merry tale? Or is it simply that we like a story which takes us back to a world which is gone, rather than one that brings the old characters and settings into a world which is all too painfully new?

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## REVIEWS

BILLY BUNTER & THE COURTFIELD CRACKSMAN — Frank Richards (Howard Baker £2.75)

There is little need to say anything to recommend this immensely long story - it comprised no less than 14 Magnets in the years 1929-30. It is one of the author's greatest stories, not only in length but also in high quality. Many, in fact, might consider it the very greatest. One can hardly say more.

Starting in the autumn term, it carries well on into the spring term at Greyfriars, and, in the centre, are several Christmas stories which can never have been surpassed. The identity of the Courtfield Cracksman is a mystery for the Greyfriars fellows and staff, though the reader is never in doubt. It is fascinating to follow the adventures of the Scotland Yard man, Inspector Irons, who turns up at Greyfriars as Mr. Steele, the master of the Remove, before he eventually gets his man. It is superb reading throughout, and it cannot be faulted in any department.

Production of the volume is first-class. Illustrations of the entire giant story are by the splendid artist, Leonard Shields.

# # #

BILLY BUNTER'S BAD LUCK — Frank Richards (Armada 17½p)

This is the opening story of the Egypt series of 1932. While it is good to see a single Magnet story reprinted without cuts, rather than to have several stories lumped together with large portions pruned away, it seems inexplicable to reprint one story from a lengthy series. In passing, it was probably the best story of the series, though that may be beside the point. It is additionally surprising that this tale should have been selected, in view of the fact that Howard Baker reprinted the entire series only about 18 months ago.

# # #

# THE SEBRIGHT, HACKNEY

(Eric Fayne continues the series concerning theatres and cinemas he knew in the distant days of his youth.)

Nowadays most of the films come back again and again to cinemas, and if anyone misses something he wants to see on the first visit, it is likely that he can catch it on the second, third, or fourth time round. Years ago it was not like this. Very few features were ever re-issued, and the only way of catching up with something you missed but wanted to see was usually to look out for it at small theatres which booked films after the large houses had done with them.

Once, during the last year or two of silent pictures, there was a film I had missed but wanted to see for some reason or other. The name of the film eludes me now. I got in touch with the renters, and they provided me with a list of the houses where the feature was still booked to play. The only one which seemed within reasonable distance was the Sebright Cinema, Mare Street, Hackney, where the film was booked to play for 3 days.

Accordingly, I tripped over to Hackney early one summer evening. I was quite a stranger in the district, and I immediately asked someone outside the underground station to direct me to the Sebright Cinema. I was told that there was no such cinema in Mare Street. I wandered round, asking first one and then another where I could find the Sebright. The answer was always the same. There is no Sebright Cinema in Hackney.

At last I found a policeman, and repeated my enquiry. He looked puzzled. He told me that he knew of no Sebright Cinema in Hackney, "but," he added helpfully, "there is a Sebright Road."

He directed me to Sebright Road, which was a turning off Mare Street, and not far away.

Sebright Road was a very short thoroughfare. I turned into it, passing, so far as I remember, under a railway bridge, and finding myself in a small cul-de-sac. And there, immediately on my left, was a public house - the Sebright. And adjoining it was the Sebright Cinema. It looked very, very dingy, and the neighbourhood, at any rate in those days, was far from salubrious. There was no vestibule, but there was a small box-office of sorts in the entrance. A sweating man in shirt-sleeves glowered at me.

"What is the price of seats?" I asked.

"Thrippence down, fourpence up!" he said.

I bought a "fourpenny up." I mounted bare stone stairs. It was the strangest cinema I ever entered. I had heard that, in Victorian times, some pubs had music-halls attached. This, clearly, had once been a music-hall attached to the Sebright Hotel, and it was the only one of its type I ever saw. No doubt it had once been elaborately appointed. It was a normal theatre circle in which I found myself - steeply raked with steps. But there were no seats. Only strips of worn carpet which had been placed along each step. The show was in progress. I went down to the front of the circle, and sat down on the carpeted step. Down below a man was banging away on a piano. A glass of something or other stood on the top of the piano.

I felt that I had drifted into a relic of the past, and I was none too happy. It was very hot, and the theatre, fairly large though it was, seemed to be badly ventilated. Luckily the audience was sparse. I waited for about 30 minutes, in order that my exit should not appear to be so sudden as to cause comment.

I never saw the film I had gone especially to Hackney to see. After half an hour I hastened down the stone steps, shook the dust of Sebright Road from my Oxford bags, and breathed a sigh of relief when I found myself among the crowds of Mare Street.

If Sebright Road, the Sebright pub, and the Sebright Cinema still exist, I hope that I shall not be sued for libel. I can only plead that it was a long time ago.

* * *

# The Postman Called

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

JIM COOK (Auckland, New Zealand): With reference to Len Wormull's remarks about the Trocadero cinema at the Elephant & Castle and of the Hyams Bros., who owned it, it may interest him to know how the Hyams Brothers began their cinema chain.

It started with a tiny cinema in Commercial Road Stepney, which we called the Periwinkle, although its official name was The Popular. When the giant TROXY was built the little Periwinkle was kept open for sentimental reasons the main one being for the mother of the Hyams. Only about 50 yards separated the big TROXY and the small "Periwinkle," but the latter remained open for some time and drew patrons in spite of the big draw of the TROXY with its expanding screen and two main feature programmes.

I never visited the Trocadero in those days since I lived on the other side of the River, but I must have been to almost all those in existence those days both in the West End and the East End.

Can any of our hobby members ever remember paying ½d for admission? That was my entrace fee when I first began to visit the cinema. And unless I retained my half ticket I was not allowed to see that part of the programme I had missed.

Since the cinema runs concomitant with our old boys' papers for entertainment in those glorious old days I can foresee an upsurge of interest in our hobby for old films and copies of PICTUREGOER and PICTURE SHOW. Oh I mustn't forget BOY'S CINEMA!

PHILIP TIERNEY (Grimsby): I received a copy of "Eric" as a present when I was eleven years old.

It was given to me by a very kind aunt who knew that I was fond of school stories and thought that "a tale of Roslyn School" would appeal to me.

It did not appeal at all. After a brief glance through the pages I abandoned it - with a shudder.

By chance I had come across one of the saddest passages in the story, but, even had I started at the beginning, I would not have progressed far. Not at that age.

It was not until more than thirty years later that I read the story from beginning to end - and found it most interesting and enjoyable - although I still think the sadness was overdone by including three deaths in one school story.

Quite recently I had a surprise. A young lady whom I have known since her early childhood - and had tried without success to interest in Bunter books - picked up my copy of "Eric" and said she would like to read it.

I was rather amused, and told her to try it by all means, but that I didn't expect her to stand more than four or five pages.

But I was wrong. She read the whole story from beginning to end. And she wasn't bluffing because she discussed every episode with me with great interest.

I have frequently deplored the fact that children of today cannot progress as we did, from comics to story papers at the same price and at the same age.

What can you make of a girl who can enjoy Farrar, but finds Hamilton too heavy going?

I now intend to try her on "Tom Brown's Schooldays." I have never been able to get through it myself, but perhaps she can.

BEN WHITER (London): Re piece in the February issue about the Kennington Theatre and the Mile End Empire. The latter was known as the Paragon Music Hall and was supposed to have the second largest stage in London, the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, reputed to be the larger of the two. In the 1920's the Paragon was known as the Mile End Empire, and I went there on many occasions. Two feature silent films and three splendid variety turns, all for one shilling and threepence. Years passed and now there is an Odeon on the site.

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# NEWS OF THE CLUBS

## LONDON

The warm and cosy atmosphere of Number 27 Archdale Road has never failed to make the occasional meeting jolly and happy, and on the current occasion, the hostess, Josie Packman, almost surpassed

all the previous gatherings. A smaller attendance for this A.G.M., due, no doubt, to Bloggs being on strike. However, the sixteen members that attended were well rewarded with a very pleasant time. Don Webster presided in the chair and conducted the entertainment side of the agenda.

Two of the ladies had excellent items for our enjoyment. Mary Cadogan had painstakingly compiled a fine crossword, the rhyming clues were good. Winner was Eric Lawrence. Millicent Lyle rendered a treatise on the origins of schoolboy punishments and followed this up with some original poems that were enjoyed. The other two ladies present then gave their efforts. Winifred Morss read an amusing piece from a recent issue of "The Times" and the hostess, Josie Packman, conducted a quiz on "The Housemaster's Homecoming, the latter being taken from that recent opus of John Wernham's. Roger Jenkins was the winner.

Eric Lawrence read an article by Basil Amps taken from "The Reading Post." It was entitled "What a nerve to call them Comics." It was up to Mr. Amps' previous good work and there is a possibility of more readings from this source at future meetings.

Finally, Larry Peters conducted his literary quiz and this was won jointly by Millicent Lyle and Roger Jenkins. Larry is the host of the March meeting, Sunday 21st, at his Kensal Rise residence.

Josie's hospitality was greatly appreciated and she was suitably thanked at the termination of this, the 23rd A.G.M.

Officers for 1971: Brian Doyle elected as chairman and the old faithfuls re-elected en bloc.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

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WE ARE IN OUR SILVER-JUBILEE YEAR. In November Story-Paper Collectors' Digest will reach its 25th Birthday.

Rejoice with us in Our Silvery Jubilee Year.

## THE NUGGET LIBRARY

by S. Gordon Swan

A VARIETY of fare was provided for the readers of Henderson's Nugget Library - school, adventure, detective and occasionally science fiction stories. Some of these tales were derived, no doubt, from such papers as Comic Life and Lot O'Fun and Nuggets, where they had appeared as serials; and two, at least, originated in a periodical known as The Boys' Champion Story Paper.

The writers, to name a few, were John G. Rowe, R. A. H. Goodyear, Horace Phillips, Stewart Lang and Derwent Miall. The last name is familiar to me as that of a contributor of humorous stories to London Opinion somewhere about 1915-1920, so I was surprised to find he wrote a number of boys' stories in the early part of the century. Another name that appears is that of E. H. Egliston, which a pencilled note in my copy of No. 57, "For His Chum's Sake," assures me was a pseudonym for J. N. Pentelow.

There was an odd feature about the introduction of Nick Carter, the famous American detective. I do not know if these were original American stories or not, but during their publication a new detective made his appearance - Maxwell Kean. (He also appeared in the Lion Library.) But in one of the Maxwell Kean stories, in several places, the name "Nick" appeared instead of "Max," indicating that these were converted Nick Carter stories. Sometimes Maxwell Kean's adventures were related by a friend and associate, sometimes told in the third person; and in one or two a wife was introduced.

After a time the policy of the Library changed, and the majority of the issues contained a school story with an instalment of a detective serial. Now the name of Charles Louis Pearce figured as the author of several stories, and A. M. Burrage also made his appearance.

Another writer who was to be responsible for two series of detective stories in the Nugget Library was Stephen H. Agnew, who wrote the serial, "The Death Flash," which brought in John Lyon, Detective. In No. 123, "The School in the Forest," one finds a school story by this author, at the end of which John Lyon unexpectedly appears on the scene. Agnew was at his best in tales like No. 150, "The Silver

Shadow," and No. 253, "The Vampire Moon," both of which I believe had run as serials. In "The Vampire Moon" another detective was to be found in the person of Max Hushwing. Shorter tales of John Lyon were appearing in The Triumph, together with stories of the famous Tufty Kingham; later Agnew was to write a regular series of John Lyon adventures in the Nugget Library, but his Peter Flint tales were better than these as they exploited his flair for the bizarre to a greater degree.

A. M. Burrage penned some yarns about a boy detective called Bob Lester, but somewhere along the way this character changed places with a new identity, Tom Lester. The mystery of this exchange is probably explained in No. 175, "Bob Lester's Namesake," which story is not available to me; but what added to the confusion was the fact that some of the Tom Lester tales were written by John G. Rowe.

The great Tufty, meanwhile, had entered the stage and his exploits, also recorded in The Triumph and Comic Life, were many and varied, ranging from school tales to detective stories. (Recently I bought a bound book entitled "Between the Minute and the Hour"* which contained a selection of uncanny stories by A. M. Burrage and selected by no other than our old friend Anthony Skene, who says that Burrage was admired by Conan Doyle and M. R. James.)

The Nugget Library had again altered its policy and was publishing stories of greater variety. Towards the end of its existence, when more yarns of the Buffalo Bill type began to appear, Stephen Agnew wrote 12 Peter Flint tales with fantastic titles like "Peter Flint and the Skeleton Gang," "Peter Flint and the Plague of Spiders," etc. I don't know exactly when the Nugget Library ended, but I do know that these Peter Flint yarns were reissued a few years later in bigger volumes, two in each issue, slightly abridged, and that when these had been reprinted two longer stories were published, one in each volume, one of them being called "The Red Rays of Sin." The origin of these extra-long tales I do not know; they may have been specially written for those two issues. As for Agnew, he was to become a Chums contributor and reached his peak with a great serial, "Skeleton's Gold," but unfortunately died in the Great War before he could give us more of his highly imaginative and well-written yarns.

On the back of No. 312 appears a bewildering announcement which says that the Library will be issued in October under the title of "Wild West Stories." This is misleading and incorrect, as I possess some issues numbered up to 322 which are still designated as the Nugget Library and do not contain the Western titles quoted. In fact, Numbers 323, 324 and 325 are announced for publication on March 21st, 1916.

Apart from these minor mysteries, which may be cleared up by the knowledge of other readers, I have derived much pleasure from reading these stories of a bygone age which reflect the integrity and the imaginative ability of the authors.

* Published by Herbert Jenkins Limited, 1967.

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## AN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOL, MAGNET STYLE

by O. W. Wadham

In a recent issue of a national Australian weekly, The Bulletin, published in Sydney, there appeared an article that would be of special interest to Magnet and Gem collectors.

It was called "Bacterial Life in a Stiff Collar," and was told by a former boarding school pupil who was sent to Geelong Grammar School in the mid-nineteen-thirties.

He was thirteen years old at the time, and states that "as a new boy in a junior dormitory naturally I was the lowest form of bacterial life. Yet as a regular reader of the Magnet and Gem I had a fair idea of what to expect."

He goes on to describe the fagging system at Geelong Grammar:

"We weren't actually called 'fags,' but I was assigned to one of the House prefects. I had to clean his study, wash his pots and pans, and polish his brass and boots on cadet days. There was one major difference from the fags in the Magnet: they always seemed to get paid, but I never got anything from my prefect except an occasional slice of toast or a piece of cake."

Certainly Billy Bunter, at least, fared much better, and the

writer - whose effort appears under pen-name "Batman" - goes on to compare other phrases of public school life with those Charles Hamilton described in the Magnet and Gem.

For instance when he and other school pals decided to cut an important inter-college football game, a year or so later, they were ragged on their return to school, and taken to a nearby pond - in the middle of a cold winter, too - for a ducking. A Wingate type saved them from such a fate.

It seems that Geelong Grammar was a school very much in the Greyfriars and St. Jim's tradition. It would be interesting to learn if that tradition has been kept up in the changing years after Hitler's war. Somehow I hardly think so.

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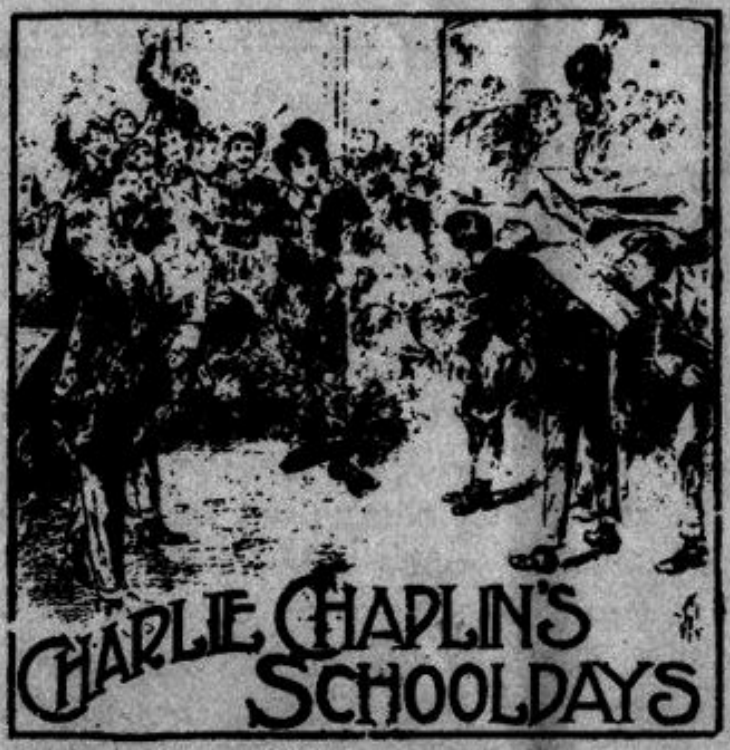


IN THE

# BOYS' REALM

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