

STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS

Vol. 26
No. 304
15p

DIGEST

APRIL
1972



THE OLD BRIDGE OVER
THE RYLL NEAR ST JIMS

H.W.B.B.
72

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by
W. H. GANDER

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HERBERT LECKENBY

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No. 304

APRIL 1972

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A
WORD
FROM
THE SKIPPER



A SLIGHT DEPRESSION OVER HAMPSHIRE

It has, I think, been rather a depressing month. Someone has won half a million on a football pool. No doubt he is happy. He would probably have been just as happy with ten thousand, and then so many more people could have been made happy, too. But more divvies would make more work and less advertisement for the pools firm. A footballer has been transferred at a fee of £200,000. At half the price, money would have been available for improving a ground for spectators, and

crash barriers might be made safe. When a crash barrier gave way, a number of children had narrow escapes. Most of those children were playing truant from school.

In fact, we are told that 6000 children play truant in London every single day of term. Something must be wrong somewhere in the world of education. Our rates are to rise enormously - and the biggest cost on the rates bill is education. And the school-leaving age is raised to 16. I am all for school to be available for those who wish to be there, but I think it madness to insist on the extra year for those who do not wish to stay. And some of our universities seem a little depressing these days.

Someone wanted to plant roses on a bare patch beside a road. It was not allowed. Roses might distract the attention of car drivers. Personally I think that the monotony of motorways is far more hazardous than the possibility of anyone being distracted by roses.

To make beauty for the future, we are all asked to plant a tree on some bare patch. But a tree takes a very long time to grow. How much more sensible to stop cutting down existing trees than to plant new ones for a hypothetical future.

And the quaint, sleepy little village of Tollesbury - total population something under two thousand - is threatened with a pop festival. Surely Danny's "gran," who lived a few miles away, must be turning in her grave.

Yes, indeed, a depressing month. Thank God for the sanity and serenity of our wonderful hobby.

BUT SPRING IS HERE

How truly delightful has been the B. B. C. presentation of "Anne of Green Gables." And how pleasant it is to say so after their slip-up over "Tom Brown's Schooldays." And how I hope that one day they will give us "A Peep Behind the Scenes."

Ethel Mannin says that some people are "cat people" and some aren't. How true! We are either ruled by our cats or we dislike cats. I'm ruled by Mr. Softee, and thrive on it. Ethel Mannin's latest book "My Cat Sammy" is a must for everyone who has ever been owned by a cat. It's a fascinating book. All the same, Ethel's experiences with Sammy fade into oblivion compared with our experiences with Mr. Tail.

Mr. Chips and Mr. Softee. My book, covering them, if I ever had time to write it, would be far more full of adventure. In passing, Softee, who was so very nervous for a long time after he came to Excelsior House, has now fully accepted us, and finds life one long purr.

THE EDITOR

NOTE: The picture with our editorial heading this month is part of a Magnet cover. Can you trace it? If so, jot the title on a postcard or in a letter. Five bob each to the senders of the first two correct answers opened.

WANTED: Good loose copies or volumes containing one or more of the following: GEMS 817, 826, 828, 832. BOYS' FRIENDS issues between Nos. 1182 and 1256 (inclusive). Good copies essential.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, CROOKHAM RD., CROOKHAM, HAMPSHIRE.

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DANNY'S DIARY

APRIL 1922

Cambridge has won the Boat Race, beating Oxford by $4\frac{1}{2}$ lengths. So the Light Blue favours I have had on my Mead have not been wasted.

The first Rookwood story in the Boys' Friend this month was "Jimmy Silver & Co. at the Boat Race." This told of Jimmy and his pals going up to Putney at the request of Jimmy's father, and, at the request of Mr. Lucian Durie, the Head's guest, they are accompanied by Erroll, who has accused Mr. Durie of being Slippery Smith, a law-breaker. But on the towpath a thug attempts to stab Erroll, and they are sure that Durie is behind the attack.

The final tale of the series had the melodramatic title of "Truth Will Out." Erroll is to be expelled for slandering Mr. Durie, but Erroll, up a tree, sees Mr. Durie forging a cheque. And Erroll phones the police. So Durie is led away in handcuffs - and Erroll is thanked by the Head.

The odd tale of this series was the Boat Race one, for there is no mention of the happenings in it in the final story. I reckon it was written into the series after the series had really been completed.

So I'm a bit of a Sexton Blake.

Next came two stories entitled "The Amazing New Boy" and "A New Boy on the Warpath." These tell of a newcomer, Peter Cuthbert Gunner, who is a complete copy of Grundy of St. Jim's. I thought it about time that Rookwood had its Grundy, though I could have done without him. Gunner pairs with Dickinson Minor.

Final of the month was "The Jape of the Month," in which Gunner fell foul of the Bagshot Bounders and was sent home in a packing-case.

Towards the end of the month the trial took place of Henry Jacoby. He was an 18-year old pantry-boy at a London hotel. He set out to rob one or two of the guests in the middle of the night, taking a hammer with him in case he was interrupted. An elderly woman woke up while he was going round her room, and he killed her by hitting her with his hammer. He has been sentenced to death, but there is an outcry in the newspapers. After all, it was only a boyish prank, and it was really the old lady's fault for being so stupid as to wake up.

All the Companion Papers are giving away photo-cards. The Magnet and Gem are giving footballers, and the Boys' Friend is giving boxers. The Popular, which is now out on Tuesday instead of Friday, continues to give coloured pictures of railway engines.

Last month the final Magnet tale was "Bunter's Bolt," in which Bunter ran away from Greyfriars after accidentally swamping Mr. Quelch with ink. It has developed into a delicious 3-story series. First tale this month was "Hunting Bunter," There is a very funny chapter in which Bunter rang up his father. "I've left Greyfriars, father. I've been wronged." After which Bunter finds sanctuary at St. Jim's. In the next, and final tale of the series, "Bagging Bunter," the fat one hides at Rookwood. But finally Bunter gets taken back to Greyfriars, where Mr. Quelch finds out that Skinner was more to blame than Bunter.

It was a very good little series, but there is far too much Bunter in the Magnet. Next on the list was a pretty awful tale called "The Greyfriars Exile" in which Bunter gets a job as a kind of wild man in a circus. Jack Drake comes into this silly business.

Then came another fearful tale called "His Excellency Count Bunter," in which Bunter buys the patent to a Russian title.

Finally, in "Tickets for the Final," Colonel Wharton awards twelve Cup Final tickets for the winners in another of those grim, gritty, gruesome sports contests between the story paper schools.

Milk has gone down in price, from 4½d a pint to 2½d a pint.

Two planes on the London-Paris service have collided in France, and 6 people have been killed.

Sir Ross Smith and Lieut. Bennett, about to fly round the world, have crashed and been killed while having a spin on the track at Brooklands.

The Gem has, once again, been pretty good this month. The series about Darrell and Cutts has continued. "Self Condemned" was a really excellent serious story in which Darrell, accused of robbing the Head of £50, destroyed the post-office receipt so that nobody could find out where he had been posting money. Final tale of the series was "Wildrake's Winning Way," in which Wildrake traced the theft to Cutts. A bit sorry for Cutts, the chums returned the money anonymously, so that the Head should believe it was all a joke. A rattling good series,

this one.

"Mr. Racke's Protege" was not by the regular writer, but, all the same, it was a pretty good tale. If all the tales not written by the real Martin Clifford were as good as this one we should not complain much. A young fellow saves Mr. Racke in a car accident, and Mr. Racke is so grateful that he sends the boy to St. Jim's. But the boy has escaped from a reformatory. On the other hand, "Sons of the Empire" was one of those tedious sporting tales which keep turning up from time to time.

Finally "The Hero of the Shell" was a real Gem. It reminded me really of the tales they had in the Gem when I was small. Grundy works matters so that the First Eleven is a man short for the footer match against Greyfriars at Greyfriars. Grundy thinks that he will be chosen to fill the vacant place - but luckily Tom Merry is there, and turns out for the First Eleven. Tip-top tale.

That old revue "Mr. Tower of London," starring Gracie Fields and Archie Pitt is still doing the rounds of the music halls. This month it has been on at the Richmond Hippodrome. Gracie Fields' sisters Edith and Betty are also in the show.

At the cinemas this month we have seen Victor McLaglen in "The Door that has No Key;" Thomas Meighan in "Conrad in Quest of his Youth;" Larry Semon in "The Bell Hop;" Mary Pickford in "Through the Back Door;" Buck Jones in "Two Moons;" W. S. Hart in "The Square Deal Man," and Harold Lloyd in "I Do."

BOYS OWN ANNUAL: 1884-5, 1888-9, 1909-10, 1910-11, 1916-17, 1923-4, 1932-3. CHUMS: 1910, 1911, 1912, 1923, 1931-2, 1932-3, 1935-6. ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS: 50 single copies between Christmas 1944 and Christmas 1949. THE SECOND WORLD WAR: Volumes 1-8. STORIES OF THE GREAT OPERAS: Volumes 1-4. Offers to -

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WANTED: TIP TOP: 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 14, 15, 305, 310, et. seq. CRACKERS: 360 et. seq. FILM FUN: Any containing 'Tales Of The Blackfriars Phantom.' (Date something like 1937-1940-ish??) FILM PICTURE STORIES: Any issues. BOYS' CINEMA and Annuals. Hardback books, must be good condition:- JUST WILLIAM'S LUCK, ROMANY ON THE FARM.

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WANTED: 1930-50 Champion, Adventure, Rover, Wizard, Hotspur, Triumph, Champion Annuals, Champion Library, Boys Cinema, Boys Cinema Annuals, Books by E. R. Home-Gall.

E. L. DARCY, 47 FISHER ST., MAIDSTONE, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA, 3012.

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

Some further information has been sent to me about the story in Pluck "The Great Cheque Fraud." The serial ran from No. 567 to 592 and was said to have been written by Lewis Carlton. I should like to thank all those Blake fans who wrote to me on this subject. The only

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE CRIMSON PEARL."



FOR READERS OF ALL AGES.

mystery about it now is "Why was the film never advertised in the companion papers as all the others were?" I don't think even Sexton Blake could solve that one as all the people concerned with the production of our favourite papers are now dead. The only solution I can offer is that the Union Jack, etc., were at that time advertising the brand new paper the "Sexton Blake Library," No. 1 of which appeared in September 1915 and there was no room for anything else. Maybe they were right, all the Sexton Blake films have long since disappeared, but we can still read our Sexton Blake Libraries.

MENTION was made in the Blakiana section of the October C. D. of Sexton Blake's crooked brother Nigel and how Howard Baker resuscitated him in the story "The Angry Night," later republished in paperback form as "Fire Over India." Baker brought Nigel to a gruesome end in India, first deceiving the reader into thinking it was Sexton Blake who was dead. Then it transpired that it was Nigel Blake who had died while engaged in secret service work for Eustace Craille.

What Howard Baker ignored or overlooked - or possibly did not know - was that Nigel Blake's death was recorded some years before the outbreak of World War Two. There were three stories of Nigel Blake in The Detective Weekly, but there was a fourth story, dealing mainly with Leon Kestrel, in which Blake's brother played a part. This was No. 13 of The Detective Weekly, entitled "The Monster of Paris."

On Page 24 we find this extract:

Nigel was dead.

Pneumonia had claimed his weakened and emaciated body, and Blake had been present in the tragic hour when he breathed his last. With Clare and Garry at his bedside, poor Nigel had passed away, sane and repentant for all the sorrow he had caused them. The demon which had tortured him for years had been exorcised. He had died with the old whimsical and familiar smile upon his lips, the smile of the brother and one-time playmate whom Blake had loved with all his heart.

"The last journey, Tony," he had whispered. "'The bourne from which no traveller returns.' Poor Clare has suffered. Now she is free."

I don't know whether Nigel Blake was the sole idea of Jack Lewis or the result of an editorial discussion about a striking series to launch a new paper, but it is possible somebody remembered that Blake had previously had a crooked brother in a story that had appeared a quarter of a century before - now over sixty years ago. I refer to the tale "Sexton Blake's Honour," which was No. 10 of the first series of The Boys' Friend Library and which was the first appearance of the great detective in that library.

The story was by Norman Goddard, and in it he introduced his popular character, Mr. Spearing - and Henry Blake, brother to Sexton

Blake. The detective is about to arrest a certain Prince Larinski, forger and swindler, when that individual removes his disguise and;

"Would you arrest your own brother, Sexton?" he asked.

Slowly, painfully, the answer came from the great detective.

"You - are - my - brother?" he said.

Prince Larinski rose to his feet and faced the detective, and the likeness was obvious. There was the same slender build, the slightly drooping shoulders, the intellectual face, the lids half veiling the grey eyes. The only difference was that he was older - much older - and his hair was iron grey with the extra years.

Later, Henry Blake tells his story:

"I was fifteen," Henry Blake continued, "and you weren't old enough to be a companion to me; in fact, as you have admitted, you had forgotten me. Well, I was as other boys, though perhaps a little wilder - I think it was the restraint of our home that put it into my blood - and I kicked over the traces a trifle, though without doing any real harm."

The man paused, a sullen look in his eyes, but not for long.

"You don't remember your parents, Sexton," he went on, "but I do. They were good people, no doubt, but their minds were narrow, and they forgot that I was a boy, with a boy's blood and love of adventure in my veins. I tried to forget it, too, aided by a frequently applied strap, but could not. Several times I got into trouble, then I was accused by our father - our father, mark you - of stealing money from him!"

Henry Blake rose to his feet, and paced up and down the room, his eyes flashing angrily.

"It was a lie!" he cried - "a foul lie, and I left home!"

Sexton Blake, following his brother with his eyes, in which there was a look of profound pity, motioned him to continue.

"I was fifteen," Henry Blake said bitterly, "and I knew nothing of the world. I set out brightly enough, quite convinced that I should make a fortune - just like the people in books do - only to find that a lad of fifteen does not seem to be wanted particularly." He shrugged his shoulders wearily, bitterly, like a man who has given up a hard race. "I fell among thieves, and slowly, not without a struggle, I became -

REVIEWSTHE SCHEMER OF
THE REMOVEFrank Richards
(Howard Baker £2.75)

The Caffyn Series comprised nine Magnets of early 1935, and therefore this book provides the "latest" of all the re-print volumes. It was one of the most satisfying series of the latter-day Magnet.

The Caffyn Series, apart from providing such a quantity of excellent school stories, also makes a fascinating study, for it was really the first series in which, subtly, a change was made in style from that of what we sometimes call the Golden Age. Previously, in a series, the plot had developed as the series unwound. The plot in the Caffyn Series is made clear in the first story, and thereafter remains static. Caffyn, who is just a little too bad to be true, comes to Greyfriars, and in each story he sets out to disgrace his cousin, Horace Coker - and in each story he fails. One could omit a story or two from the series without realizing that one had done so, providing the first and the last were read and digested. It was a system which was to be present in most Magnet series from that time onwards.

That point, however, does not prevent this from being a tip-top series. Every story in the series is first-class reading, especially when each one is considered individually. And it is great fun for Coker fans.

Production is well up to the usual high standard of Howard Baker re-prints. And the illustrations by the incomparable Leonard Shields are a delight.

* * *

CARDEW OF ST. JIM'SMartin Clifford
(Howard Baker £2.75)

There were a few outstanding series in the early Red, White & Blue cover years of the Gem. This was one of them.

The volume comprises 8 issues of the Gem of late 1923 and early 1924. By the time that they appeared the Indian Summer of the Gem was waning considerably. Though the genuine Martin Clifford was still writing most of the stories, and was on the top of his form, the substitute

writers were coming more and more into the picture. However, the real Clifford was in command in this series.

The stories are handicapped by their shortness, of average length only nine chapters. The St. Jim's stories occupied less than half of the paper, usually. It was the day of the "full supporting programme," with the rather short St. Jim's tale backed up by a serial, another complete tale, competitions spilling over two pages, lots of advertisements, and many illustrations.

Of the St. Jim's series, Tom Merry and Cardew are the star players. For the Cardew fan, it is great stuff. Cardew at his very best. Tom Merry, however, is unsympathetically presented. He is almost irritating by being weighed down by his responsibilities as junior captain of St. Jim's, and even, now and then, seems smug and pompous. Cardew becomes captain in Tom Merry's place, in the same way that Mornington had supplanted Jimmy Silver a little earlier and as Vernon-Smith was to supplant Wharton a decade later. There is much similarity in all three series.

The Cardew captaincy fizzles out a little, owing to the Christmas holidays, and the scene changes for several of the stories to one of those Hollywood-style parties at Eastwood House with too many characters in the limelight. The Cardew-Tom Merry feud continues over the Christmas. Finally, in the last story, the chums are back at St. Jim's in time for Cardew to give up the reigns of authority.

It is a story full of interest for anyone who enjoys a well-written school story. It should be an immense success, even though Tom Merry at this time, was far removed from the sunny-natured hero of earlier days.

In some ways, this is the most remarkable volume of all the reprints. With so much variety and novelty, it is rich browsing-ground for the idle moments. There are even a few instalments of one of the few serials I ever read in the old papers - "Tom of the Ajax."

* * *

GOOD NEWS FOR ST. FRANK'S FANS

In place of the earlier announced reprint of the Monster Library "EXPULSED," the Howard Baker Press is presenting an 8-issue volume of the Nelson Lee Library, 1st New Series, Nos. 68-71 "The Feud of the

NELSON LEE COLUMN

EARLY STRUGGLES

by Robert Blythe

(continued)

THE UNION JACK

Back eventually answered and, although no concrete offer was made, the fact that the adventure synopsis was to be passed to other editors, was a step in the right direction. The synopsis mentioned was, in fact, the basis for his story "Scorned by the School" which later appeared in the "Dreadnought," and which, incidentally, was the same plot E. S. B. used for the Castleton Twins series in the "Nelson Lee" and the "Gem" in 1927.

Fleet St. February 16th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Brooks,

I am sorry I have not yet been able to do anything with the adventure story synopsis. At present I have no opening in the Boys' Friend for a story of this type. I will pass the synopsis on to other editors in the department.

I do not care for the wireless-telephone idea for a Sexton Blake. Please send along a list of suggestions.

Yours sincerely, W. H. BACK

Bures. February 21st, 1912.

Dear Mr. Back,

Thank you for your letter of the 16th inst. Sorry you haven't an opening for the adventure serial - and thanks for passing the synopsis on to other editors. With regard to the Sexton Blake, how would one of the following vocations suit him: Marine Store Keeper, Steeplejack, Workhouse Master, Newspaper Editor. Has Blake been in any of these positions; if not, perhaps I could do a story with Blake occupying one of these posts. Until I know what my groundwork is going to be it's not much use getting out a synopsis. I shall be in London tomorrow, Thursday, so will give you a call.

I am, etc., E.S.B.

E. S. B. now makes one of his perennial requests for an advance payment, which illustrates, I think, the difficulties of trying to make a living by writing when one is unknown. It must be remembered that the standard rates of pay by the A. P. in those days was 10/- (50p Sorry!) per thousand words. The Kingston stories were about 5,000 words each.

Bures. February 28th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Back,

Would you be good enough to let me have £10 advance payment on "THE COFFEE-STALL MYSTERY?" I dislike making this request - especially as I received the same amount in advance on the previous story - but I feel sure you will accede to it.

As you know, I have a Triumph motor-cycle, and it goes without saying that I am buying it out of my income. It happens that just over eight pounds are now due on it, and as my regular cheques are very small ones (Kingston stories in GEM) I find I haven't got enough cash to meet the payment. I had been hoping to get a serial going, but everyone seems to be well stocked at the moment. I have promised to pay the two

instalments by Monday next, and if you can let me have the £10 advance I shall be extremely glad. I have no fear of the firm taking proceedings - William Whiteley Ltd. - but I do wish to meet the payments as they become due.

Thanking you in advance, and with kind regards.

I am, etc., E.S.B.

From here on the correspondence tailed off somewhat, for, as we know, it was not until 1917 that another story by Brooks appeared in the U. J.

Bures. March 3rd, 1912.

Dear Mr. Back,

I received on Saturday the advance of £10 on the "COFFEE-STALL MYSTERY" and I just write now to heartily thank you for complying with my request. I've been thinking over that workhouse idea and will let you have the synopsis in a day or so, together with the first four or five thousand words written up.

I am, etc., E.S.B.

Fleet St. March 6th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Brooks,

Thanks for your letter. I have sent the Coffee Stall story out for illustration and will push it through at the earliest possible moment. I had to introduce a short paragraph stating that the hero was sent for trial at the police court hearing. You do not mention this.

Yours sincerely, W. H. BACK

Bures. March 13th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Back,

Thanks very much for your letter of the 6th inst. and for your promise to push "THE COFFEE-STALL MYSTERY" through at the earliest possible moment. I am sorry I overlooked that little matter about the police court hearing; but, really, I did it unwittingly, for I thought I had got everything right. Thank you for introducing the paragraph.

I enclose herewith the outline of another Sexton Blake yarn, and hope it will commend itself to you. If it does, I should like to send in the first ten thousand words, with a detailed synopsis of the remainder.

I am, etc., E.S.B.

Bures. April 14th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Back,

I hope you won't think I've forgotten that Sexton Blake yarn you told me I could get on with. I've been considerably off-colour just lately, suffering from a nasty influenza cold, and I haven't felt much like work. I am much better now, however, and will get on with the first chapter or two and send them in with the remainder of the story in synopsis as soon as I can. By the bye, you mentioned something about some short stories when I saw you last, and I hope, because I haven't been in town lately, you won't overlook me.

I am, etc., E.S.B.

Bures. May 12th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Back,

I enclose herewith the first short Nat Pinkerton story, and I hope you will like it. I have been getting on with the working-out of the Sexton Blake yarn and will send along the first six or seven thousand words, with a full synopsis of the remainder, by to-morrow night's post.

I am, etc., E.S.B.

Bures. May 15th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Back,

I enclose the beginning of the Sexton Blake story, together with the rest of the story in synopsis. I hope you will find it to your liking. I must apologise for not sending it before, as I said in my last letter - when I enclosed the Nat Pinkerton tale. I am, etc., E.S.B.

The Sexton Blake story mentioned in those letters presented me with a problem, for I could not find a record of it being published in either the U. J. or S. B. L. It was eventually tracked down to a serial in the "Dreadnought" entitled "The Heir from Nowhere" and published in 1914. It was later reprinted in the S. B. L. as "The Case of the Twin Detectives" in 1916.

The Nat Pinkerton stories, as related in the section on "Cheer Boys Cheer" eventually appeared in that library, but with the American, Pinkerton, changed to a British detective, Clive Derring. There were ten of these stories and they, at least, appeared in the same year - 1912.

Once again we can see that over a period of nine months, in correspondence with one editor, Back, the sum total of his endeavours was a commission to write two stories. The other stories mentioned in this section were, of course, written at the request of other editors. It's no wonder that when Edwy did get a story accepted he had to ask for an advance!

- - -

The next paper to be dealt with in this series will be the "Dreadnought"

LEN WORMULL writes: The greatest or not the greatest - that is the burning question in recent correspondence. Harry Dowler deploras its use, but can we escape it? Cassius Clay makes no bones about it - he is THE greatest. The Mirror boasts it has the world's greatest Sports' writer, whilst many of the superstars of sport are lauded in like manner. The moon landings are hailed as man's greatest achievement. Chaplin has long worn the crown of distinction, and in love stories Romeo and Juliet still receive the highest accolade. Beethoven has been called the greatest of all musical geniuses: Mozart, the greatest prodigy. Similarly, "Master" instantly conjures up names like Sir Noel Coward and Somerset Maugham. Johann Strauss is named the Waltz King - Agatha Christie, the Queen of who-dunnits. "Without peer" is common usage. One eminent objector to the title is Arthur Rubinstein, world-renowned concert pianist. When told that many critics regarded him as the world's greatest pianist, he replied: "I think this is nonsense! There's no such thing as the world's greatest pianist. Every pianist is different. Different people appreciate different interpretations at different times. Everybody is a world in himself." In describing Hamilton, I would use the remarks of Clara Schumann on Liszt: "He is the only one of his kind."

No. 98 - Gem No. 1035 - "The White Cavalier"

By 1927 the Gem was past its prime, about to begin its headlong descent into a morass of substitute stories. The few tales written by the real Martin Clifford at this time stand out all the more brightly because of the contrast, but many of them were only mediocre in quality. "The White Cavalier" is a case in point.

No. 1035 was the last real Christmas story that Charles Hamilton ever wrote for the Gem. It would be pleasant to record that it was an outstanding success, but the story was episodic and unexciting. Despite a picture of a ghostly cavalier in the snow, no phantom was ever seen. The only phenomenon was a light in the deer park at Eastwood House. When it is added that the story of twelve chapters began at Reckness Towers and ended at Gussy's home, it is not difficult to understand why it never had the chance to create any real atmosphere or excitement. As usual, the Eastwood House stage was overcrowded, with fifteen young people mentioned by name. Nevertheless, despite so many willing and active youngsters about, it is interesting to note that Lord Conway saw fit to ring for the butler to switch on the electric lights after Gussy had made a mess of telling his ghost story.

The interest of "The White Cavalier" is centred wholly upon Cardew, and this was his last star part in the Gem. For some reason, when Charles Hamilton began writing new St. Jim's stories again in 1939 he concentrated on the characters who had been the leading lights of the blue Gem, and quite neglected study No. 9. So this story is really Cardew's swan-song, and it certainly displays all the facets of his complicated personality: his anger when a dingy acquaintance assumed he was a rogue, his quick recovery of his cool drawling manner, his physical endurance in carrying D'Arcy's unconscious body through the snow back to Eastwood House, his perspicacity in solving the mystery, and his airy persiflage when asked to explain - all these constituted a complete study of one of Charles Hamilton's subtlest and most intriguing characters. Cardew was on stage for only about one third of the Gem's long run, but it can be safely asserted that he added a distinction and lustre to all the stories in which he was allowed to play a large part, and for that reason, at least, "The White Cavalier" will always have an

interest to collectors of Hamiltoniana.

By way of postscript it should be noted that Gem 1035 contained an advertisement for Schoolboys' Own Library No. 66 - "The Eastwood House Mystery," a reprint of the famous Painted Room story. It was an ironic juxtaposition, to say the least, to advertise the first (and finest) Eastwood House mystery in the very number of the Gem that contained the last and least successful variation of this theme. Our only consolation in all this is that the fall of the Gem resulted in the rise of the Magnet.

SIX OF THE BEST

by W. O. G. Lofts

A correspondent recently queried whether Charles Hamilton wrote all the Rio Kid stories in view of the inconsistency of their brilliance in later yarns. So far as the Amalgamated Press records were concerned, he is credited with writing them all. Indeed, in this respect he was sending them up to Fleetway House in batches of six, and maybe by this time he was tired of creating series and schools, and then finding other writers taking over. Likewise Mr. Hamilton is also credited by official records with writing all the Len Lex/Bunny Hare/Ken King and School for Slackers tales in Modern Boy, though I don't think it ever has been doubted by the experts that Charles Hamilton wrote all of these. Regarding his Cliff House stories, and writing 'the first half-a-dozen' in the Schoolfriend, I did find that seemingly R. S. Kirkham is credited with writing No. 5 and No. 6. I cannot really detect much difference in the style - though there seemed a remarkable change of theme from No. 7 onwards. The editor Reg. Eves in No. 6 announced in his editorial 'that future tales would be of a slightly different type,' to warn readers of a change in style. The term 'half-a-dozen' stories could have been meant to be more accurately 'or so,' and may have stemmed originally from Mr. Hamilton, but it would be most interesting to learn from any of the experts on Charles Hamilton's style if he had written Nos. 5 and 6.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Hamilton wrote only the first four.)

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

Mr. C. H. Matthews, who contributed his fascinating memories of the Crystal Palace in last year's Annual, has sent us the following article which provides a subject for discussion.

THE SUBSTITUTE WRITERS

by C. H. Matthews

It has occurred to me that the scope of C.D. could be broadened to take in the substitute stories in The Gem and The Magnet. There would then open out a vast new field for investigation, many hundreds of stories to comment upon either favourably or otherwise, and even, maybe, columns headed "Let's Be Controversial about the Substitute Stories" or "Gems of the Substitutes."

Why should C.D. be devoted to the non-substitute stories in The Gem and The Magnet? Moreover, why should the libraries contain only genuine stories by Charles Hamilton? Could they not acquire a complete set of both papers while there is yet time?

Later on, and may that time be far distant, when the last survivors of our hobby have the sad task of handing over the much loved copies of the three papers, will not the Museums query the absence of these substitute numbers. At this time in the future it may be too late to acquire them.

While I admit that none can compare with Charles Hamilton and Edwy Searles Brooks, there are, nonetheless, many good tales to be found in the contributions of the substitute writers. At the risk of being regarded as an outcast, I admit reading for the second time, many Gems of the 1929/30 period, a time when the genuine author was completely absent. I was, at that time, having both The Gem and The Magnet, and as money was short in those slump years, and two pence would have brought many other things dear to a boy's heart, I must have considered The Gem to be good value and worth what I paid for it.

Now, very much older, I have enjoyed those same stories again - not every one, I admit, but most of them. After all did not Charles Hamilton write many tales that were far below his standard? I am sure that Eric Fayne and Roger Jenkins will recall some of these.

Compared with the genuine article there are, it is true, certain things that grate and surprise one, although these same aspects would not

have occurred to the boys for whom they were written.

I cannot, for instance, imagine the genuine author writing such a tale as this. The new American Junior Cyrus K. Hancock is kidnapped by American Gangsters, is rescued by Tom Merry & Co., and then before they can make their escape are captured and shanghaied on to the Gangsters' Yacht and taken to America. Here they are imprisoned in a waterside house from which Tom Merry escapes and brings the police. They then return to St. Jim's, all of which is told in a mere five pages of a nineteen page story entitled "Gunmen at St. Jim's."

There is another tale which comes to mind with a situation which could never be used by Charles Hamilton. In a clash with the boys of Rylcombe Grammar School, the St. Jim's chums have fallen into the river fully clothed. Fortuitously there come on the scene the Spalding House School girls in their boat, and dressed in rowing kit which I assume to be shorts, etc. When the girls see the plight of Tom Merry & Co., they tell them to go to their boat house where they can change into their (the girls') clothes. Girls at that time were more modest and would have been most embarrassed for the boys even to have seen their clothes especially if they had not been there themselves.

Neither of these two stories, as I have said, would have been written by Charles Hamilton, but they do at least furnish opportunities for discussion in the pages of C. D.

Later on, in October of 1930, there appears a tale "Won by a Foul" which is so good that it could easily have been written by "Martin Clifford" to whom credit is of course given for it.

Incidentally while on the subject of the substitute authors, why not analyse the last five Bunter hardbacks with all their peculiarities?

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No. 169. LOOK BACK AND WONDER

Mr. Matthews' article is interesting, but it is based on an erroneous assumption. C. D. is not "devoted to the non-substitute stories in the Gem and the Magnet." Danny's Diary recalls all the stories of his period, whether genuine or substitute. This Controversial column constantly refers to the sub yarns, and has, in fact, devoted a number of articles to various sub tales. In fairly recent years we have taken a close scrutiny of "The Sunday Crusaders," of the Delarey "Rebel

Series," of the story about Dr. Holmes' birthday, of "Bunter's Baby," of the Wingate "Film Stars" series (which I, at least, am certain is not genuine), of Fingo, of the 1918 Sports series, and of the sub's connection with the Bunter doubles series. And others.

So far as Museums go, when we have kicked the bucket, I don't see why they should complain. My own collection contains everything, genuine or sub. So do the collections of plenty of others, I expect. In fact, the Magnet and Gem collections in the British Museum are far from complete today. The missing items are Hamiltonian, due to the activities of pilferers in the days before the books were bound in volumes. The files of the Amalgamated Press are likewise depleted.

As for the libraries, well, there aren't many of them. It is the librarian's own business what he stocks. But by the time the Museum gets the items they will almost certainly be worn out.

Most readers know my personal views of the sub tales. I dislike condemning the sub writers simply because they wrote sub tales for the Gem and the Magnet. All the same, it can hardly be denied that those sub tales would never have lingered in anybody's memory but for the fact that they are substitutes for the real thing.

There were plenty of substitute writers, but only two of them are really worth more than passing consideration as such. They were Pentelow and Samways. Both had a thorough knowledge of the Hamilton schools. That point can never be in doubt.

Samways was by far the most worthy. He made genuine and obvious efforts, throughout his subbing days, to imitate the Hamilton style. His heart was in the right place. Whether he was a sentimental man we do not know. But sentimentality flowed copiously in his tales, and the hammy soliloquy seemed to be one of his stocks-in-trade. Unhappily he had a penchant for themes which seemed to be so far-fetched that they became simply ridiculous.

Pentelow had equal knowledge of the Hamilton characters and settings. He, unlike Samways, was never anyone but himself. He never made the slightest effort to imitate the Hamilton style. He thought that boys loved to have their heart-strings plucked - but he was incapable of plucking them.

Both Pentelow and Samways left their marks in Gem and Magnet

history - and those marks are ineradicable.

Of the later substitute writers, I dislike Francis Warwick the most of all, for he, obviously believing that the Gem had become his particular province, abandoned tradition.

Because we disliked the substitute stories so much, not without very good reason, we have tended to believe those writers capable of anything underhand, and I am sure that we have done them less than justice. I have said before that I believe we should accept with some reserve some of the things which Charles Hamilton wrote to us in that brief period just after the war when he was so bitter against the Amalgamated Press. He never repeated them in the last dozen years of his life, and, I feel sure, wanted them forgotten.

Common sense tells us that, at least after the Magnet began, he must have known that substitute stories would have to be used occasionally to keep the series running. It was a physical impossibility that one man could write them all, and he must have known it.

There is nothing anywhere, in the appropriate period, to show that he was not working in perfect harmony with Pentelow.

Last month Roger Jenkins observed: "It has been said that Pentelow issued an ultimatum to Hamilton: either co-operate with me or I shall write all the Magnet and Gem stories myself."

It has been said - but by whom? I, myself, have no idea where that old report originated. On the face of it, it is absurd. The total number of Pentelow sub tales was not, comparatively, very large. He cannot have thought that he could write all the tales for both papers any more than Hamilton could. In any case, Pentelow was only the editor. There must have been people above him - people who could tell a good story from a bad one - to whom any disgruntled writer could have appealed if he felt himself unjustly treated.

Beyond that, if Pentelow actually said anything of the sort he was a rogue and a fool. On the very meagre evidence that we have, I could not believe it of anyone.

MAGNETS FOR SALE. Write to -

FELDMAN,

4 BALLANTRAE HOUSE, LYNDALE, LONDON, N.W.2.

The Postman Called

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

W. T. THURBON (Cambridge): With reference to the letters of Victor Giles and Geoff. Wilde in the current C.D. is there not a danger in our nostalgic interest in the books we read as boys of attributing to the writers qualities they did not possess? It seems to me that the ultra-keen Hamiltonian does a disservice to our hobby by excessive claims for Hamilton and by resentment of those who do not share his enthusiasm. My own interests are in Clarke Hook's "Jack, Sam & Pete" tales and in Cecil Hayter's writings. But I would not claim Clarke Hook was a great writer and I am well aware that Hayter owed much to Rider Haggard and Edgar Wallace.

I agree with the writer of "The Classic Slum" that the writers of boys' stories in the early years of the century had a good influence on their readers, although I think that he is wrong in saying that Hamilton had more influence than B. P.; and I speak from nearly sixty years of connection with the Scout Movement. Charles Hamilton did a good job within his own sphere, he set a pattern of school stories which lasted for thirty years or more, and in Bunter he added a character to English folklore. In the economic climate of pre-1914 the "weeklies" served the needs of those who could not afford the hardbacks, or even magazines like the Captain or the Strand. But there were better writers of school stories than Hamilton in that period, Kipling ("Stalky") or Wodehouse for example, and writers for children like E. Nesbit.

Today the child who-wants to read (not all, alas want to do so) has first-class writing available in series like Puffin, and writers of the calibre of Arthur Ransome, C. S. Lewis, Rosemary Sutcliffe, Peter Dickinson, Alan Garner, Ronald Welch, to mention only a few.

Geoff. Wilde evidently doesn't know that Mrs. Margery Fisher is one of the leading experts on children's reading, and her book "Intent on Reading" a standard work on the subject. Modern writers on children's literature are neither "toffee nosed" or "snobbish" if they judge the writers we are interested in against the very fine writers of today. Against such a standard Mrs. Fisher's criticisms are quite reasonable.

We can enjoy our nostalgic interest in the books we read twenty,

thirty, or forty years ago, and we can find them, also, useful for social studies of those times. But we do not impress those outside our circle when we claim for them literary qualities they do not possess.

GEOFFREY GOOD (Batley): In the last paragraph of Geoffrey Wilde's letter in the March C. D. he refers to the Howard Baker biographical note on E. S. Brooks which states that he was born in 1889 and was an avid reader of the Gem and Magnet 'as a boy.'

If we look up C. D. No. 14 (February 1948) we find there a letter from Brooks himself in which he says: 'I was reading Charles Hamilton's inimitable school stories with immense relish when I was a schoolboy myself - indeed, I was a keen reader of the Gem and Magnet from the first number of each of these papers.'

As 1889 is evidently established as the year of E. S. B.'s birth, then he cannot possibly have meant what the quotation above seems to imply.

Hamilton was writing school stories long before 1907 and E. S. B. must mean that he read some of these as a schoolboy and, later on, was a reader of the Gem and Magnet from the first number.

The biographical note in the Howard Baker volume is evidently based on the seeming implication of the above (or similar) quotation from E. S. B.

Just a little more research and more careful checking would have avoided this and other errors in the otherwise delightful Howard Baker volumes.

BILL LOFTS (London): Mrs. Frances Brooks gave me the birth dates of E. S. B. which tie up with his age at death. These cannot be confirmed, as astonishingly there is no record of them at Somerset House. Likewise I have wondered that he must have been an oldish reader of the Companion Papers at 18 or 19, but is this all that unusual at that period when even comics were considered 'family reading?' The fact cannot be disputed that in 1910 E. S. B. did have adverts in the GEM requesting back numbers of papers - maybe as a budding author he read all the school stories he could lay his hands on and what better way to learn them by the master Charles Hamilton. I am almost certain that the serial Josie Packman queries was in the U. J. as "Orders Under Seal" and revised in

B. F. L. No. 291 (1915). The author was Lewis Carlton, editor of the U. J. in that period who had hand in the films and also played Tinker himself on the stage.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Research into our hobby interests is excellent and has been of great value. But it seems to me that research into hobby matters should stop well short of visits to Somerset House. Even the families of dead and gone authors are entitled to some privacy.)

HAROLD TRUSCOTT (Huddersfield): A very quick note about Wodehouse. "Tales of St. Austin's" was the only hardback collection apart from what appeared in the volumes of The Captain. "Tales of Wrykyn" appeared as a complete collection in two volumes of The Captain - I have them, but I cannot recall the actual years (around 1906 or 1907), and the volumes are at my home at Deal.

"The New Fold" was the title given to the initial serial appearance in The Captain of what appeared later in hardback as "P. Smith in the City." "Mike," in any case, first appeared as two serials, "Jackson Junior" and "The Lost Lambs" in the Captain.

Mrs. J. PACKMAN (East Dulwich): Did you by any chance see the episode of "Softly, Softly" in which the WPC remarked "It's rather like Billy Bunter's Postal Order," when commenting on a cheque that happened to get delayed?

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Hamiltonisms have become part of our language, in all walks of life. Has any other school story writer contributed so much?)

J. BERRY (Hatfield): I wonder if you have come across the name of John Finnemore? As I have only been a reader of C. D. for about two years it is possible that someone may have written about him before.

He wrote a series of six books about "Teddy Lester's Schooldays." I first read these books as a boy. I borrowed them from the Public Library. I remember I enjoyed them very much.

There was something for all taste, Cricket, Rugby, Running, Boxing, etc., with cricket playing a major part in all six books.

Unlike the Brooks and Richards' characters, Teddy Lester & Co. aged with time. The first book "Three School Chums" shows Lester as a youngster - a fag. The last book "Teddy Lester, Captain of Cricket" and he is about eighteen.

Whether Mr. Finnemore wrote any more stories I do not know, I certainly have not seen any. It would be interesting to know.

(We have Finnemore fans in the clan, and have published articles on his work. A brief look at his career, from one of the enthusiasts, might be welcome now. - ED.)

ROGER JENKINS (Havant): The recent correspondence on Charles Hamilton's literary reputation has been very interesting. I am pleased to see, that in one influential quarter, at least, he has been accorded his due. In the latest edition of the Oxford Companion to English Literature, there is the following entry:

Hamilton, Charles (1875-1961), author, under many pseudonyms, of boys' weekly papers, of which the most famous were 'The Gem' (1907-1939) written under the name of MARTIN CLIFFORD and 'The Magnet' (1908-1940) under the name of FRANK RICHARDS. 'The Magnet' introduced Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School.

Brief, but accurate (as one would expect of such a publication), this entry guarantees Charles Hamilton's works a recognition among the great achievements of English Literature.

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

CAMBRIDGE

Sexton Blake in the film, "The Clue of the Second Goblet," dating from 1928, was the main feature at the March meeting, and Danny Posner, chairman, was the first to admit being disappointed by it.

Mr. Posner bought the silent two-reeler lasting 30 minutes, in London.

Langhorne Burton, remarkably well-cast as Blake, was a popular film actor of his day.

Blake appears in a surprisingly naive story in which he assumes the disguise of a waiter at a London hotel in order to bring about the downfall of a hypnotist crook.

A George Banfield production, the film also includes Micky Brantford as Tinker.

Mr. Posner said he had been commissioned to produce a book of

reprints of heroes created by boys' fiction. His problem was to know where to stop.

He had started with a short list of 25 characters, many of them obvious enough, including Billy Bunter, Harry Wharton and Co., Sexton Blake, Nelson Lee, Dick Turpin, Robin Hood, Biggles, Matt Braddock, Wilson and Desperate Dan.

Other members' suggestions included Colwyn Dane, Handforth, Jack, Sam and Pete, Nick Smith, Batman and Dan Dare.

Mike Holliday gave a talk on the development of the newspaper strip cartoon.

A popular feature of the meeting was a general quiz, set by Bill Lofts, president, and won by Mr. Holliday with Mr. Posner second, and Bill Thurbon and Harold Forecast joint third.

First prize was a copy of Mr. Lofts' latest book, "The Saint and Leslie Charteris."

The club will take a place in August at Cambridge's leisure fair, on Midsummer Common, where they will be able to display their wares and, hopefully, attract new members.

To celebrate the centenary of the birth of John Nix Pentelow, who was born at Somersham, 15 miles from Cambridge, the club were holding an evening meeting on March 26th.

A booklet to mark the occasion, including a full reprint of Pentelow's most famous story, "A Very Gallant Gentleman," was expected to be on sale (price 25p) at the meeting.

The next monthly meeting will be held on April 9th (3 p. m.), and an invitation is extended to all members of other clubs on the second Sunday of each month.



MIDLANDS

Meeting held on 29th February, 1972.

Despite the hazards of power cuts, six stalwarts assembled to hold a highly enjoyable and lively club night.

Chairman, Ivan Webster, true to his promise, arrived complete with a very acceptable distillation of which we were to partake "Afore ye

go.'" The routine formalities over, ever-welcome correspondence read from our indefatigable country members, the evening then developed along informal discussion lines, punctuated by the refreshment break and Tom Porter's regular presentation of Anniversary Number and Collectors' Item. The former was "Magnet" No. 1463 dated 29th February, 1936, and thus 36 years old to the day, whilst the latter was the Howard Baker publication "The Magnet Companion." Both were much admired and the latter in particular aroused considerable discussion.

Next meeting will be at the Birmingham Theatre Centre from 7.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 28th March, 1972, when we hope to welcome all our "regulars" — reinforced by several "irregulars" too, perhaps — but at least with assured lighting and heating once more!

IAN BENNETT
Vice-Chairman.



NORTHERN

Meeting of the 11th March, 1972.

There were fourteen members present at the 264th Meeting of the Northern Club, opened by Chairman Geoffrey Wilde.

After the routine business of the meeting, Harold Truscott gave us his selections of Desert Island Books. One a little-known volume by an early 19th Century German Author, John Paul Friedrich Richter called "Flowers, Fruit and Thorn Pieces" which appeared to bear little relation to its title but, nevertheless, provided some amusing and interesting extracts including a plethora of prefaces and an illuminating insight into the warlike proficiency of the Kuschnappel Militia. The second book was "The Mirror of the Sea" by Joseph Conrad illustrated by a dissertation on the subject of anchors and the correct terminology to use about them. The third book selected was the Holiday Annual 1924 with special reference to "Martin Clifford Goes to Greyfriars" and "Mornny's Masterstroke." Our castaway gave us food for thought.

The evening was concluded by an entertaining exercise presented by Geoffrey Wilde where members were asked to ascribe suitable remarks

within the context of Magnet stories to certain named characters. Everyone tried hard but when one listened to the true version afterwards our own inadequacies when compared with the master were patently obvious.



LONDON

There was a good attendance for the Queens Park meeting on a lovely spring Sunday afternoon. Larry and Gladys Peters were the hosts with Don Webster in the chair.

Reports by the librarians got the meeting off to a good start. The arrangements for the visit to the Hamilton Museum next May were finalised and names taken for participation. Adam Bradford's mother brought along from Vernon-Lay, copies of the two latest Howard Baker reprints and Bob Acraman displayed his copy of the next one, a very fine Gem series.

Furthermore to Mr. Baker's visit to the Richmond meeting, Bob Blythe told of how he spoke to him and it is possible for two or three Nelson Lee reprints in the near future. Josie Packman hopes for a Criminals' Confederation volume and stated that she had sent the St. Jim's map to Howard Baker.

Bob Blythe read extracts from the March 1955 issue of the club's newsletter. The host, Larry Peters, conducted a quiz, Messrs. C. Wright, Parsons and Lawrence being the one, two, three. Ray Hopkins read a paper on the "Toff" and Ben Whiter obliged with a quiz on Members' Names of which Roger Jenkins was an easy winner. Tom Wright read the St. Ted's story by Dicky Nugent from the Holiday Annual reprint.

Next meeting at Friardale, Ruislip, on April 16th. Kindly inform Bob Acraman if intending to be present.

UNCLE BENJAMIN



MARVEL MEMORIES

by O. W. Wadham, N. Z.

Way back in 1909 the Magnet and the Gem were just getting into their stride. At that time they would have played second fiddle to the Marvel, at that time a paper of about six years' experience in the boys' story world. The Marvel sold at one penny in 1909, and must have had a wide sale. Copies of most years are still fairly easy to obtain, which shows that readers cherished their copies just as much as those who purchased the Magnet and Gem a couple of years later. Very few Magnets or Gems are to be had today in the 1909 to 1912 period. In 1909 the Marvel was a 28 page paper with a green cover. It gave three servings of popular fiction each week. First came a 16 page story of the stage and boxing world by Arthur S. Hardy entitled "Tom Sayers in Liverpool." Tom Sayers was a mainstay of the Marvel, and ran all the most popular years of that grand old paper. Another writer, who was to become even more popular in the teen years of this century was S. Clarke Hook with his famous Jack, Sam and Pete series that ran for many years, and no doubt did much to make the Marvel so well-known. In 1909 the trio had but 10 pages to recount their often outlandish escapades, while a serial "Redcastle and Co.," by David Goodwin, described as a "grand school tale" had two pages. The Marvel was described as "a weekly library of healthy and entertaining fiction for all," and the two-some adventures of Tom Sayers and Jack, Sam and Pete were undoubtedly a popular combination to the reading public. The Boys' Realm Football Library was boosted on the Marvel's green cover. Priced at a half-penny it shared the back cover with an advert. for Pluck, which gave two complete tales each week about famous fighters, but no other details are given.

The following week's issue of the Marvel also boosted numbers 94, 95 and 96 of the Boys' Friend Library, which was also featuring Jack, Sam and Pete in a yarn called "Mutiny." There was also mention of "The Mervyn Mystery," a Sexton Blake story, and "House of Garth," described as "a treasure story" by John Tregellis.

Truly the Golden Age of boys' papers was getting into its stride when that 1909 Marvel first saw the light!

ATTERCLIFFE PALACE

by Leonard M. Allen

Situated in the East End of Sheffield Attercliffe Palace was often, and still is, quoted by the 'profession' as an example of the old No. 5 type of Victorian Music Hall. In spite of this rating, however, many famous artistes appeared on its boards.

First opened on January 1st, 1898, the Palace survived until August 31st, 1955, never even closing during the two World Wars, although for short periods it was converted to a cinema. This is a remarkable record considering that at one time there were many counter attractions in the neighbourhood, two other similar theatres, Attercliffe Theatre Royal and the Regent, plus at least four large cinemas, all within one mile radius. The Palace was under the able direction of the Walker family for its last 39 years and it was a sad day for Dick and Speed Walker when the building was sold to a London group of businessmen and the contents auctioned off to its last audience on August 31st, 1955. The grand piano was knocked down for £5,10.0, the velvet curtains for £22 and the first eight rows of tip-up seats sold en bloc for 1/9d. each. Everything else movable was sold including the spot-lights and outside neon sign "Palace."

The first time I visited the theatre was in the mid-twenties paying 1/2 for a seat in the middle of the front row. Only small by comparison to the Moss Empires the auditorium consisted of Orchestra Stalls at 1/2d, Stalls 9d, Circle 6d, and Pit 4d. The Orchestra Pit was so narrow one could shake hands across it with an artiste on the stage.

Early recollections include Dr. Walford Bodie, the electrical wizard, who must have played every hall in the country and many abroad during his long career: Archie Pitt's "Mr. Tower of London" with Barbara Bartle in the Gracie Fields part, Wal Langtry, the "Tiddy Pol Lol" comedian in his revue "On Velvet," Johnson Clark, the "vent and Claud Lester.

People the comedian, who had a big success with many silent film knockabout comedies before and during the 1914/18 War, appeared at the Palace in his own revue, "Stand at Ease," in later years. His name was Fred Evans, nephew of the famous comedian Will Evans, he had the distinction of being featured on the front page of "Comic Life" during his heyday.

During the Second World War many famous music-hall stars toured the smaller halls, amongst those who appeared at the Palace were Joe Daniels and His Hot Shots, G. H. Elliott, Randolph Sutton (he gave an excellent half hour act), Bob and Alf Pearson, Billy Russell and Jimmy Wheeler. With the cessation of hostilities several now well-known stars made early appearances on the small stage including Max Bygraves, Billy Dainty, Freddy Frinton and Stan Sterrett. Jack Doyle, the "prone" heavyweight boxer, paid several visits but his act consisted of starting off several Irish ballads and letting the audience finish them.

Over the years several Repertory Companies were engaged, mainly during the summer months, staying several weeks with a selection of plays. Most well-known was Tod Slaughter and his company who presented in addition to his two perennials, "Haria Marten" and "Sweeney Todd," other productions including "Lanark" and "The Pace at the Window." The Charles Deville Players had a season but to very indifferent business. I counted only 38 people in the audience for "Smouldering Fires."

The type of show, however, changed in the Fifties in accordance with public taste; nude shows became the main attraction, revues with titles such as "Grin and Bare It," "Strike a Nude Note," etc. Some were a little too daring for those days and the management, artistes and producer of one of these were fined a total of £125 in 1951 for contravening the regulations.

