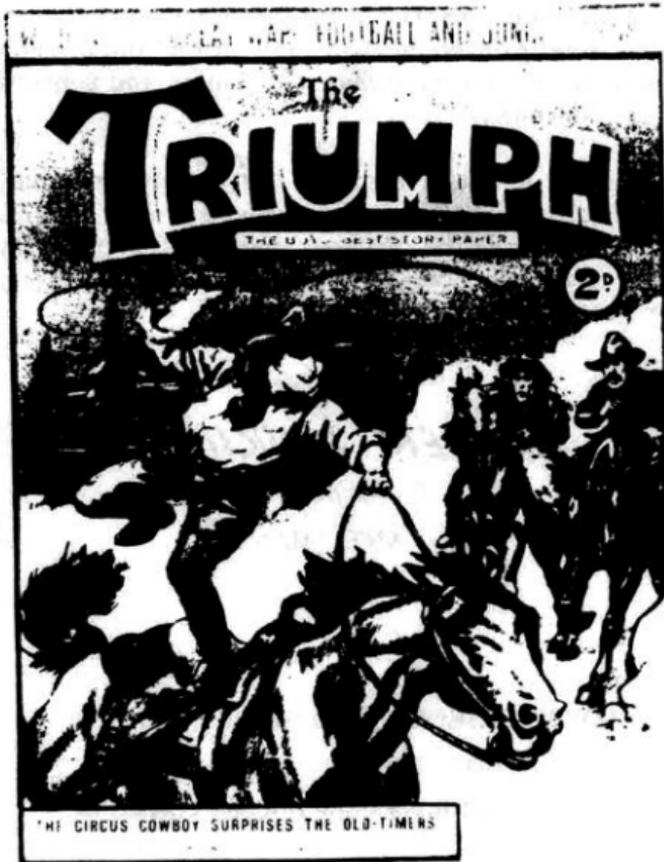


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COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Vol. 26 No 310

OCTOBER 1972



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Vol. 26

No. 310

OCTOBER 1972

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TRIAL BY CORONER

In our series devoted to old cinemas, the writer referred to one named Golden Domes, opposite to the South London Palace, Elephant & Castle. This cinema screened, as novelty attractions, a number of old silent films starring Philip Yale Drew. Drew was notorious for his connection with the coroner's enquiry into a Reading murder case. At the time we printed the article, many readers wrote to me with their recollections of that forty-year old sensation, and for that reason I think it worth referring here to a new book, just published by Harrap. This

is "The Ordeal of Philip Yale Drew" by Richard Whittington-Egan, the first ever to deal comprehensively with that old affair. The price of the book (£3.75) is a reflection of the immense cost of publishing today, but if you can come by a copy, it is well-written and makes fascinating reading, with nostalgic pen-pictures of old theatres long gone, and of seedy touring companies in a world that has disappeared.

I have no vivid memories of the case, but I recall that Drew was named as a kind of protegy of the Lindo family, and a famous matinee idol. He was hardly either. At the time of the murder he was in his fiftieth year, and an alcoholic. He seemed to be drunk for at least 50% of his time, and he had been a drunk for nearly thirty years. When drunk, he was moody and often violent.

He was an American who seems to have enjoyed considerable success and fame in his earlier days.

In Edwardian times he came to England and toured the leading theatres with great popularity. In 1915 he returned to the States and made a number of two-reel western films in Hollywood. It is said that, had he remained in films, he could have equalled the fame of Tom Mix and others of the cowboy heroes, but he did not enjoy appearing before the camera. (It was these which were reissued in 1930 to cash in on the connection of the star with the Reading murder enquiry.)

In the early twenties, Drew returned to England, which he always loved. He became a firm friend of Andrew Melville who owned theatres in London, including the Lyric and the Lyceum. Drew appeared in successful plays at both these theatres, but by 1927 Drew's drunkenness had become too great a problem, and Melville, with sadness, dispensed with his services.

For some time, Drew had been trying to find a sponsor to put on "The Monster," a play by Crane Wilbur. Drew was then appearing in tatty shows in tatty theatres all over the country, but suddenly "The Monster" was accepted by Olga Lindo, who was seeking a play for her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Lindo. They toured this play for a time, with Drew in the leading role. They took the play to the West End at the Strand Theatre, but, here, Edmund Gwenn took the lead and Drew was demoted to understudy. After the West End run ended, the Lindos toured again, with Drew once more in the lead, but now they often

played it at very 3rd-rate theatres.

In the summer of 1929, when readers of the Magnet were about to enjoy the Ravenspur Grange series, "The Monster" arrived for a week, twice nightly, at the County Theatre, Reading. Early on Saturday evening, the last day of that engagement, an elderly tobacconist named Oliver was murdered, in his shop in Cross Street. Somebody leaned across his counter and battered him furiously, and the attacker (or somebody else who entered the shop very soon afterwards) emptied the till.

The play moved on to other theatres, while the murder hunt went on in Reading. Numerous witnesses spoke of seeing a drunken man in Cross Street, at the time of the murder, but five weeks went by before the police decided that Philip Yale Drew of "The Monster" Co. had some questions to answer. The play was then at Nottingham Empire, a Moss Empires house, and a rather better class theatre than those normally played by "The Monster."

Drew returned to Reading for an unprecedented seven days of trial by coroner. The Lindos stood by him, and the verdict of the jury was "murder by some person unknown." There seems to have been scenes of wild enthusiasm in Reading at the verdict.

Understandably, perhaps, Drew and the Lindos cashed in as hard as they could on the notoriety angle, but suddenly, at the end of the year, the Lindos dropped Drew like a hot brick, and never again had contact with him. It seemed shabby, even though they had suffered a lot as a result of Drew's constant drunkenness. The obvious reason was that, though they stood by Drew in the trial, they really believed him guilty, and cut off all connection with him as soon as they could after the enquiry.

Drew lived for another ten years, going down hill all the time. He toured with "The Monster" for a short time, with others playing the Lindo parts, and trying to reap a harvest from notoriety - a harvest which was soon exhausted. For years he seems to have done no work, but spent his time writing to newspapers, while he existed in doss-houses or sponged on his few remaining friends. The aunt of Andrew Melville, who was an especial friend of Philip's, once asked him, point blank: "Did you do it, Phil?" The natural answer might have been: "Of

course I didn't." Drew actually said: "I wish to God that I knew."

The writer of the new book says it is impossible to know for certain whether or not Drew was guilty. He thinks there is just the slightest probability that the man was not guilty. The police never doubted that Drew was guilty. I myself cannot help thinking that there is the slightest probability that they were right.

TIME FLIES

"The Sale of the Century" is a pleasant little quiz programme put out by I. T. V. Pleasant because no time is wasted and nobody tries desperately hard to be funny.

In a recent edition, the quizmaster asked: "In which paper did Billy Bunter appear?" One of the panel gave the information that our Billy was in the Boys' Own Paper in 1910.

However, a lady who looked as mature as most of us, corrected him, and announced that Billy was in the Magnet.

"Did you read the Magnet when you were young?" enquired the master of ceremonies.

"Good gracious, no!" said the lady indignantly. "I'm not all that old."

Has anybody seen by bathchair?

THE ANNUAL

December, when Annual publication day arrives, still seems far off, but preparations are well in hand for our great Year Book. Our star writers, including Roger Jenkins, Mary Cadogan, Harold Truscott, Len Wormull, Bill Lofts, Les Rowley, Jack Underhill and plenty others, are on the top of their form with some brilliant articles. Roger Jenkins looks at the senior forms in the Hamilton schools, and Mr. Buddle's adventure is entitled "The Spirit of Slade."

Have you ordered your Annual yet? Early in the New Year we shall be publishing our booklet of the Letters of Frank Richards, which will be something, after the Annual, to anticipate with relish. More of this in due course.

THE EDITOR

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The sun never fails to shine brightly when we visit Kingsgate, and its attractive seascape and mild weather must have been additional reasons for Charles Hamilton's purchase of the house in the first place. Those who visited him there might have been excused for thinking he was a Man of Kent himself, but Miss Hood was quite certain that it was not until 1914 that he resided in the county. Returning to Folkestone after the outbreak of war, Charles Hamilton asked the taxi driver to find him a place where he could get quiet lodgings, and it was Hawkinge, Miss Hood's own village, that was the destination. The mysterious stranger was suspected of being a spy, a situation which he worked into some of his school stories during the war. It was his sister, Mrs. Harrison, who liked Thanet, and Kingsgate became his home some years afterwards.

From this time onwards, Charles Hood explained, he became something of a recluse. The one-time traveller gradually withdrew into himself until writing and reading was the real world for him, which helps to explain the marked improvement in his style of writing at this time. He used to rise early and have a walk before breakfast and an occasional swim if the weather was warm: after that writing occupied him from 9 a. m. until about 7 p. m., nearly every day. Plots were never worked out in rough: he did all his thinking at the typewriter and when stories were finished it was Miss Hood's task to send them by registered post to Fleetway House. Miss Hood also did all the shopping and items which she could not purchase for him, such as clothes, were delivered to him on approval. His withdrawal from the outside world was almost complete, and though he still saw some of his relatives he seemed to have no personal friends. The Magnet and Gem editor, Mr. Down, made occasional visits to Kingsgate, but Charles Hamilton seemed to avoid going to London as much as possible, apart from the yearly visits at Christmas time to stay with his sister. "Apple Trees" at Hawkinge was the alternative residence, but travelling was done by taxi and the outside world was kept at a distance. It is something of a surprise that there should be so much vitality in the work of a man who had almost turned his back on the world, but Miss Hood says that accounts of trivial local occurrences that she related to him would often be worked into a Magnet

story.

It is no secret that Charles Hamilton was an inveterate pipe smoker, continually striking matches and setting fire to the wastepaper basket on more than one occasion. He got through thirteen ounces of pipe tobacco a week, which is no mean achievement. I well recall the huge jar in which he kept his tobacco, and I also recall his asking me, as he filled his pipe, whether I had passed Northdown House on the way to Kingsgate. This was a large mansion standing in its own impressive grounds and surrounded by a brick wall all round its park. He informed me it was the original of Portercliffe Hall in the 1935 Magnet summer series. As we left Miss Hood at the gate of "Rose Lawn," we did indeed drive towards Northdown House once again, but alas its glory has departed, for the wall is down and speculative builders have got to work in those impressive grounds. Charles Hamilton often cast a penetrating glance upon landowners who were feeling the pinch between the wars, but one can hardly imagine Combermere Lodge or Popper Court invaded by bricks and mortar. Perhaps it is just as well that Charles Hamilton never lived to see today's changes in the Isle of Thanet.

 W A N T E D : Magnets 114, 1204, 1207, 1208, 1220, 1221, 1227, 1237, 1263, 1265, 1267, 1269, 1273, 1274, 1317, 1323; C.D. Annual 1947 (first); C.D. No. 26; The Saturday Book (published 1945).

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XX
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DANNY'S DIARY

OCTOBER 1922

On the evening of 3rd October, Mr. and Mrs. Thompson of Ilford went to the Criterion Theatre. As they arrived home at midnight, a man jumped out from the bushes and stabbed Mr. Thompson to death. A ship's steward named Frederick Bywaters of the P. & O. liner "Morea" has been charged with the murder, and Mrs. Edith Thompson, the wife of the murdered man, has also been arrested.

The first Magnet of the month was a good single tale. In "The Footballers' Foe," Ponsonby of Highcliffe set out to make trouble between Courtenay and his Greyfriars friends. Pon uses Bunter, the ventriloquist, to scratch a football match in an offensive manner, but the Caterpillar sets things right in the end.

In "Loder's Long Trail," Loder is out to make trouble for the Famous Five, but luckily they are well aware of what he is up to. In "Bunter's Lawsuit," Bunter gets a licking, and sees a solicitor to take action against Mr. "Horace" Quelch for assault and battery. Final of the month was "The Man From the Congo." Captain Kit Corkran, Bob Cherry's cousin, visits the school. He is much impressed by Bunter's clever ventriloquism, and thinks that it might be useful in a search for hidden treasure on the Congo among the natives. So Bunter and the Famous Five are booked for a trip to Africa. October seems a rum month to start a travel series, but I suppose the author and the editor know best.

The clocks went back on 8th October, so now winter has really started. Cricket seems a long way away.

Some very good pictures at the cinemas. We went to see a new star named Rudolph Valentino, who seems to be knocking the ladies over, though I don't like him much. The film was "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," which is cracked up to the skies, though I was a bit bored. I liked Matheson Lang in "Dick Turpin's Ride to York," and I shed a tear, along with Mum, over "Where is My Wandering Boy Tonight?" Bebe Daniels was in "Oh, Lady, Lady," which was good fun, and Jackie Coogan was really great in "Oliver Twist." They have got an awful lot

of prices in our largest cinema: 5d, 9d, 1/3, 1/6 and 1/10.

Electricity is 2½d a unit, which makes it cheaper than gas.

Another great month in the Gem. First of the month is "Tricky Trimble." Trimble pretends to lose his memory, and so win sympathy. The Gem tales are pretty short these days, though much longer than the Rookwood ones.

In "Trouble for Tompkins," Tompkin's uncle - a shabby, old wreck - arrives at St. Jim's to visit his nephew. Next week, "Tompkins on Trial" carries on with the same theme. Tompkins comes through the test with flying colours and Mr. York, the uncle, turns out to be a very smart and rich man. To end the month, the start of what promises to be a new Cardew series. Cardew, unpopular for slacking at games, tries to win good opinions by putting up a cup for competition. It is to be called the Cardew Cup, but, at the end of the story, while the draw for the cup is taking place, Cardew receives a letter from his Uncle Lilburn who refuses to put up the £25 to pay for the cup. So Cardew is in Queer Street. This story is entitled "The Cardew Cup." It promises to be good fun. I don't like sporting series, but this seems as though it will have a plot as well as a string of games.

Starting this month, all railway fares are being reduced by 15%, and this is good news.

There is a smallpox scare. There have been sixteen cases in a Poplar institution.

In the Boys' Friend, the series has continued about Mr. Wilmot, the new football coach at Rookwood. This series holds the interest well, especially when one considers how very short each separate tale is. "Jimmy Silver's Secret" is that he believes that Mr. Wilmot is a cracksman. "The Grip of the Law" told how Mr. Wilmot played for the First Eleven against Greyfriars, and at the very end he was arrested by Inspector Troope who thinks the coach is Dandy Jim, the burglar. In "The Wanted Man" it is proved that Mr. Wilmot was in the army while Dandy Jim was in prison - so Wilmot cannot be Dandy Jim. Finally, in "In False Colours," Mr. Wilmot has been released and is on his way back to Rookwood when he is kidnapped by his cousin and double - the real Dandy Jim - and Dandy Jim goes back to Rookwood in Mr. Wilmot's place. It's working up to a great finish.



Conducted by

Josie Packman

I expect most of you Blake fans will have by now, purchased your copy of the Union Jack reprints. A review of the contents appeared in the August C.D. If this book is successful no doubt Mr. Howard Baker will produce another one. I myself, have suggested that the second volume contain stories by G. H. Teed and Anthony Skene, also one of Gwyn Evans fine Christmas tales. If anyone has any other suggestions to make perhaps they would like to contact me. I am pleased to say that I have received quite a number of articles for Blakiana, enough to last a few months.

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SEXTON BLAKE AND THE
'THRILLER'

by J. Bridgwater

Sexton Blake never appeared in a full length "Thriller" story. He was, however, accorded the signal honour of a 20-page, U. J. size supplement presented with the "Thriller" dated 15th February, 1930. The supplement contains a U. J. full length story called "Midnight Gold" by Gilbert Chester. It is not listed in the S. B. Catalogue or its Supplement.

The Union Jack story "False Lights" by the same author, which appeared in U. J. No. 1374, also dated 15th February, 1930, is referred to in the supplement as the sequel to "Midnight Gold." This is not strictly accurate although the two stories are linked by a Crux Ansata (a Jade cross surmounted by a loop or circle) which plays an important part in both. The earlier story is referred to in passing, by Blake, towards the end of chapter three of "False Lights" when he says "It (the Crux Ansata) was in the possession of a young couple named Brenton."

As an advertisement for the U. J. "Midnight Gold" does a good job. Chester goes flat out the whole time. It is all so well done I found the necessary suspension of disbelief a pleasure. The sequel, though good is not its equal. I wonder how many new readers it got for the U. J.

Gilbert and Eileen Hale make brief appearances in "Midnight Gold" but these are merely incidental.

(In my opinion, Gilbert Chester never did anything quite so good after he dropped those two very well-known characters. Many fine tales about them appeared in the early 1920's, especially those in the Sexton Blake Library. J. P.)

SEXTON BLAKE - DR. FU MANCHU - QUANG LU - WULING
AND A CHINESE LAUNDRY MAN

by William Lister

A while ago I switched on my Television and settled back in my chair with a sense of anticipation. "The Face of Fu Manchu" - featuring the characters of Fu Manchu, Nayland Smith and Dr. Petrie, was about to be shown. It was to take me back over the years. Over the years; to my very early picture going days. The silent film days, where for the price of one penny we went to the Saturday matinee. We were given

the choice of an apple or orange, plus a comic. The never to be forgotten feature being the Dr. Fu Manchu serials. At some point in life we become conscious of something for the first time. No doubt I had seen Chinamen before, but not to notice, until the Fu Manchu serials appeared. In those very early 1920's there were many Chinese laundries in Leeds. Shortly after becoming a Fu Manchu addict my father asked me to take a dozen of his stiff white collars to the nearest Chinese laundry. I had not been before. As one opened the door one was faced by a high counter. A door just behind led to the steam cleaning department. Having just been to my Fu Manchu serial at the local cinema, I was a little uneasy. Suppose this laundryman was one of his many henchmen?

The door opened, the Chinese proprietor entered, followed by a cloud of steam. He peered over the counter, his slanting eyes piercing through the steam, his pig-tail dangling. It was too much for a small fellow, I dropped the collars and ran. Later father took me back and introduced me to the Chinaman. We became friends. Chinamen, via Fu Manchu and the laundryman, had now become part of my life. Just as in later years Sexton Blake, Tinker, Billy Bunter, Tom Merry and the boys of St. Franks also became part of it.

Sexton Blake more than once found himself at grips with Chinamen. There was one, a certain Quang Lu, who was a real runner up to Dr. Fu Manchu. He was a super hypnotist, with a moon-like visage, calm inscrutable and sporting two narrow shaped almond eyes. Hence the title of the Union Jack No. 909, 12th March, 1921, story entitled the Chinese Hypnotist.

This Yellow Peril, Quang Lu, turns up again in the U. J. No. 923 entitled "The Raven and the Ruby." Quang Lu was dead, there could be no doubt about that, at least so we readers thought. But come with me to an underground morgue. An Autumn moon, peeping through cloud drifts, and piercing the iron bars of the morgue window, gives a ghostly radiance, a feeling of unreality, as the shrouded figure rises from the slab and glides towards the entrance, followed by a fitful gust of wind. Quang Lu?

Another nasty piece of work was around in the 1915 period. U. J. 552. Wu Ling, head of the Brotherhood of the Yellow Beetle and deadly

enemy of the white races. Funny thing, but Wu Ling turns up again with a certain Dr. Huxton Rymer in 1931, U. J. No. 1438, entitled Yellow Guile, by G. H. Teed. Well that's what it is too, "Yellow Guile" but Sexton Blake knows how to deal with it. Cunning fellows these Chinamen, clever too. That is, all except my Chinese laundryman, he turned out to be a great guy.

EGGHEADS AND ARISTOCRATS OF CRIME

by J. E. M.

'Some of the greatest mentalities in the world have been strangely warped. Uncanny intelligences which would have worked wonders in the march of progress have been, for some obscure reason, ranged on the side of society's enemies. Their owners have become super criminals; men who have brought the practice of crime to a fine art. Such men are more than dangerous. But there is an even greater genius for whom they are no match ... such is Sexton Blake ...'

This extract from a 1932 advertisement for the SBL reminds us - if we needed any reminding - that Blake did not waste his time on idiots. His principal underworld opponents were indeed intellectual aristocrats - and sometimes social aristocrats as well. Some bore impressive academic or professional titles, including Professor Jason Reece, Professor Kew, Dr. Satira, Dr. Huxton Rymer and Dr. Gorlax Ribart. Then, of course, there was Mr. Mist, whose scientific credentials can hardly be doubted, since he perfected a means of making himself invisible! And we can hardly overlook such cerebral giants as Leon Kestrel, the Master Mummer, or Mr. Smith of the Criminals' Confederation, neither of whom would have been left behind in any brains race. The criminality of most of these characters is attributed to a "mental kink" (this was a favourite phrase), with no excuses for environment or unhappy childhood.

But in what respectable activities did such men first demonstrate their brilliance? What subjects, for instance, had Reece and Kew been professors of - and where? Huxton Rymer, I have recently learned, had once been "senior surgeon and first lecturer at the Franz Josef Hospital in Vienna," but can any Blakian tell me if Dr. Satira was also a medical man? If not, in what subject did he gain his doctorate? Some Blakian scholar would be doing me and all of us a great service by researching

the complete backgrounds of these master-minds.

It would also be interesting to know something about the origins of the aristocratic wrongdoers such as Count Carlac, Count Bonalli, Baron von Kravitch and the Black Duchess, Ysabel de Ferre. Did their authors ever tell us to what areas of Europe these titles applied? Or with what eminent families they were connected? The social backgrounds of one or two top-drawer types like Sir Philip Champion and Prince Wu Ling are either made clear to us or can be guessed at. But what about, for example, that great exotic, Monsieur Zenith? There was a character who could have come only from the highest pinnacle of society (did not his very name imply this?), while his brilliant and cultivated mind suggests the most exclusive education. But what positive knowledge have we of these things? Did Zenith's creator ever tell us anything about his early background? Or is it, like his very nationality, enshrouded, as they say, in mystery?

Quite a lot of information has been gathered by Blakian scholars concerning the great detective's own family origins and education. Now we need a little monograph by some enthusiast on the background history of his great criminal adversaries.

MEMORY OF 1912

by O. W. Wadham

All the many penny papers of that tranquil year of 1912 must have carried a fair share of advertising for a great new penny paper that came into being in the tenth month of that year. Nearly one and a half pages were devoted to the lusty newcomer in the MARVEL of Saturday, 12th October, 1912. I refer, of course, to THE PENNY POPULAR, which first appeared on Friday, 11th October. The cover was surely an impressive sort of effort. It showed Tom Merry arriving down at breakfast clad only in a flour bag! It was said to be his first day at school. After an arrival like that he was SURE to be noticed. Sexton Blake came next, with a cover picture from the story inside the paper, and the same size picture was given Jack, Sam and Pete, who were the third party to share the PENNY POPULAR in those first years, but

continued on Page 32



THE RISE AND FALL OF NELSON LEE -

A THEORY

by Gemini

So much has been written upon the comparative appeals and successes, as well as the histories, of the Hamilton and Brooks schools that, to the average "Digest" reader, it must sometimes appear that protagonists can forget the major determining factors in favour of the more interesting - but usually blind - alleys of side issues.

Over many years I have admired, read, preserved and collected both. Both, in their respective fields, were masters. But when the chips were down, when it came to a straight battle for durability and very existence, St. Franks lost out.

The seeds of its failure in August, 1933, were sown (in my opinion) when Nelson Lee and Nipper first arrived at Bellton in 1917, with yellow men somewhere in pursuit.

Those seeds were cultivated and ripened in Old Series No. 166, on their return from the first Brooks South Seas saga in August, 1918, when "By General Request" Lee decided to remain at St. Franks and the erstwhile famous detective became the ultimately doomed figure of the famous housemaster-detective.

It is a matter for idle speculation as to how St. Frank's might have been created and maintained without Lee and Nipper. Certainly, for at least half of the Old Series, the characters were indispensable as the plots were evolved and written - and so the pattern was set. I believe, however, that if St. Frank's had been entirely separately created

by Brooks as deliberate competition for the Hamilton schools, without the continual subsidiary detective plots, conceivably it could have lasted as long as Magnet and Gem.

We shall never know. For myself (like most of my generation) I vastly preferred the Old Series of Lee, Nipper and St. Frank's; and the very clever double and sometimes triple plot creation in which Brooks indulged from 1917 until about 1924.

But the first signs of harvest were in evidence when Lee was kidnapped from his Roman African scenario in September, 1924, rapidly to be followed by Nipper in search of his "gubnor." Zingrave and Jim the Penman, the worst enemies any famous school ever had and who became its ultimate destroyers, got their manhunters back. But the respite was not for long.

I feel certain that Brooks - an outstanding professional - was fully aware of the character problems and the dilemma of requirements for the continuance of St. Frank's at this time and that when Lee airlifted from New Rome he was doing his utmost to sever competing school and detective interests with finality and for parallel tracks in the same magazine. His intensive buildup of the leadership qualities of Reginald Pitt in the School Scandal series emphasises this.

By then, however, it soon appeared that the well established split personality pattern of the Nelson Lee Library was too deeply entrenched and it wasn't long (32 issues, to be exact) before the school and detective themes were reunited.

But this time, with one major difference. Nelson Lee as the detective had lost the battle to Nelson Lee the housemaster.

The long Indian summer of the First New Series saw St. Frank's and its interests paramount to such an extent that many youngsters buying the magazine for the first time could be pardoned if they wondered why it was called the Nelson Lee. Then, for a long period, the words of "School Story Library" were added.

May, 1926, however, when the First New Series commenced, saw the Nelson Lee at the height of the success of its St. Frank's policy. In addition, the eye-straining print format (loved dearly by its afficianados) was abandoned, the magazine was larger, roomier and much more attractive in appearance to the more modern eye of the

mid-1920's, the embryo St. Frank's League was obviously proving to be a considerable success - and so for a long time all was set fair.

Some of the series' earlier themes, particularly, sustained that belief vigorously. Then, gradually, erosion set in, with Nelson Lee himself becoming a cardboard background character and the style of double plot gone for ever.

I believe that a large part of reader fall-off could have been caused by reader reaction against the loss of not only these, but of lack of use of the old and well loved characters. How often, in the First New Series were, for instance, the Trotwood twins; Boots; Bob Christine & Co.; Fatty Little; Jerry Dodd; Solomon Levi; Singleton and Somerton and even the great William Napoleon Browne, much more than part of the chorus? Only Willy Handforth and Archie Glenthorne showed real survival capabilities.

Brooks - always a marvellous creator of characters - was introducing new characters - The Onions brothers, Gresham, Waldo, Castleton, Gore-Pearce and Forrest, Corcoran and Harborough and more. They were all good, all interesting, and all effective. But they were all too much for the older characters and they, in turn, joined the mounting background chorus as Brooks juggled with his plots. Only Gore-Pearce and Forrest maintained prominence among the newcomers and that was because of a need to supplement Gulliver and Bell.

The obtrusion of Vivian Travers (for whom Brooks seemed to have maintained considerable affection) with Jimmy Potts also had greater stage area.

But it was the all-pervading Handforth who really dominated the First New Series, just as Lee and Nipper had dominated at least the main part of the Old Series; losing, in the process, the incomparable Ralph Leslie Fullwood, a character superbly drawn during the whole of his rascality, fading to inconsequence and another eventual St. Frank's chorus role in the First New Series.

Brooks' writing style in the First New Series was, by any professional standards, more mature, more sustained and frequently of very high calibre. His plots, now almost entirely centred upon school affairs, were meticulously worked out and as ingenious as ever - but without any real intrusion (except very occasionally and at need) of the

detective element.

As I see the history of the Nelson Lee Library, its detective background and the St. Frank's creation, inevitably Zingrave and the Green Triangle took over again in January, 1930.

The second New Series was foredoomed, the split personality of the magazine being revealed very clearly for public display. Even so, detective stories, back with a flourish, hesitated soon, so that "Back to St. Frank's came after fourteen issues in short form and the longer stories followed. But this time not so determinedly, for it was by now very clear that St. Frank's and Nelson Lee were in acute editorial dilemma and, although the school achieved a last dominance throughout most of 1931, Zingrave was back in January, 1932, and this time he won.

That is, if the loss of what had been one of the best boys' magazines can be counted as a victory for anybody. But the harvest of split personality and competing double interests, from the seeds sown in 1917, was reaped fully.

Charles Hamilton never really entered the same lists as Edwy Searles Brooks. His schools and characters were, I think, simpler and easier for the reader to define and understand and, when he introduced new characters after establishment of his schools' scenarios and list of actors, he didn't keep them for longer than he needed them, discarding them once their role had been played out.

And, when Hamilton wrote in some detective interest with Ferrers Locke and/or Jack Drake, both in and out of Greyfriars, the only people who took the whole length of such a series without discovering the wrong 'un were usually his own detectives.

Brooks wasn't of the same mould. He enjoyed and specialised in detection writing, and his work, throughout, displayed his superb technique of tantalizing the reader, making him think and speculate and keeping him always interested in "who dun it."

All of which seems to prove, I think, that Hamilton was right in his long term school story planning just as Brooks was about detection and crime fiction.

The fact that both were brilliant and unforgettable, whatever they did for us in those far off pre World-War II days, proves how fortunate indeed were the generations they served so well.

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 174. LEVISON

The years between 1914 and 1920 seem to form a period when reform was in the air at Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood - at least, so far as the junior villains were concerned.

Vernon-Smith, the incredibly bad boy of the red Magnet became incredibly good for a time. Then, between 1918 and, perhaps, 1935, he became the real Bounder whom we knew and loved so well, and, maybe, the greatest character study in the whole of school literature. Though Vernon-Smith remained a truly fine character study, his stock slipped a little, so far as I was concerned, in the closing years of the Magnet. The series about the Bounder's double was about the greatest of the latter-day Magnet, but, for me, it was marred by the sheer callousness of Vernon-Smith. It was a callousness which was seen many times before the Magnet passed on.

Mornington of Rookwood followed a similar path to that of the Greyfriars Bounder, though in many ways he stood alone and had a great potential for Owen Conquest.

The third of the schoolboy villains was Levison. Danny in his diary, records, in the 50-year old extracts which we are currently publishing, the series where the rumour got around St. Jim's, that Levison had been expelled from Greyfriars. At this time, Levison was a reformed character, and had been so for a long time. I found the reformed Levison dull. The reform of Levison, in my view, was one of the greatest mistakes of Hamiltonia.

Look at this description of Levison from a blue Gem.

"Levison was not liked.

"Exactly what there was wrong about Levison it would be hard to say; probably most of the fellows could not have said. Certainly it was known that he had been compelled to leave his last school, Greyfriars, though he had tried his best to keep that a secret. But that would have been forgotten if Levison had been a likeable fellow. He was not bad-looking, and he was at least as good as the average junior on the playing-fields, and at lessons he was ahead of most of the form. He could assume a very pleasant manner when it suited him, but he was

not liked. Perhaps it was because he had a gift of keenness that was almost uncanny in one of his age, and fellows did not like to feel that the penetrating eyes could see so far into their hearts, and read their motives better than they themselves could read them.

"Herries of the Fourth never would speak to Levison, because his dog Towser had taken a dislike to the new boy at their first meeting. Most of the fellows laughed at the idea; yet in the main they agreed with Herries in his attitude. Levison did not seem to care. There was a coldness about him that seemed to render him almost indifferent to companionship."

That, then, was the Levison of a lengthy period of blue cover days. The possibilities to an author of the youngster so described must be obvious to the discerning reader. Martin Clifford never fully exploited those possibilities, more's the pity. Perhaps it wasn't necessary for him to take the trouble to develop this fascinating character. Undoubtedly he might have done more, even though the Levison of many blue Gems is quite a remarkable study. Maybe the psychological angle was just a little too acute for a character in a weekly school tale.

Martin Clifford took the line of least resistance. For the sake of a brief period of sensation to his readers, he reformed Levison. And the reformed Levison was really someone quite, quite new.

What a waste! So often in connection with the dear Gem we muse over what might have been.

 MAGNETS FOR SALE. Write to -

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

XX
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,

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XX
FOR SALE AND WANTED - Periodicals, Newspapers and Juvenile Items
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I was indeed very sorry to read of the recent death of C. H. Chapman. He was an essential part of the Greyfriars scene for so long. But what prompted me to write this article is a particular idea that has appeared, in my experience, every time his work has been mentioned; it appeared again, dutifully, in the obituary notice in the August C.D. What is more, whenever he is considered, this idea is almost the only one mentioned in connection with his work, as positive statement; the rest is generalisation. I cannot recall having seen any individual mention of the positive qualities of his drawings, whereas the praise accorded certain other Greyfriars illustrators seems to me to be excessive. Here is the obituary sentence, again the only allusion to a definite quality in Chapman's work: "He had a distinctive style, with a peculiarity for angular types and with schoolboys grinning widely into the drawing board." I apologise; here there is another characteristic mentioned: the widely grinning schoolboys - which does not take us very far. This concern with angularity in Chapman's drawings is an obsession. Since the dominant impression I have always had of Chapman's drawings is his mastery of the curve, I was astounded when I first saw this word "angularity" applied to his work, especially as it was not accompanied with any other appraisal, and I still think it very wide of the mark. I must allow for the fact that when I first encountered the world of Frank Richards, in the 1920 HOLIDAY ANNUAL, lent me by a friend in 1922, and a little later in the MAGNET, Chapman was already the regular illustrator; Shields came later, in 1926; what one first encounters, at a young and impressionable age, is often what one sticks to; nonetheless, I was certainly not seeing what was not there. I had no reason to; and certainly, when Shields' work came along it disappointed me and never meant to me what Chapman's did and does. I have no desire here to denigrate the work of others; it is sufficient to say that, of all the Greyfriars illustrators, Chapman was the one who really summed it up for me; visually, he was Greyfriars.

Characterisation seems to have been an instinct with Chapman. In the 1920 HA the first Greyfriars story is RUCTIONS AT GREY-FRIARS. There is a drawing of Bunter (back view) throwing Mr. Prout's

postal packet at Bob Cherry, who is on his bike, with others of the Famous Five and two of the girls also in the picture. There is not the slightest doubt who any of the characters are. Chapman's Bob Cherry is unmistakable, and not only here. As with other boys in his illustrations, in his heyday he really gave one the same boy every time that character was concerned, adapted to different situations and reactions. This is characterisation with a vengeance, and for me, he is the only Greyfriars artist who achieved it to anything like this degree. Look at Bunter's back in this drawing. Emil Jannings, the great German actor, was sometimes referred to as the man who could act with his back, and Harry Langdon once showed a whole range of feelings with the camera focussed on the back of his neck. Chapman's back view of Bunter suggests every detail of the fat Owl's thrilling indignation as he hurls the packet at Bob.

I wrote a moment ago "in his heyday." Chapman's heyday, for me, is in the later teens of the century and the twenties. The later drawings, since the 1939-45 war, I have not liked nearly so much. Even before the war, with the introduction of the blazer in place of Etons, in the thirties, his drawings, while still having strong identifiable characteristics, substantially changed and satisfied me less. Admittedly, his work varied in quality, and even in the twenties, his finest period of Greyfriars drawing, one can find totally different conceptions of Bunter, for instance, by him - some far from suggesting that fat youth. But undoubtedly also he created in illustration Richards' completely rounded (in every sense) character. The earlier HOLIDAY ANNUALS have many of these wonderful realisations of Bunter. A portrait such as FULL INSIDE, on page 191 of the 1926 HA, shows Bunter complete. This is Richards' fully developed character. Angular? Any one who can see this as angular is, like Morgan, a suitable case for treatment. The idea is ridiculed by every tight but opulent curve of this superbly oval face and body; and this is only one such portrait. The existence of such magnificent studies, quite apart from those which spattered the MAGNETS of the twenties, makes the occasional unreal divergence all the harder to understand.

Studying the Chapman drawings again, I can see a little justification for the angular angle- I can see something of what was

meant by this - to the angles of arms and legs, to some extent; but it should never have been allowed to hide so much else in this work. And boys, in any case, are often like this - it is common knowledge that schoolboys frequently do not know what to do with their awkward limbs; Chapman's masterly understanding of this fact provided a magnificent contrast to Bunter. As to Mr. Quelch, how many times did Hamilton describe him as bony? Chapman's Prout, at his best, is as fine a character study as his Bunter; every facet of that rich, pompous character is there.

Chapman had not only a superb mastery of the curve but of the resulting perspective; and perspective, like tonality in music, has always been one of the real thrills of my life.

One final quality in Chapman's work, which also has a bearing on this angularity question. Chapman was a past-master of the art of drawing horses in motion, and mastery of the curve and all that comes from this is essential to such an art.

W A N T E D : Monster Library, S.O.L.'s, Magnets, Gems, Nelson Lees, Adventures, Champions, Rovers, Hotspurs, Wizards, Dandys, Beans, Magics, Skippers, Dandy, Beano, Jester, Annuals. 1920, 1928 Holiday Annuals.

JAMES GALL,
49 ANDERSON AVENUE, ABERDEEN, SCOTLAND.

XX
SALE: 10 Dandys, 1969, £1. 7 Beans, 1969-71, 80p. 4 Lions, 1952, 50p. 2 Chatterbox Annuals, £1 each. Film Fun Annuals, 1958, 1960, £1 each. B.B.S. Own, Tom Merry's Own, £1.40 each. Turner's Boys will be Boys, £1.50. Autobiography Frank Richards, £1.75. Greyfriars Prospectus, £1.75. Greyfriars Holiday Annuals.

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XX
S A L E (or will exchange for 1936/7 Thomsons) 25 Collectors' Digest Annuals 1947-71.

HANGER,
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XX
FOR SALE: Mickey Mouse Weekly, 200 issues, 1936 to 1941, 50p each. 50 issues 1946-47, 30p each. 200 issues 1952-1956, 15p each. All in good clean condition.

R. HAYDEN, 36 HIGHFIELD RD., LIVERPOOL, 13.

The Postman Called

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

MARY CADOGAN (Beckenham): I was interested to read in C. D. recently that "A Peep Behind the Scenes" has recently been reprinted in a cheap edition - it is amazing how long some of these old books remain in demand: it shows that they must be touching on the finer levels of life.

T. W. WALKER (Widnes): I still look forward each month to "C. D." and especially to "Let's be Controversial," which is always so very interesting.

BILL LOFTS (London): In answer to Jack Cook (Benwell) my poser "Which Thompson paper featured St. Frank's?" was raised in a letter to Ben Whiter. This was only meant as a sort of light-hearted poser, and was reported in the Club report. It is, of course, a catch question - but a series of tales of St. Frank's did appear in the ADVENTURE in 1936 entitled "The Fateful Forty Days at St. Frank's" - but was not of course the E. S. Brooks school. "Cheery Chicks," or all the copies I have seen had AIDA REUBENS on the imprint as the publisher. It could have changed later.

DENIS GIFFORD (London): My long-running radio series, the nostalgic panel game SOUNDS FAMILIAR, has been adapted to television and begins a run on Thames TV in October, as LOOKS FAMILIAR. This will follow the formula of a showbusiness celebrity panel and chairman (for TV Dennis Norden replaces Jack Watson) who identify and reminisce about items from the past. Instead of purely sound extracts from old radio shows and records, I will be introducing clips from old films of Music Hall personalities, old trailers, feature films, and other visual memorabilia: including characters from old comics and boys' papers. Panellists contracted include Arthur Askey, Anne Shelton, Ted Ray, Bob Monkhouse, Pat Kirkwood, Patricia Burke, Cardew Robinson, Leslie Welch, plus, of course, our weekly Surprise Guest - a star from the past.

(Editorial Comment: This sounds very fascinating, especially if, for short spells, the comedians forget to try to be funny.)

WILLIAM LISTER (Blackpool): Reading the autobiography of Father John Heenan - I came across this quote: "I was about the age of 17 and went to Upshaw, a large seminary near Durham. I observed one of the new boys reading the Children's newspaper. This was then a fairly new venture and I considered it as far beneath me as the Magnet and Gem which I had outgrown at the age of 10 or 11."

It would appear the other student was one of us who continued reading these papers or the Nelson Lee till much later.

(I have the greatest admiration for Cardinal Heenan as a splendid man. But he must have been an extraordinary child. - ED.)

REVIEW

THE GREYFRIARS ADVENTURERS

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker £2.75)

This giant volume contains reprints of no less than twelve Magnets of 1938. The main item on the menu is the Magnet's last travel series which told of a visit of Lord Mauleverer and his friends to the South Seas in search of Brian Mauleverer, a character who had featured as a scamp in a Magnet of many years earlier. Though few would gain-say that the South Seas series of a decade earlier was a far better story, this later one is a worthy effort. It contains some magnificent descriptive passages, and much excellent prose. Thrills and adventures follow one another thick and fast, and readers who recall Ken King with affection will delight in the episodes in which this famous Hamilton character from Modern Boy is introduced.

This very long series covers no less than ten Magnets, which one would have thought, alone, good value for money. The publishers have, however, preceded the main dish with a single Magnet story which is competent and amusing, and have tacked on another copy after the close of the South Seas series. This is the opening story of the ten-story Tracy series, and its inclusion in this volume is quite inexplicable.

The main illustrator is C. H. Chapman, though Shields was responsible for some of the covers. General reproduction is first-class, though the issue covers, with pink exteriors and white interiors, strike a slight note of unreality. A very worth-while addition to any collector's library, and, considering its immense size, good value at the price.

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

CAMBRIDGE

Josie Packman, the Sexton Blake expert, prompted a very lively discussion in which Danny Posner, chairman, made "outrageous" allegations against the detective's popular appeal.

Raking over the embers of the club's recent Bunter v. Blake controversy, Mr. Posner asked: "Do you think Sexton Blake has a fully-developed character?" - and Deryck Harvey almost burst into flames.

Mrs. Packman considered: "The point is, so many people wrote about Sexton Blake, that's why you haven't got a real picture of him."

Mr. Harvey disagreed. Postwar, Blake had been more popular than Bunter. He had appeared in "Sexton Blake Library," and in picture-strip form in "Knockout" and "Valiant," as well as on television.

"Anthony Parsons wrote ninety-nine books in the old 'Sexton Blake Library.' How many other characters have had as many books written about them by a single author? This, surely, allowed room for characterisation."

Jack Overhill agreed that Blake was, years ago, "the working man's Sherlock Holmes." He himself had always had a very clear mental image of Blake and his character.

Mrs. Packman showed the famous Sexton Blake bust, and the copy of the "Union Jack," dated 1926, featuring its story.

Vic Hearn (Treasurer) filmed a club visit to Dick Turpin's birth-place, at the Rose and Crown, Hempstead, Essex, eighteen miles from Cambridge, and subsequently a full feature appeared in the "Cambridge Evening News."

Bill Thurbon (Secretary) is answering a request from the Cambridge University Library for club literature to be placed in the library's archives.

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NORTHERN

Meeting on Saturday, 10th September

A cool September evening with Chairman Geoffrey Wilde back in his accustomed place after his Swiss holiday. Geoffrey had picked up a

Dutch paper with a cartoon strip recording the adventures of Billy Tirffe, which was, he felt sure, pseudonym for our own Billy Bunter:

A game of the animal - vegetable - mineral type was organised by Jack Allison in which we split up into two teams. Simultaneously a question was asked of each team, the two answers (obviously about the hobby) being the names of objects closely connected with each other.

John Cox then gave us his account of 'How my collection started.'

What is most interesting to note is that John, being the 'baby' of the Club, was far too young to remember the 'Magnet.'

His introduction to the world of our literature was in Christmas 1948, when among his presents was 'Billy Bunter's Banknote.' Although at the time, said John, it made no terrific impact, yet there followed others which he enjoyed immensely, notably 'Billy Bunter among the Cannibals' and 'Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School,' still his favourites today.

In the 'Tom Merry's Own' he came to know St. Jim's, Rookwood and Carcroft and gradually, so to speak, he became 'hooked.'

And his other love was that captivating little rascal, Richmal Crompton's 'William.'

But as most teenagers put away childish things, so the time came when John felt he must dispose of these accountments of childhood.

Later (of course) he came to want them back, and is now in the process of building an exciting collection:

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LONDON

The customary Autumn meeting at the Leytonstone home of the hospitable Godsaves was very well attended. It was appropriate that Norman Wright should give his version of characters he liked and disliked at St. Frank's, seeing that host Reuben has written some very fine articles in C. D. about this famous school. Norman's like was William Napoleon Browne and his dislikes were Fullwood, Bernard Forest and Gore Pearce. Roger Jenkins read his forthcoming article in the C. D. Annual about the fifth form seniors and one must state that this is another winner.

Tom Wright read another amusing St. Sam's story and Bob Blythe

obliged with a reading from Newsletter of September, 1955, about the Woodingdean meeting, when the guest of honour was Herbert Leckenby. Bob Acraman read an article from a C. D. Annual that was written by Herbert.

Reuben's quiz was won by Winifred Morss and Mary Cadogan, and the latter won both hands of Bob Blythe's Bingo Game.

Next meeting to be held at the Beckenham home of Mary Cadogan, 36 Overbury Avenue. Phone 650 1458. Date Sunday, 15th October. Kindly advise if intending to be present.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

SCRAMBLE AND OTHER SWAN

PUBLICATIONS

by Gordon Hudson

In the post-war years many publishers issued comics and magazines, but few seemed to last very long. Among the most successful of these minor publications were Gerald G. Swan's boys' story paper "Scramble" and their series of pocket books, particularly Schoolboys 3rd Pocket Library.

The Scramble commenced in 1947, and appeared monthly until 1950, when it became fortnightly and later weekly. It reached a reasonable number of issues - my own collection goes up to No. 57 - but the last few issues appeared spasmodically and from No. 54 were undated. It finally disappeared later the same year, although I do not know when the last issue was published.

Scramble contained the usual kinds of stories, western, mystery, science fiction, etc., but its real attraction was in two series, "Ozzy the Wiz" by Michael Kendrick and "Martin Speed, Detective," with his two assistants Sam and Susie Spry. Sometimes these appeared as complete stories, sometimes as serials. Like his famous counterpart Sexton Blake, Martin Speed stories were written by several authors, particularly Vincent Griffin, G. M. Byrne and Maurice G. Hugi, and they also appeared in a separate paperback series.

Ozzy the Wiz Doolittle was an extraordinary schoolboy who invented machines which could make people invisible, petrified, smaller,

and many other strange things. One serial "Ozzy of Overstone" later appeared in book form.

Swan published several books of school stories including Trent House stories by Michael Kendrick, Whitelands by Reginald Browne and Westchester by Edward Thornton. Browne and Thornton were pen-names of an author well known to O. B. B. readers - Edwy Searles Brooks.

The Schoolboys Pocket Library reached 24 issues. It contained some good stories by Browne and Thornton and other authors whose work regularly appeared in Scramble.

Swans published several comics and magazines including Slick Fun, Cute Fun, Comicolour, Girls Fun, Wild West, and adult publications including Romances, Confession and western and thriller paperbacks. These, however, only appeared to have moderate success and eventually they disappeared.

Swans also issued some annuals but Scramble seems to have been the only one with "Annual" in the name. For some reason their comic annuals were called "Albums," such as Funniers Album and Slick Fun Album.

The Scramble did not have the same appeal for me as some of the more popular story papers, possibly because it was limited to 16 or 20 smaller pages and appeared at longer intervals. Nevertheless, it contained some fine stories well worth re-reading.

Continued from Page 17

were replaced later by Harry Wharton and Billy Bunter. The title of the Jack, Sam and Pete story was "Volcano Island," which I fancy was a MARVEL reprint. I am wondering how long the famous trio took a third place in the old paper. I should say they had reached the peak of their popularity in 1913 - after that a slow decline in their adventures set in. Still, they made a most impressive commencement in that October of 1912, and certainly made the grade over the commencing years. How long did their adventures last, I wonder?

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