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COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Vol. 27 No 320

August 1973

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STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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A WORD FROM THE SKIPPER

GET OFF THE FIELD!

'Kildare was pale with rage. He strode up to Jones with a look upon his face that made the New House fellow

extremely uneasy.

"Get off the field, Jones," he said sternly.'

When, recently, a Derbyshire fast bowler was ordered off the field by his skipper, the event must have seemed quite familiar to the Hamiltonians. Actually, according to newspaper reports, it was only the third time it has ever happened in first class cricket.

But it happened on many, many occasions in the school stories of Charles Hamilton. Kildare ordered off Monteith, Harry Wharton ordered off the Bounder, Wingate ordered off Loder. It came round more frequently than Leap Year.

The quotation with which I started this item comes from "The Milverton Match," an early St. Jim's story in Pluck. Maybe one day we will run "The Milverton Match" as a classic serial. I have had scores of requests from readers for another one.

This is the earliest example of the event - going on for seventy years ago - which I can trace in Hamiltonia. It is certainly the first at any of the author's most famous schools. In this case it was the soccer field. But "ordering off" occurred on his cricket fields as well. When Alan Ward was shown the pavilion, we felt that this was where we came in.

THE MORMONS

One of the details concerning a celebrated American golfer who distinguished himself in the British Open was that he was a Mormon. Nowadays, such a detail is only of passing interest to us over here, but some of us will recall the incredible prejudice against the Mormons which was evident in this country in the second decade of this century.

Girls' and women's papers ran a great many long novels in serial form, warning British maids of the dangers of associating with Mormons. "The Serpent in the Home," "A Mormon's Wooing," "The Mormon Evil," were three among plenty.

In the summer of 1911, the editor of "The Girls' Reader" wrote: "At this time, a very deep and real peril menaces the homes of thousands of good, honest, God-fearing families. This is the arrival of Mormon missionaries in our midst. Our new serial will accomplish a purpose - that of putting on their guard the women and girls of Britain

against an insidious, persistent foe."

Quite a number of sensational films, linking the Mormons with what was apparently known as the "white, slave traffic," were shown in cinemas, but it seems likely that they were third-rate pictures, made to cash in on the prejudice of the moment.

What started the crusade against the Mormons I do not know. It could hardly have been the polygamy of their leaders, abandoned long before, and I should think it unlikely that Mormons were ever really engaged in carrying off British girls to South America. But the hatred of the Mormons, for whatever reason, was very evident, and caused quite a scare over here, between 1910 and 1920.

Nowadays, of course, the Mormons still send over their missionaries, and I believe they hold an annual conference at Twickenham, or thereabouts. In recent years, I got to know a good many of them, found them courteous, kindly, and of exemplary conduct, and I liked them a lot. A far cry from the days when nice girls ran like the dickens if they feared a Mormon was in the vicinity.

WHERE WAS SHOREDITCH EMPIRE?

I have recently been reading an account of the Steinie Morrison case. A man named Beron was murdered on New Year's Day, 1911. He seemed prosperous, but his sole apparent income was £26 a year which was the rent for nine houses which he owned. I rubbed my eyes when I read that bit, but it was a fact.

The alibi of Morrison, (a false one, it proved), who was charged with the murder, was that, on the grim night, he had been to see Gertie Gitana at Shoreditch Empire. The best stalls there cost a shilling; 1/6 on Saturdays and Bank Holidays. I knew most of the music halls round London, but I cannot place Shoreditch Empire. Does anybody know where it was sited, and what happened to it?

THE ANNUAL IS COMING

Next month, September, we shall be sending you your order form for the 1973 Annual, which is now taking shape.

THE EDITOR

DANNY'S DIARY

AUGUST 1923

It is joyful to be able to enter in my diary that it has been a splendid month in the Magnet. The opening story is "A Split in the Co!" I feel that this would have made a good series, but it is squashed into one not very long story. Angel, having been a bad angel to Dicky Nugent, is punished by the Famous Five, and gets his revenge by a bit of forgery. By leaving a forged fragment of a letter in a Holiday Annual, Angel makes it seem that Bob Cherry has been saying slanderous things about Harry Wharton. Lord Mauleverer puts things right.

Then a new summer series started with "Sir Jimmy's Substitute." Bunter passes himself off as Sir Jimmy, and finds himself kidnapped for a while. Sir Jimmy has inherited an old house named Pengarth in Cornwall, and he arranges to take a holiday party there. "Bunter the Hunter" tells of Bunter's efforts to get included in that holiday party. In the end of this one, however, the pals manage to rid themselves of Bunter.

Then came "The House of Pengarth," where, on arrival, Harry Wharton & Co., and Sir Jimmy, find Keeley, the caretaker, in a state of collapse, and this he says is due to some ghostly Spaniards concerning whom there are many legends in the neighbourhood. A grand series, and it continues next month.

The Magnet also contains complete stories of Ferrers Locke, tales of "Galloping Dick, the Highwayman," and the Greyfriars Herald supplement. So the Greyfriars tales are not all that long.

The dock strike has ended after seven weeks, so there is now no dock strike - till the next time. The use of quill pens at Southward County Court has been abolished after 150 years. Seems like the end of a bit of history.

Doug and I went to Canterbury to see Kent play Hampshire. Woolley made a century, Tich Freeman bowled like an angel, and we saw most of this. The next day, however, Philip Mead of Hampshire, also made a century, and the game ended eventually in a draw. I

enjoyed my day in Canterbury very much. Mead is a left-hand bat.

As always, the stories in the Boys' Friend about Jimmy Silver & Co. in the West, have been tip-top. In "Tricking the Cowpunchers," Baldy Bubbin, the cook, rescues a hobo named Hookey, from the river, and is praised for his bravery. Unluckily, it was a put-up job, and Baldy finds himself blackmailed by Mr. Hookey.

"Held Up on the Prairie" was great reading. A hooded road-agent starts a number of hold-ups on the prairies round Windy River. Jimmy meets a lively Irishman named Ulick Fitzgerald, and Jimmy notes, with surprise, that Ulick has a gun in his pack. Ulick joins the bunch at Windy River ranch, and they all call him Mick.

In "Mick of Windy River," Jimmy Silver & Co. and Hudson Smedley, are held up on the prairie by the hooded road-agent. And Jimmy begins to be a little suspicious of the new puncher, Mick.

Last of this pleasant trio of tales was "Run Down at Last" in which the rascal in the flour-bag mask rides once too often and is captured. And, of course, he turns out to be the happy-go-lucky new man, Mick of Windy River. Delightful tales, these.

Doug gave me a great new Sexton Blake Library tale this month. It was "The House of Fear," and it featured Leon Kestrel, who is my favourite criminal. A lovely yarn.

At the cinemas we have seen Betty Balfour in "Love, Life, and Laughter;" Norma Talmadge in "Within the Law," Harold Lloyd in "Safety Last;" Bebe Daniels in "One Wild Week;" and Charles Ray in "Smudge." A good month, without being very startling.

One swallow does not make a summer, and one really stunning story could not make it a very good month in the Gem. But the opening tale, "D'Arcy Maximus," was really the funniest Gem I have ever read. A perfect school tale. Gussy adopts a donkey which he rescues from ill-treatment by a cruel owner.

"Sportsmen All" was a "grand, extra-long, 25,000-word story," but as it was not written by the real Martin Clifford it was an also-ran. All about sport, and centring on a lot of sporting friends of Clive, from South Africa. Awful dull stuff.

"From School to Circus" was really too silly for words. Tom Merry & Co. are accused by Knox of smoking. So they run away from

Conducted by

Josie Packman



BLAKIANA

This month's contribution is a "Proud" one, or should I say two. These articles on Mr. Proud and the Tram series came from two of our well known contributors. I thought it would be rather a good idea to publish them together. Perhaps some replies will turn up as a result.

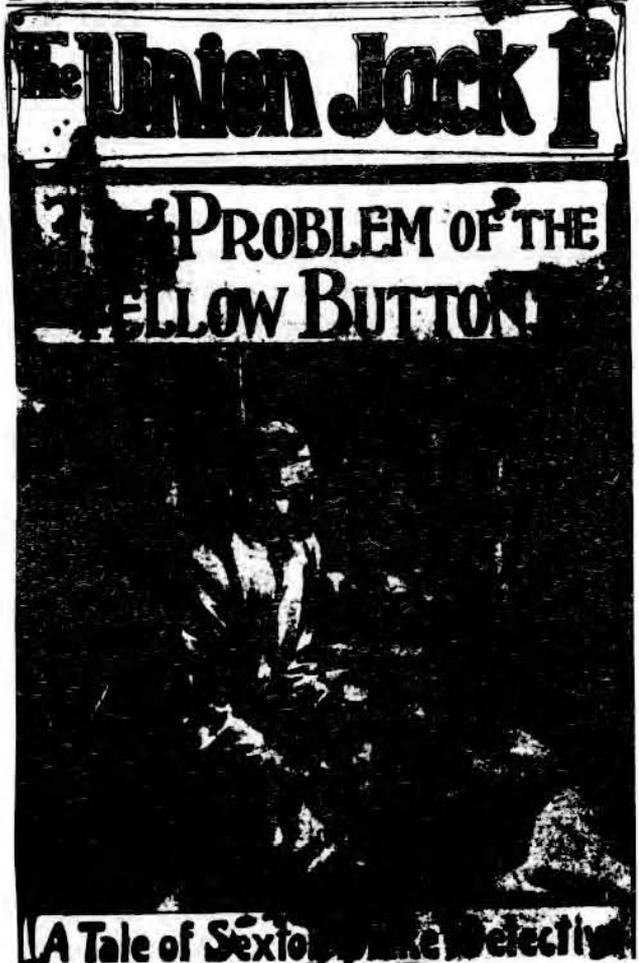
It has been suggested that Blakiana has a "Let's Be Controversial" column. What do Blake fans think about it? Please write to me if you are interested.

UP THE POLL

by J. E. M.

I was looking recently at the result

A DETECTIVE NOVEL FOR READERS OF ALL AGES.



of a modest little poll carried out by the Union Jack in 1932, as part of a prize competition. Blakians will recall the famous "Tram" series when six of the best-known UJ authors contributed stories based on an identical mystery situation presented to them by the Editor. Readers were invited to vote on the popularity of these yarns, the winning entry being the one whose list came nearest to the popular vote as a whole. This was the result of the ballot:

First:	E. S. Brooks.	<u>The Mystery of Blind Luke</u>	UJ 1490
Second:	Gwyn Evans.	<u>Fear Haunted!</u>	UJ 1489
Third:	Donald Stuart.	<u>The Witches' Moon</u>	UJ 1488
Fourth:	Anthony Skene.	<u>The Crook Crusaders</u>	UJ 1486
Fifth:	G. H. Tead.	<u>Revolt!</u>	UJ 1487
Sixth:	Gilbert Chester.	<u>The "Proud" Tram Mystery</u>	UJ 1485

Has anyone commented before on the fact that the order of preference arrived at by readers' votes was exactly the reverse of the order in which the stories appeared, apart from the preference for Anthony Skene's story over G. H. Teed's? One wonders if this result had any significance. Did it mean that the later the story came in the series the fresher it remained in readers' minds and, therefore, the better it seemed? If so, then clearly the earlier contributors were severely handicapped. That Skene's story, on this hypothesis, did better than it "ought" to have done is surely a tribute to his glittering creation, Zenith the Albino - a memorable figure for even the shortest memories! Indeed, one can't help feeling that had this story appeared later in the series - say, as fifth or sixth entry - he might well have secured a far larger vote from UJ readers. Nevertheless, as I wrote on a previous occasion (CD 286), the actual "winner" by E. S. Brooks was a worthy one, a compelling and attractive story.

It would be interesting to have the views of other Blakians on this old UJ "opinion poll."

THE SIX FACES OF MR. PROUD

by William Lister

Let me introduce you to Mr. Alfred Mowbray Proud. A man worthy of your attention. A man worthy of all readers of crime fiction. Perhaps the only man in the history of detective tales to die six times.

Not only to die six times, but six weeks in a row. And the cause of death? Heart failure in each case.

Of course we all know that Sherlock Holmes died and that his creator Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, brought him back, that on occasions Sexton Blake was presumed dead. Once it appeared that Dr. Fu Manchu had been executed - no such luck - back he came. However, is there any other fictional character, detective or criminal, who has died six weeks in succession? Well Mr. Proud has. This is why I want to introduce you to him.

Sexton Blake fans are no doubt aware of the "Proud Tram" series and our Alfred is the namesake. For those not aware, it all came about when in 1932, the Editor of the Union Jack asked six authors to write six stories without consulting each other. The idea being that towards the end of the tales the body of Alfred (through heart failure) along with an unconscious Sexton Blake, should be found on top of a tram in the depot surrounded by various articles. The authors were: Gilbert Chester, Anthony Skene, G. H. Teed, Donald Stuart, Gwyn Evans and Edwy Searles Brooks. No mean team. For present purposes we will dispense with Sexton Blake, the tram and the various articles and take a look at Mr. Alfred Mowbray Proud.

FACE ONE

Gilbert Chester sees our Alfred as a man out of work, on the dole, and married, yet able to flash a considerable amount of money. Blake found the wife, Mrs. Proud of Camden Town, a faded, tired-eyed woman. "A good husband mostly I'd say, though he did give me a lot of trouble - staying out at nights, and that, and us on the Dole." They lived in a prosperous looking house for a man on the dole, Mrs. Proud, however, remarked "He said he won a lot at the races."

This is face number one of Mr. Proud, later to die of heart failure on top of a tram. Glossop the artist, illustrates this scene on the Union Jack cover. Proud appears to be over sixty and stout.

FACE TWO

Anthony Skene now takes up his pen and Arthur becomes the Standard Bearer for the Crook Crusaders; to the police he is a nobody, a whiskey soak, once fined, once threatened with prison.

In this tale "The Crook Crusaders," Skene brings Alfred Proud to life, in my opinion, Proud steals the story. He lives! Even Blake has a liking for him. Proud is a bachelor going home every night to play the mandoline, his two mongrel dogs at his feet and the whiskey ready at hand for Proud.

Blake is later to find out that Proud is a dark horse, a man of many disguises, a poisoner and actual leader of the Crook Crusaders. The tale features Blake, Tinker, Coutts and Zenith, but Proud steals the show.

FACE THREE

Can you imagine that one day in 1932, G. H. Teed taking up his pen (or typewriter) his fertile brain working over the Proud problem, the title "Revolt," yes, he thinks, my Alfred Mowbray Proud will be a convict, a troublesome jailbird, stirring up a prison revolt. So a new Proud was born who was destined to die from heart failure on the top deck of a tram with Sexton Blake lying unconscious at his feet.

FACE FOUR

To Donald Stuart is given the honour of creating the fourth face of Proud, and he does it in the tale called "The Witches' Moon." Alfred Proud, jewel robber, the brains of a two-man partnership, very successful until Sexton Blake arrives on the scene, and, as we already know, destined to die naturally in Blake's presence.

FACE FIVE

I like Gwyn Evans, and by now I am more than interested as to the Alfred Proud who will appear from his pen. Our Alfred takes his new part in "Fear Haunted."

From the first paragraph, Mr. Proud takes the stage. Mr. Evans sees him like this: "Mr. Proud regarded his shining features in a strip of fly-blown mirror above the sink. A square rather wooden face with a prominent nose, slate grey eyes, with a tendency for a double chin. Thinning hair brushed back to hide a bald patch, and a delicate twirl to the ends of his moustache. A good face as faces go. Mr. Proud is married to a thin scrawney woman with a pinched, bad-tempered face and untidy mouse-coloured hair." Circumstances lead to

Mr. Proud becoming a conscience-haunted murderer from Sheffield. He doesn't hang even though it is 1932. Why? Because by request of the editor of the Union Jack, our Alfred has to die of heart failure on top of a tram.

FACE SIX

None other than Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks takes up his pen to complete the series in a tale called "Blind Luke." Here Mr. Proud dies for the sixth and last time. If before he was dead but would not lie down, this time he is dead for keeps. Never again will Mr. Alfred Mowbray Proud appear in print. Mr. Dickens would say - "Alfred Mowbray Proud was dead, as dead as a door nail."

Brooks sees Mr. Proud as a stoutish man, clean shaven, elderly. A florid face, bags under his eyes and unemployed, a past master at sponging. Twenty years married to a shabby faded woman, he has a stepdaughter Peggy, who turns out to be the long lost daughter of a Lord!!!

Once again though death finds Mr. Proud on top of a tram. The last of the six. Goodbye Mr. Proud.

I noticed some of the writers used Alfred Proud as an incidental character, while Gwyn Evans, Anthony Skene and Edwy Searles Brooks made him the main character, and in these tales Mr. Proud really seemed to live and really died.

Supporting case over the complete series included: Gilbert and Eileen Hale, Zenith the Albino, Mlle Roxane and Waldo the Wonderman.

* * * * *

Nelson Lee Column

I LIKE ST. FRANK'S, BUT -

by Philip Tierney

I discovered the "Nelson Lee" shortly before its demise. The reprinted "Hunter the Hun" serial, was running at the time. Since then I have read and re-read many St. Frank's stories with enjoyment, and I still do.

My knowledge of St. Frank's is confined mainly, though not entirely, to S. O. L. reprints of the early stories most of which I still possess.

Much as I enjoy them they are open to great criticism. They are much more far-fetched than Charles Hamilton's stories, (Hamilton's fantastic "Strong Alonzo" serial was exceptional in this respect), but this would not matter so much if the characters were not so grossly overdrawn.

Fatty Little, for example. Great pancakes! He couldn't ever speak without mentioning food. And, as for the amount he ate, Billy Bunter was nowhere in it. Bunter's capacity was rather a strain on the imagination, but Fatty Little's was utterly, utterly impossible. How the plum pudding could anyone believe in a character like that?

Then there was Ernest Lawrence who won a boxing championship without his headmaster knowing what was going on. And Jerry Dodd, the fantastic cricketer, who not only played in a Test Match, but outshone all the other players on the field. And Dick Goodwin, the schoolboy inventor from Lancashire, who might have been a tolerable character if Brooks had not made him say "Aye" almost every time he opened his mouth.

There were the cads, Ralph Leslie Fullwood (who reformed later and was replaced by the much more credible Bernard Forrest) and his friends, Gulliver and Bell. They had to be caddish in everything they said and did. In the first El Dorado serial, for example, they caused offence by trying to start a sing-song on a piano at a time when frivolity was out of place. But this trio were not the types to enjoy a sing-song anyway. Brooks made them behave out of character in an effort to portray them in character.

Probably E. S. B.'s greatest mistake in those early stories was in making Nipper the narrator. This not only gave the impression that Nipper was an insufferable swankpot, which he was certainly not intended to be, but it stretched author's license beyond breaking point.

It is of course quite common for authors to write in the first person as one of the characters in the story. But any author who does this imposes upon himself limitations which E. S. B. never recognized. An author is entitled to know what anyone in his story is saying, doing,

or even thinking. But a character in the story is not.

In "Treasure Island," to take one of countless examples, Jim Hawkins told all that it was possible for him to tell when he was present. But when he was absent the narrative was continued by Dr. Livesey.

But in those early St. Frank's stories, Nipper knew what everyone was doing, saying and thinking - whether he was present or absent.

Probably the later St. Frank's stories were better. I know some of them were. I have recently read the "Ezra Quirke" serial and the "death of Church" serial, both of which were vastly superior to those S. O. L. reprints.

But personally I think Brooks unlike Hamilton, had not achieved his peak as a writer in his school story days, and that he did later reach this peak in his adult detective stories of more recent years.

And I think this would have been his own opinion if he were here to express it. Otherwise, why should he have lost all interest in St. Frank's and started writing adult stories instead?

AUTHENTIC OR OTHERWISE?

by R. J. Godsave

The London Club Nelson Lee library is fortunate in having in its possession the very early St. Frank's series from the personal collection of the author E. S. Brooks.

Many of these St. Frank's Lees were of a date before the reprints which appeared in the Moster Library, and fill in the gap from No. 112 to No. 157 o. s. which in the past was virtually unknown to many Lee readers.

Brooks, from his early writings would appear to have a good knowledge of the sea and ships. We, who have had the privilege of being able to read some of his early letters to various Editors, which were printed in the 'C. D.' may wonder how it was possible for him to have had any practical nautical experience, and yet, be able to write with such authority on this subject.

The coming of Tom Burton series o. s. No. 137 to St. Frank's, introduces a low type sailing skipper and his mate - Captain Jelks and Mr. Larson. In the El Safra treasure series o. s. 213 - 220, Captain Grell and Mr. Starkey pit their wits against Sir Crawford Grey and his guests in the quest for the treasure. Once again the descriptive

writing of the sea and ships is of an authentic nature.

When E. S. Brooks attended the London Club meeting at Dulwich, in 1963, he stated that although he took the St. Frank's boys to the Canadian North-west he had never visited Canada. He said he found great help in obtaining local colour from the writings of Hulbert Footner. The series mentioned are o. s. No. 320 - 327.

It would appear that he gleaned a lot of his knowledge by extensive reading of the subject relevant to the type of story he was writing. It is essential that the authenticity of a subject must be a high priority to any author if he wants his story and characters to come alive.

* * * * *

DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 111 - Magnet No. 1090 - "Under Bunter's Thumb"

The blackmailing of an unscrupulous prefect or unpopular master was a time-honoured theme in Hamiltoniana. A photograph or some piece of writing was the normal incriminating evidence that allowed a junior to exercise power over the older person. The pattern of the story allowed some entertaining episodes until the situation could clearly go no further, and the evidence became destroyed.

"Under Bunter's Thumb" had all the hallmarks of such a story, and it was the first Magnet dated 1929, a fact which was made clear in the humorous opening when Bob Cherry asked Tubb if he was thinking of having his annual wash now that the New Year had arrived. Loder graciously asked Wharton to post a letter for him at Courtfield Post Office as he did not want anyone else to know that he was entering for a football competition. Loder disliked Wharton for his good qualities, not for any bad ones that he might possess, but he was a keen enough judge of character to realise that he could rely on Wharton. Unfortunately, Wharton became involved in a scrap with Ponsonby & Co., and the letter was later picked up by Bunter. It was addressed to J. Grafter, Esq., the local bookmaker.

The amusing part of the story revolved around Bunter's high moral principles which impelled him to warn Wharton to keep clear of such disreputable affairs in the future, and to tell Loder that if he had

lost a letter he should put full details on the notice board. It was at this stage that Loder first heard about Bunter's celebrated postal order, and was thus enabled to cash it in advance. Of course, Bunter could not resist the opportunity of ordering Loder about in public, and the situation became too explosive to be contained much longer.

It is interesting to compare Magnet 1090 with Gem 807, in which Manners photographed Mr. Selby listening at the keyhole of the Third Form classroom (he wanted to know what the fags were up to). In the Gem story there was a slightly different situation, the blackmailer acting as he did to prevent Mr. Selby from being harsh towards his younger brother, whereas Bunter in the Magnet story had no justification whatsoever for his actions. The Gem story was on a higher level, with Manners' moral dilemma clearly shown, whereas the Magnet story involved a pair of rascals, and the reader had precious little sympathy for either.

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 183. THE MACHINE.

Though there were long periods - too long - when Charles Hamilton was not writing Greyfriars and St. Jim's stories, there seems to have been no time during his writing career of, say, 1905 to 1940, when he was not constantly churning out masses of material for publication. There is no time when the thought could occur that the author was taking a holiday.

The mind boggles, as it has so often boggled in the past over the same matter, at the amount of close work which was involved - day after day, week after week, year after year. It wasn't only the thinking out of the plots, the pen-painting of the backgrounds, the characterisation, and the dialogue. There was the actual typing - for nobody has ever suggested that any of the typing of the Hamilton stories was done by anyone but himself.

Hamilton seems to have been a two-finger typist, which means that, apart from vast experience in this line, he was no expert on the keys. Yet the amount of typing he did each week must have been colossal.

To those of us who tap away occasionally on our Remingtons or Bluebirds, it would be something like hard labour if we had to type out even one Magnet story in a week. But for Hamilton, for a great many years, the Magnet story was only about a quarter of his week's work. Perhaps even less.

Take, for instance, a year like 1908 or 1909. He was writing almost all of the Gem and Magnet stories at that time. He was writing serials, some of which ran to 90,000 words. He was engaged with other series, like the Pelham tales - two of these often appeared in one week, one in the Boys' Realm and one in the Boys' Realm Football Library - the Cliveden series, a circus series about Joey Pye, any amount of stories for the Realm, the Friend, the Herald, the Marvel, and Pluck, not to mention stories for Trapps Holmes. The output was breathtaking.

One can find scores of Hamilton stories in the papers of the Hamilton Edwards' empire, though I have not yet discovered which was the first one to be published by the company which was later to be the Amalgamated Press. When I think I have found the earliest, I come on another still earlier one.

By 1909, Hamilton had pretty well progressed beyond being published anonymously under the intriguing tag "by a popular author."

The carpers have averred that Hamilton was not good in writing of sport. Technically, this may have been so, but he had the gift of making his matches interesting and fascinating, whereas the more knowledgeable man on sport could often be boring and dull. Hamilton's stories of soccer are legion - an intensely long serial (and intensely popular, if the editor is to be believed) was "Football Fortune," later published abridged in the B. F. L. He wrote series about soccer clubs, which does not surprise us, what is more surprising is that he wrote plenty of rugger stories also. He wrote masses of adventure stories, tales of cricket, and quite good detective tales. In fact, had he not become really famous for his school stories, he would still have been memorable for his other work.

It is odd, perhaps, that the work under his own name is the least remembered, while he won his greatest fame with pen-names.

The most striking factor about his mass of stories written in

the first decade of the century is the duplication of names of people. Actually, one can get the first clues of the authorship of some of the earlier work by coming across a familiar name.

More astonishing still is the fact that names of leading characters appear over and over again. It would be difficult to find any Hamilton story of the early days which does not contain some names which became famous years later when attached to other characters.

And the other day I even came on one of his schools which was named Mornington College.

What causes a writer to hang on to old names, and use them again and again? Names are easy enough to invent, and, in any case, there is always a directory of some sort to dip into. It has been suggested that Hamilton dipped liberally into Burke's Peerage. I wouldn't be surprised.

The further one delves into the history and career of this amazing man, Charles Hamilton, the more one marvels at the constant, life-long grind to which he condemned himself. What on earth makes a man turn himself into a machine in this way? Was it only for the financial reward, which was clearly enormous?

Others, like Jack North (Pentelow), and Sidney Drew, were deadeningly prolific writers, and, even more so was Henry St. John who possibly came the nearest to the Hamilton output, though it is unlikely that he anything like equalled it.

But Hamilton was unique. The amazingly high standard he maintained along with his mass production was something which one probably finds in no other writer in the wide, wide world.

But what a life of drudgery! And for what, beyond fame?

* * * * *

REVIEWS

THE GREYFRIARS HIKERS

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker: £2.75)

Once upon a time, not so very long ago, the south of England comprised pleasant country towns, charming villages and hamlets, dusty winding lanes, thatched cottages with roses round the doors, and

quaint old inns. And, of course, wooded hills and undulating fields, dotted with buttercups and daisies. That was before the monstrous dragon - Traffic - pushed his great snout further and further forward, with his menacing roar, his horrible stench, and his giant jaws which ate up the lovely countryside and crunched history and charm into nothingness.

The 10-story 1933 holiday series, now reprinted, is probably the most delightful of the Magnet's summer series, set in England, and it gives us a nostalgic journey through the Southern England mentioned above.

The varying incidents, with the Famous Five and Bunter hiking through the Home Counties, are linked by a skeleton plot concerning a bank robbery and the secret of hidden loot carried in Bob Cherry's Holiday Annual. This link is not so overplayed that it becomes tedious, but, in any case, there is ample compensation in the delicious, summery tales which range from a haunted castle to the tithe war.

It is, of course, the perfect atmosphere of old summer days which makes this series so very attractive. It is a certain hit for all who remember England as it was before the speculators and the planners got to work.

A chance to enjoy the sort of holiday which must, sadly, be beyond recall in anything but memory. Ponsonby features in the series, as his normal villainous self, and Horace Coker adds to the fun at times.

Shields illustrates the earlier tales, and Chapman the later ones.

THE BOYS OF ST. JIM'S

Martin Clifford
(Howard Baker: £2.75)

The seven Gems in this volume are of the early part of the year 1939, and the St. Jim's stories concerned are themselves reprints of yarns originally published in 1918.

Without being particularly noteworthy stories, they are all competently told and full of interest. A 3-story series concerns the arrival of Roylance from New Zealand, a young fellow who gets on the wrong side of Manners as a result of Manners Minor - and Tom Merry gets involved in the quarrel.

Interesting is a traditional-type tale of house rivalry, here

entitled "The St. Jim's Prize-Packet." It was originally named "Walker," and some readers may recall that, in a C. D. editorial some time ago, we discussed the application and origin of the slang term "Walk-Er," as used in the story.

"Tom Merry's Boast" (once "Tom Merry's Brag") was welcomed when it first appeared, as Tom Merry emerged from a long period of neglect. A pleasant football tale. In another little romp, Gussy becomes a gambler with the best of motives.

Altogether, a very jolly and welcome volume, which, in addition to the St. Jim's tales, presents fine Cedar Creek yarns and some stories about the boys of the Benbow.

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

W. T. THURBON (Cambridge): Re Mr. Bridgewater's interesting article, is it not likely that both James Thurber and Gwyn Evans were influenced by Mrs. Malaprop from "The Rivals?" Incidentally, is there any evidence that James Thurber ever read Sexton Blake stories?

MRS. J. PACKMAN (London): The story of Union Jack No. 1023, entitled "The Tabu of Confucius" is the first of a set of three tales about Wu Ling and the famous Ling Tse Vase which was first mentioned in U. J. 1000 and a Tabu placed upon it. The other two tales are U. J. No. 1026, and 1031, entitled "The Slave of the Thieves Market" and the "Adventure of the Giant Bean." The action begins in San Francisco and ends in London, after a trail going round half the world. Another of Mr. G. H. Teed's sets of magnificent tales.

W. O. G. LOFTS (London): I don't think there is any mystery about the reprinted S. B. L. "The Crimson Conjuror," as it was a policy in that period for stories to be reprinted slightly altered from the originals. "Donald Stuart" rewrote several from Andrew Murray. J. G. Brandon rewrote some from Francis Warwick. Likewise W. J. Banyfield. It was the latter author who rewrote the story in question, I believe, Gwyn of course being several years passed on. I enjoyed

Guy N. Smith's article on Dixon Hawke. I recently passed the house in Dover Street, but Hawke had no character or personality at all. It was forbidden by Thomson editors for any author to put any sort of life into him. Maybe because of this, he was never as popular as Sexton Blake. Lastly, T. Hopkinson's query on Tom Holland. As far as I know this is the very first mention of this author in our hobby, and the tales are obscure to say the least.

J. McFARLANE (Glasgow): O. W. Wadham mentions the People's Friend and calls it an English paper. I never knew there was an English People's Friend. The only one I know is the one published by D. C. Thomson of Dundee. If Mr. Wadham means the Scottish People's Friend, why does he call it an English paper? As it is a Scottish paper, if he had to mention nationality he might at least have said British. He certainly had no right to call a Scottish paper English.

CHRISTOPHER O'LEARY (aged 11½) (Loughborough): Just a note to tell you how much I enjoy "The Story Paper Collectors' Digest." (When my dad has finished it.) I read through all the pages, which are very interesting. Being a Charles Hamilton fan, and not having the pleasures of Magnet, Gem, Boys' Friend and all the other good comics, it is nice to read about them in articles, and "Danny's Diary."

(There was an article about the Black Sapper and others with eyesight for seeing in the dark, in No. 292. At the time he was boring his way through the front pages of the Hotspur, which I get every week.)

I expect others share my dismay at finding the Rover has quietly fizzled out and amalgamated with the Wizard and now only the stories remain (two of them). The rest are picture stories from the Wizard. A bit like the format of the Hotspur once.

My Dad and I collect old books. This is a very interesting hobby - a Holiday Annual every Christmas - and very rewarding. "The Engineers in Fur Coats" a story in the Rover Annual, was repeated in pictures retitled "The Engineers came with Tooth and Claw" and, of course, shortened, in the Hotspur Book for Boys 1972. We are waiting for something else like this to happen. (Keyhole Kate and Pansy Potter are now reserve characters in the Sparky and Screw Driver has reappeared in the new big Dandy.)

Thanks again for bringing me something to brighten up the month.

GERALD FISHMAN (New York): Last Saturday I went to an exhibition of Comic Art in which dealers from all over the U. S. A. come to sell their wares, namely every conceivable American Comic ever published and while it was interesting I was a little bored as I am only interested in British O. B. B's. Anyway as I was strolling around the various stands I stopped at one in particular for no reason, when out of the corner of my eye I saw sitting quite unobtrusively, all neatly wrapped in cellophane, the first 27 issues of The Bullseye, starting date January 1931, featuring such old stories as "The House of Thrills," "Mortimer Hood, the Millionaire Tec" and many fine stories of similar nature.

I was very pleased at my good fortune as it is virtually impossible to find any British Old Boys' Papers and to find a first issue, I think it's remarkable. I do not know the value of them but it doesn't really matter one way or another. It's the finding of them that brings enjoyment to a collector, don't you think?

Fond regards from this side of the briny.

L. SUTTON (Manchester): It is not always easy to pinpoint the particular attractions of any magazine but I do think a great part of the Bullseye's draw are the illustrations which are unique, and almost as startling as those on the fronts of the pre-war 'Horror' and 'Terror' mags. Many collectors will know the same illustrator's work appeared in colour on the front of the Surprise. The gloomy and hag-ridden pictures in the Bullseye have fascinated Bullseye enthusiasts since the early 1930's, when to me the magazine was Friday's best offering.

The tales appear simple now and are anything but scaring, but nostalgia overlooks many imperfections. Always a seeker of the off-beat, as a boy I enjoyed the Bullseye, especially the two Phantom series, the Inn of a Thousand Secrets, (an idea pinched from Sweeney Todd) The Mummy's Hand, and last but not least, the John Pentonville stories which ran for the whole 183 issues.

Collecting Bullseyes is very slow work!

ALAN STEWART (London): I agree entirely with your editorial. I certainly cannot recall discussing the papers at school. I attended

'Trinity Academy' in Edinburgh and the only paper in evidence there was the 'Children's Newspaper,' no doubt the lads lapped up their 'Thompson papers (I had no time for them) but they were never mentioned. As soon as I arrived home I was in another World with the Magnet and Gem, and as for swapping - perish the thought! They were my Treasures, and were placed carefully in my cupboard. My brother never bought any papers (Scottish beast!) and was allowed to read mine, but woe betide him if he doubled them over or creased them - happy days!

MISS M. ALLISON (Leeds): How I enjoyed your remarks about Agatha Christie. The tie-ups are fascinating I agree. It was only just last week, when reading once again *The Pale Horse*, I realised Mark Easterbrook's cousin Rhoda met her Col. Despard in *Cards On The Table*.

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News of the Clubs

NORTHERN

Meeting on Saturday, 14th July

A discussion took place on the apparent anti-Americanism of Charles Hamilton. Had he been unfortunate in his encounters with Americans? Or might it have something to do with his lady friend from New York - to whom he refers in the words of Orlando as "the fair, the chaste, the inexpressive she?" Though (p. 76 of CH's Autobiography) we read, "She was an American, and Frank liked Americans."

So was he really anti-American? Or may it not have been, as Geoffrey Wilde asked, that he was anti-money-grubbing?

Later came a quiz organised by Mollie in which Geoffrey Wilde came first and Ron Hodgson, Ron Rhodes and Bill Williamson shared second place.

Geoffrey Wilde gave two readings in our series 'These you have loved.' One was from the Portercliffe Hall Series of 1935, and the other was from the Valentine Compton Series of 1936. Both series, said Geoffrey, he felt were underrated.

In the one we have Bunter fast asleep in the haunted room at Portercliffe Hall. It is Fishy's plan to make Bunter so fed up that he will go home! But Fishy, dressed as a ghost in a sheet to frighten Bunter, is himself glued to the floor in terror as he sees what he supposes is the real thing! Bunter, needless to say, snores on!

In the other Harry Wharton turns the tables on the scapegrace, daredevil Bounder and reverses their accustomed roles! In the underground tunnel it is Smithy who cries caution and Wharton who is careless of risks!

Then, another quiz, this time by Ron Rhodes.

Questions ranged from 'Who was the sharp-eyed animal who became a master at Greyfriars?' (Larry Lynx) to 'Who is the scholarship boy in the classical Fourth at Rookwood?' (Tom Rawson)

And work this one out for yourselves: If I started at Greys, went to Wells, calling at Hurlingham on the way, whereabouts would I be at St. Jim's?

(At any rate, some of us got it!)

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LONDON

"A Rose between Two Thorns" was how Don Webster described our lady Chairman surrounded by himself and myself, subbing for holidaying Ben Whiter at the East Dulwich meeting on Sunday, 15 July. Don Webster was asked to say a few words as, sadly, this will be his final consecutive meeting. He is to move to Bideford, early next month, but stated he hopes to see us at special do's in the future. Brian Doyle proposed a vote of thanks to Don for his past fine work and wished him every happiness in the future. John Wernham told us that he hoped the Charles Hamilton Companion would be ready in September. Eager hearts were thrilled to learn that this was only Volume One and that it is all printed and now just awaits binding. The Hamilton Museum is now the happy possessor of a complete edition of nice copies of the Holiday Annual. Bob Blythe read the Newsletter for July 1956, after which members were reminded that it was in order to pay deposits for the Cambridge Outing, an event we keenly anticipate in early

September. Laurie Sutton read from Magnet 69 (1909) in which Harry Wharton reveals a deep affection for Toddles, a sick small boy. Don Webster read a dramatic scene in which Dr. Locke expels Wingate Minor from Greyfriars. After an enjoyable tea, Josie Packman asked Roger Jenkins to read Len's Cedar Creek article from the 1953 Collectors' Digest Annual, and then conducted her own quiz of Sexton Blake character names. Brian Doyle won, Charlie Wright coming second. Tom Wright took us on another hilarious jaunt to St. Sam's. The meeting concluded with a plea by Bob Blythe that we plan meeting agendas for several months ahead to preclude a running out of items prior to the seven o'clock closing time. This will be discussed more fully next month. Please inform August meeting hosts, Bob and Betty Acraman, at Ruislip, if you are going to be there.

RAY HOPKINS

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CAMBRIDGE

The Club met at 3 Long Road, on Sunday, 1 July. The Secretary read a letter from the Northern Club expressing interest in the idea of a Federation of Clubs.

Arrangements for the visit of the London Club were discussed, and a draft programme prepared.

The draft programme of meetings for 1973-74 was offered.

Trevor Page showed a programme of films from the National Film Institute, including "Mickey Mouse," Charley Chaplin in "Easy Street," Laurel and Hardy, Keystone Cops, and extracts from "Top Hat." A most enjoyable programme.

There was a general discussion on books recently read, and a surprisingly wide variety of reading matter was revealed.

Next meeting will be on Sunday, 12th August, when final arrangements for the programme for the London Clubs visit will be made.

London now propose to come by coach, arriving in Cambridge at about 12.30. There will be a brief tour of the Colleges and then a meeting at 3 Long Road, at 3 p.m. London members coming direct by

car should arrive at 3 Long Road by 2.45 p.m.

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SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

At our June meeting our President, Sid Smyth, and new Secretary, Marion Brockman, unhappily both sick, were unable to be present. However, as the evening wore on conversation (with so easy and pleasant a topic as our common hobby) flourished: at times one wondered whether we were back in some Common Room on the first day of term, we had so much to recall.

Stanley Nicholls told us he had heard from the Sherlock Holmes Society (U. K.) and this led to a discussion of Sherlock Holmes literature generally, and to mention of the collaboration of Conan Doyle's son and John Dickson Carr in adding to the literature stories which supplied the details of cases just mentioned in passing in the original Conan Doye stories. Stanley has promised to enlarge on the subject of Sherlock Holmes at our next meeting. He has a copy of an early German publication with an illustrated Sherlock Holmes story in it, which we hope he will bring along.

Bette Pate and Victor Colby produced a very interesting letter from Chris Lowder, on the subject of G. H. Teed and his Sexton Blake stories: so interesting indeed that it made the writer, a "Magnet educated errand boy" wonder if perhaps he'd missed something as a young reader. The letter was in reply to congratulations sent to him on his article on G. H. Teed in the last Collectors' Digest Annual.

Victor also read a letter, from S. Gordon Swan of W. A. , on the subject of G. H. Teed which admirably complemented the letter from Chris.

Our next meeting will be at our new meeting place, the Golden Capitol Cafe, Campbell Street, Sydney, on Thursday, 30th August.

RON BROCKMAN

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WANTED: Certain Bullseyes. Offer in exchange some series Nelson Lee (o.s.) in excellent condition, few Bullseyes, others.

SUTTON, 41 SWALECLIFFE AVE., MANCHESTER, M23 9DN.

creator had explained, "and in the first few volumes no amount of re-writing and lengthening, even from 25,000 words to 60,000, could make him more than a rather heavy-footed 'Saint.'

Most old boys' enthusiasts will know that Creasey wrote five novels for the Sexton Blake Library between 1933 and 1939, "Private Carter's Crime," "The Case of the Mad Inventor," "The Great Air Swindle," "The Man From Fleet Street," and "The Case of the Frightened Financier."

He also turned his hand to D. C. Thomson's Dixon Hawke series, George Newnes' Flag Library for Boys, and the Mellifont Sports Stories - to any publisher of the day who would buy what he wrote.

No-one who met John Creasey - and I was fortunate enough to visit New Hall in April 1972 - was left in any doubt of his tremendous personality. He was a powerhouse of energy.

A plump, genial, white-haired fellow, guiltily over-weight, he was justifiably proud of having written all his series books in advance to the end of 1975. He had, thereby, created time in which to tackle his Scotland Yard saga. This, I felt sure, was intended to be his coup de grace.

For if John Creasey shared one thing in common with Charles Hamilton, besides his prolific output, it was failure to achieve literary "respectability" during his lifetime, and it rankled.

Not that the merit of his later and better work went completely unsung: in the United States, where academics take the genre of mystery fiction very seriously, he was acknowledged as a master of his craft.

At home, his Gideon books, by "J. J. Marric," received high praise from the critics - until the identity behind the pseudonym was revealed. "By strange coincidence," Creasey wrote, "the number and quality of reviews dropped sharply in England, but rose even higher in the United States."

If ever there was a parallel case of literary snobbery, it was that shown by George Orwell to Charles Hamilton 25 years previously.

Some enthusiasts might now be given to arguing the respective claims of Creasey and Hamilton to be "the world's most prolific author," surely a futile exercise.

Of one thing, however, we can be sure: Creasey, who was not writing to a weekly deadline, spurned any suggestion of using substitute writers. Every word was his own.

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THOSE FOREIGN LANGUAGE MASTERS

by H. Truscott

Hamilton has often been criticised, by Orwell and others, for making comic characters of the foreign language masters at his schools, with their broken English, foreign phrase construction for English sentences, their love of stifling hot rooms, their inclination to a sentimental view of the boys, and, at the other extreme, their temper - their excitability. We know that not all foreigners are like this, and it is true that for a long time this was the Englishman's idea of a Frenchman, or a German. But why was it? There is a basis of truth in this picture, and it is in the English educational system around the end of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century (when these stories were begun) that it was encouraged. Hamilton is building on what he knew; in fact, he is building on what I know, from personal experience, and on what Jerome K. Jerome knew. In his THREE MEN ON THE BUMMEL, Jerome gives a humorous account of how Ahn's First Course came into being; I quote the final paragraph:

'Lest, in spite of all, the British schoolboy should obtain, even from the like of "Ahn," some glimmering of French, the British educational method further handicaps him by bestowing upon him the assistance of what is termed, in the prospectus, "a native gentleman." The native French gentleman, who, by the by, is generally a Belgian, is no doubt a most worthy person, and can, it is true, understand and speak his own language with tolerable fluency. There his qualifications cease. Invariably, he is a man with a quite remarkable inability to teach anybody anything. Indeed, he would seem to be chosen not so much as an instructor as an amuser of youth. He is always a comic figure. No Frenchman of a dignified appearance would be engaged for any English school. If he possesses by nature a few harmless peculiarities, calculated to cause merriment, so much the more is he esteemed by his employers. The class naturally regards him as an animated joke. The two to four hours a week that are deliberately wasted on this ancient farce are looked forward to by the boys as a merry interlude in an otherwise monotonous existence. And then, when the proud parent takes his son and heir to Dieppe merely to discover that the lad does not know enough to call a cab, he abuses not the system but its innocent victim.'

Jerome wrote this in the early nineties; this system was still in

vogue in numbers of schools thirty to forty years later. I should say that this habit was the only real blot on the education in this country in the twenties; in most other ways today's methods (when they remain stationary long enough to be properly experienced) have deteriorated in solid results, throughout the mass of the country's children. But this particular thing we have put right this far, that as a rule today French, or German, or whatever language, is taught either by an English teacher who knows it (the German system of one hundred years ago, in fact, substituting 'German' for 'English') or by a native of that particular country who not only knows the subject but can teach it and command respect. I know that at the County High I attended in the late twenties the one blot on the teaching side of the school was that the teaching of French was in the hands of a Belgian (Jerome is right this far, too) who, while not quite so much a figure of fun as Hamilton's characters, was sufficiently so to make French lessons often a good deal of an uproar. Admittedly, some boys did manage to learn some French (I did myself) but nowhere near so much as we ought to have done. The man was well-meaning but he was soft one moment, hard the next; he had manners and customs we boys did not like. He tended, if he was near one, to drop a patter of rain upon one when he spoke - an unfortunate arrangement of his teeth, no doubt, but it did not endear him to us. His English was funny, and I know that it struck me as ironical that he was trying to teach us (at times, almost imploring us to learn) beautiful French, while he had not bothered to master to anything like a reasonable extent what I already regarded as beautiful English. I am sure that he would have got a better response from us if he had troubled to learn English to a rather better standard than he had. And he did give French construction to English sentences, just as Hamilton has his language teachers do. He had, too, the irritating habit of losing his temper suddenly, giving out lines or using the cane, and then putting his arm round the victim (who often was not the culprit - but if the real culprit tried to own up M. Bache would not listen, and the intervention simply met with lines) and saying "Frien's, hein?" This made me squirm to see and hear; and he would often make it still worse by wanting to shake hands with the particular boy at the end of the lesson. It is not surprising that his lessons were often community rags. So that I have a

lot of sympathy with Hamilton's caricatures. They are caricatures, to some extent, but not nearly so much as people today may imagine, who are too young to have had such an experience. There is a whole lot of truth in these portraits.

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EDITOR'S FAREWELL

by W. O. G. Lofts

It is always sad when a paper ceases publication. Not only for the editor, but also for the loyal reader. It has been my experience to meet several editors who have just lost their papers, and to attend the farewell parties, usually held in a saloon bar down Fleet Street. The evening was very similar to an Irish wake, and a sad occasion, with the editor discussing what exactly went wrong, and brooding that its loss was a reflection on his ability. Fortunately, however, in large publishing firms, he is usually given another job, but more often in an inferior position such as working by himself on a yearly Annual. Unless he had resigned from this tedious task, and the powers that be lose faith in his ability, its more than possible that in time he will be given a new paper to work on.

In the history of boys' paper publishing, there have been all sorts of editorial goodbye chats in the final issue. Some, to be quite frank, are downright dishonest, and announce with a fanfare that their paper is to be incorporated or amalgamated with another simply to make a gigantic super publication. The actual truth is that the finishing paper was a flop, and that the latter had a far superior circulation. Other editors, more honest, freely admitted that readers had not supported them as they had hoped, and they were finishing simply because of poor sales. Many papers of course, ceased without any warning, with serial stories held in mid-air. Most of these were around 1940, and because of paper shortage. In this category, comes famous Magnet. The late Mr. C. M. Down who was on the staff from the very first issue in 1908, and who finished up as Companion Papers editor - told me how sad and disappointed he always was, in not having the chance to say goodbye to so many loyal readers. Told simply by a Director with no sentiment, to place all the Magnet office files, documents, etc., in a large box. They were locked away, and never to be seen again.

But certainly one of the most amusing, and startling 'goodbye' chats that I have ever read, was in the final issue of Boys' Magazine in 1934. Bernard Buley, the editor, simply announced "that for some time he had had the wanderlust fever, and travelling itch again, and was joining an expedition to the Amazon." He urged readers to buy the Amalgamated Press Champion, next week. The whole irony of all this was that Boys' Magazine had quite healthy sales, whilst other Allied Newspaper publications had not. An offer from Fleetway House to buy Boys' Magazine, a rival to their Champion, was too good to refuse.

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ERIC FAYNE urgently wants good copies of GEMS 817, 826, 828 and 832.