

STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Vol. 28 No 326

FEBRUARY 1974

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BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NO. 22

NO. 22

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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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PUBLIC LIBRARIES

At the little Hampshire town, close to which I live, they have just opened a new public library to replace the old one. The new library has cost £170,000, and as my rates have doubled in the three years I have lived in Hampshire and are still rocketing every time they come in, I can be excused, perhaps, for wondering whether a library at half the price would not have answered the purpose just as well. However, that's life in the seventies. The glut of spending is staggering, is it not?

I am reminded of the Carnegie Library in Gravesend, which I have always regarded as a model among libraries. It is as charming and well-conducted today as when I was a child, which is a long time ago

as the crow flies.

Nowadays, of course, borrowers wander among the books to make their selections, a system which has its obvious advantages, but is probably a boon for book thieves. It was different when I was a youngster.

Then, there was a giant window, packed with numbers, some in red and some in blue. You took a library catalogue, looked up the book you wanted, and found the number allotted to that particular book. Then you referred to the giant window. If the book number was shown in blue, the book was available. If shown in red, the book was "out".

Actually the numbers were on little tin trays which fitted into slots. The blue number was at one end of the tray, and the red number at the other end. You would ask the librarian for the required book, quoting the number. She would obtain the book for you, and withdraw from the window the little tin tray which had shown the blue number. Into the tray she would insert your library ticket, then reversing the tray and returning it to its slot with the number now showing in red.

I sometimes wonder what they did with all those little blue and red trays when, many years back, the system was changed. I wonder whether any of them found a place in the town's museum. Did anyone else come across this method in libraries long ago?

Before I leave that Gravesend Library I must just refer to a book out of which I once cheated them. It was entitled "Dragooning a Dragoon", written by an author named E. Livingston Prescott, and published by Hutchinson in 1903. That date is really surprising, for it was not until many years later that my sister once came in with it from the Library. She read it aloud to us, and we all loved it. On many occasions in the years which followed, I borrowed the same book from the Library, and read it again with unflinching enjoyment. In my view it is one of the finest novels ever written. The story is fascinating in plot, and the story-teller was a master of his craft.

Much, much later I badly wanted to have the book in my own library. I could not get it. It was long out of print, and I found it impossible to obtain it through any of the normal channels for obtaining rare books.

Some time in the nineteen-thirties, I went back to Gravesend

Library, and to my astonishment and pleasure the book was still there, and in really wonderful condition. I borrowed it yet again, read it again, and enjoyed every word of it yet again.

And now the old gentleman in black took a hand, suggesting evil ideas to my normally law-abiding nature. I kept the book. When eventually they wrote to me from the Library to inform me that its return was overdue, I reported it as lost - and paid for it. "Dragooning a Dragoon" was mine at last, even though I cheated to get it. It is still one of my most cherished possessions.

Occasionally I have lent it to somebody reliable - a risky proceeding, I confess - and the new reader has inevitably enthused over this remarkable story in the same way that I enthuse over it.

Has anyone of my readers ever come across "Dragooning a Dragoon"? Or any story by Livingston Prescott, for he wrote a number of others, though I have never seen any of the others?

I wonder how many such stories and writers have been simply lost in the mists of time.

OUT OF STOCK

Those of us who browse over our old boys' books frequently come across the stock situation. One of them I came on recently in Boys' Realm, in a serial entitled "Red and Green Lights" by E. Beeston. Somebody was crossing the railway lines when his foot was caught in the points as they were changed from the far-off signal-box. He could not get his foot free, and a train was rushing down on him. The stock escape is brought about by someone who comes to the rescue, unfastens the laces of the trapped person, and drags him clear, just before the express thunders past.

I recall the same episode in an Augusta Anstruther-Browne story in the early School Friend, and I expect it occurred now and then in the Magnet and Gem.

One of those stock occurrences which are so familiar. This particular one I always found pretty unbelievable, though I suppose it might be within the bounds of possibility.

DELAYS

Last month we were nearly a fortnight late in getting the monthly

copy of C. D. to our loyal readers. Our printers, like most firms, are on a 3-day week, and the parcel post is chaotic at the time of my writing this. Delay, as readers will appreciate, is, in these troubled times, a matter entirely beyond my control.

Things may be better on the industrial front next month, but, in case they are not, I appeal to all to be patient and give us a long breathing space while times are hard. We are all doing our best under the most difficult conditions.

THE EDITOR

* * * * *

Danny's Diary

FEBRUARY 1924

The first Rookwood story of the month in the Boys' Friend was "Backing Up Cuffy." Cuffy is always good for a real laugh, and he did not fail us this time. Tommy Dodd told Cuffy to hurl a snowball at the first person to come through the door of the School House. And the first one to emerge happened to be the Head, Dr. Chisholm.

Then the start of a new series - one of those rebellion affairs which are always done so well at Rookwood. It opened with "Mr. Dalton's Dilemma". Dr. Chisholm was expecting some very important visitors whom he was going to show over the school. So Mr. Dalton took charge of the Sixth, to leave the Head free, and Carthew was put in charge of the Fourth. And an inky Carthew was flung out of the Fourth Form room, right at the feet of the very important visitors and the Head. Later, Mr. Dalton is ordered to punish all the Fourth, but he fancies that Carthew himself was to blame.

Mr. Dalton gets the sack, and, in "The Fourth Form Rebels", Mr. Mooney has an unhappy time when the Fourth has to join his class, the Shell, for shared lessons.

In "Up Against the Head", the Fourth take "We want Dicky" for their motto in their campaign to get their old form master reinstated, and the Head finds himself locked in a box-room. All exciting and good fun.

The new Prime Minister, Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, has formed his Cabinet which includes Mr. Philip Snowden as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Mr. Arthur Henderson as Home Secretary.

The Magnet is a patchwork of a paper these days, with the Greyfriars tales slotted in among a long instalment of a serial in small type, another complete tale, the Greyfriars Herald, and a longish editor's chat. And the Greyfriars tales are patchy affairs, too.

The only passably decent tale this month was the opening one, "Coker's Brain-Wave". A hypnotist is appearing at the new Ionic Theatre in Courtfield, and Bunter is his secret assistant, being paid with a dozen 5s/9d seats for the show. Coker employs the hypnotist to hypnotise Blundell and compel him to give Coker a place in the Fifth Football Team. But the hypnotist is a fraud. A few funny moments, providing you laugh easily, in this one, but the rest of the month was awful.

In "Mauly's Amazing Adventure", Mauly falls asleep in a train and wakes up in a siding. He lands among some criminals, who make him dig, and somebody dives into the sea, and the end comes, if you haven't been bored stiff before you get to it. "Bunter's Poor Relations" was another hackneyed bit. Uncle Claud and Aunt Claribel pretend to be very poor, in order to give Bunter a lesson. All too silly for words. February ended with "The White Feather", in which Bob Cherry is accused of cowardice, because Ponsonby blackmails him over a secret concerning Phyllis Howell. So embarrassing it made me itch.

The Farne Islands off Northumberland have been purchased by the National Trust as a bird sanctuary, which is nice for our feathered friends.

The exciting and original "Dr. Karnak" series has drawn to a close this month in the Nelson Lee Library. Dr. Karnak, that very mysterious curator of the St. Frank's museum, exerted an evil influence over De Valerie and a little band of juniors who called themselves the Sorcerers' Club. In "The Spell of the Mystic", Handforth provided the fun and games with some fancy skating, while Dr. Karnak hypnotised De Valerie to make him do harm to Lee. Then, in "The Temple of Silence", where some Egyptians practice some odd rites on Bannington Moor, Dr. Karnak himself is saved from being burned at the stake, a

warm end which his old enemies had in store for him. The final stories of this top-class series is "The Wages of Treachery", in which Karnak and his avengers are disposed of in an explosion on a yacht at sea. Willy Handforth is to the fore in this tale.

There has also been another new St. Frank's book available this month. A new story entitled "Pots of Money" in the Boys' Friend Library. I wanted to read it, so I borrowed fourpence from Mum and bought it for a birthday present for Doug.

The Gem, like the Magnet, is a bit of a jig-saw, and the quality of the stories changes with lightning speed. "The Hermit of Moat Grange", about a scientist who finds out how to make artificial diamonds, had plenty of plot without being very interesting, and the next tale "The Refugee of St. Jim's" was a boring bit about a cousin of Digby, who comes to hide at St. Jim's.

After this, another new series with the old writer bang back in form. In "Len's Luck", the Terrible Three, with Gussy, sheltered in a shack and found a boy of their own age also sheltering there. He was Len Lee, who had left Wodehouse School in the north, owing to the death of his grandfather who had supported him. Len is an orphan with few friends or relatives. Later, Len stops wealthy Mr. Pomfret from committing suicide, and Mr. Pomfret adopts Len and sends him to St. Jim's as his nephew Len Pomfret, the real Len Pomfret having died in a skating accident. In the next story "Len at St. Jim's", Tom Merry recognises Len as the waif of the shack, and Len tells Tom the story of Mr. Pomfret, confidentially. The series continues. Very nicely written stuff, this.

At the pictures we have seen Mae Murray in "The French Doll"; Richard Talmadge in "Taking Chances"; George Robey in "The Rest Cure"; Norma Talmadge in "Ashes of Vengeance"; Gloria Swanson in "The Impossible Mrs. Bellew", and a welcome return visit of the lovely film "Way Down East."

* * * * *

COLLECTOR REQUIRES: Sexton Blake Libraries, especially 1st series 1915. £2 offered for No. 11. Also Union Jacks, especially years 1920-1922. Few duplicates for exchange.

H. A. OWEN

28 NARCISSUS RD., WEST HAMPSTEAD, LONDON N.W.6.

BLAKIANA

conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

I have recently acquired several copies of the New Magnet Library which contain stories of Nick Carter the famous American detective. Some of these tales are reputed to be re-writes of Blake stories which appeared in the Union Jack circa 1908 to 1914. So far, I have not been able to read any of the books, but as soon as I possibly can, I will read them very carefully and try to discover which Sexton Blake stories they are, and then publish my findings in Blakiana.

The short Sexton Blake stories which I discovered in some early Boys' Realms, appear to have been written by William Murray Graydon. Here is a list of the titles and date of publication: -

| | | |
|---------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| No. 219 | 11 August, 1906 | The Case of the Opium Smoker |
| No. 220 | 18 August, 1906 | The Case of the Two Leopards |
| No. 221 | 25 August, 1906 | Lord Avonmore's Gold Plate |
| No. 222 | 1 September, 1906 | The Case of Lord Armadale's Burglar |
| No. 223 | 8 September, 1906 | The Case of the German Prince |
| No. 224 | 15 September, 1906 | The Case of the City Office Boy |
| No. 225 | 22 September, 1906 | The Case of the Railway Manager's Son |
| No. 226 | 29 September, 1906 | The Case of the Eastwich Mail-cart |
| No. 227 | 6 October, 1906 | His Lordships' Valet |
| No. 228 | 13 October, 1906 | The Missing Huntsman |
| No. 229 | 20 October, 1906 | The Case of the Young Secretary |
| No. 230 | 27 October, 1906 | The Footman from France |
| No. 231 | 3 November, 1906 | The Obstinate Witness |

These issues of the Boys' Realm also contain stories by Charles Hamilton and John Finnemore.

SEXTON BLAKE SNIPPETS:

Thoughts on some items from the Union Jack

by J. E. M.

One way for a journal to discover who are its most popular

contributors is to conduct an opinion poll of its readers. This, of course, is not always an infallible guide, since many of us are too busy or - let's be honest - too lazy to express an opinion when this involves pen, paper and a journey to the postbox. However, there seems no doubt that a readers' poll held by the Union Jack nearly half a century ago on the popularity of its illustrators was, as the experts say, statistically significant.

The results of this poll were referred to in UJ No. 1169, and showed Eric Parker well ahead of the field with 878 votes. Also-rans were Val Reading (656), J. H. Valda (421), A. Jones (242) and H. M. Lewis (151). At this time, Parker had been illustrating the UJ for only a couple of years or so, but had already, it appears, established the pre-eminence he was to retain to the end.

One could present a history of the UJ from around 1924, almost exclusively through a collection of Parker's drawings. A few years ago, OBB enthusiasts had a handsome Billy Bunter Picture Book based on the work of C. H. Chapman. What about a Sexton Blake book based on the work of Parker? Including his unforgettable portraits of Blake's adversaries, such a work would provide nostalgic enjoyment par excellence. Parker's brisk, 'cinematic' style would also, I am sure, appeal to a modern audience. Is this a project to be undertaken by our Blakian editor; or is it a case of 'Over to you, Mr. Howard Baker'?

Incidentally, it is interesting that the artist, Arthur Jones, who later set his seal on the visual style of *The Thriller*, found so little favour with UJ readers. His peculiarly murky and sinister style was obviously not to the taste of Blakians.

Another kind of opinion poll was discussed in the UJ's Round Table feature (No. 1511, 1st October, 1932). This was a questionnaire which had been answered by 4,400 scholars in state schools in Victoria, Australia. In reply to the query, "What character in all your reading would you like most to resemble when you grow up?" the voting went overwhelmingly to Sexton Blake, leaving well behind such figures as Sherlock Holmes, David Copperfield and even Australia's own real life Ned Kelly (admittedly a somewhat dubious character for anyone to emulate!).

It would be interesting to know how modern youngsters would

deal with such a question. Would their "heroes" be from television rather than from books? Or might the whole idea of modelling themselves on some ideal character from fiction seem rather pointless to the young of today?

UJ No. 1420 (3rd January, 1931) advertised what it called the 'Sexton Blake play', then being performed at the County Theatre, Bedford, and the Granville, Walham Green. This play was, presumably, the four-act Sexton Blake by Donald Stuart, first presented on 18th September, 1930, at the Prince Edward Theatre, now the London Casino. It ran there, I believe, for about three weeks. Apart from the Bedford and Walham Green presentations, does anyone know of other theatres, in London or the provinces, where this play was performed?

The original production starred Arthur Wontner, who also appeared on the cinema screen, at least once, as Sherlock Holmes (The Case of the Sleeping Cardinal). In physical appearance, Wontner was easily the best of all the filmic Holmeses and I'm sure he also made an excellent Blake on the stage. His portrait was actually used by the UJ on one occasion (I think on the cover) to illustrate a Blake story.

If Sexton Blake survived so long because he was always up to date, it is worth mentioning that even the non-Blakian stories in the Union Jack kept pace with, or even ahead of, real-life events. Remember The Atom Smasher by L. H. Robbins, serialised in 1924? This was astonishingly sophisticated, not only in its anticipation of nuclear fission (which it forecast for 1940, just five years before the first atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima) but in its depiction of social, industrial and political upheaval of a kind very familiar to us today. A quite remarkable story with an American setting, it was clearly also of American origin. Was it, I wonder, ever published in hard covers in this country? Perhaps one of our expert researchers can help with this one.

"Sixty-nine scarce pink-covered UJ's for sale (816 - 885) ... Contain many Confederation, Kestrel, Zenith, Carlac and Lawless stories. 12/- (or 60p!) the lot, post paid."

Sorry you'll be too late to answer this ad. It appeared - without, of course, the reference to modern currency! - just fifty years ago, in the UJ for 1st March, 1924. Those were indeed the days.

No. 116 - Gems 323-5 - The Clavering Series

Charles Hamilton had a certain fondness for stories about doubles. There is an old saying to the effect that everyone of us has a double walking around somewhere in the world, but apart from identical twins there seems to be little evidence of this. Even more unlikely was his supposition that the doubles would speak exactly alike, as in the case of Billy Bunter and Wally Bunter, Bertie Vernon and Herbert Vernon-Smith, and Reggie Clavering and Tom Merry, but this was nevertheless a fact that all three series depended upon. If all these unlikely circumstances were accepted by the reader, however, it would have to be conceded that there were certain dramatic possibilities in the theme, which is probably the reason that Charles Hamilton used it on a number of occasions.

Just as Wally Bunter appeared in a single story before he featured in the famous series, so did Reggie Clavering, Tom Merry's double, make his debut in a single number, Gem 272 in 1913, in which accident and co-incident operated to cause Tom Merry to be mistaken for him and blamed for his blackguardly customs. When he turned up again in Gem 323, practically a year later, the previous affair was referred to as an event of "last term", a necessary fiction in a Peter Pan world; otherwise Tom Merry would have had to admit having spent two summer terms in the Shell!

The series had a good basis for the deception practised. Gerald Goring, the villain, stood to inherit a fortune if Tom Merry were disgraced, and so Clavering was used to bring suspicion on Tom Merry, and later he took his place at St. Jim's when the Captain of the Shell was kidnapped and guarded by the villain Trimble. Clavering began to demand a higher payment for his services, while Levison (who had been eavesdropping at a crucial moment) began to blackmail Clavering in his turn. Events moved swiftly and tension remained high throughout the series.

The Clavering series was the shortest of all the doubles series, and apart from the Stacey series in the Magnet it was unsurpassed by anything similar. In particular, it had a most dramatic climax, when

Tom Merry managed to escape from captivity and reach St. Jim's just as Clavering was being expelled for theft. A battle of wits ensued in which Tom Merry proved his identity by referring to events in the past of which Clavering naturally knew nothing. Even the Stacey series had an ending which was tame compared to this, and the Bertie Vernon series terminated like a damp squib. Retribution was equally uncompromising in the Gem series: there was no forgiveness or desire to hush things up. Goring and Trimble were sentenced to penal servitude, and Clavering was sent to a reformatory. There is much to be said for the clear-cut moral line of the early Hamiltonian stories, and everything to be urged in favour of the grand climax that they usually provided.

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 188. ENDURING STRANGENESS

Always during the Christmas season I look out an old series and re-read it, partly to revive some of the joys of long past Yuletides. This year the one I selected was a rather strange Gem series from 1909. It was very many years since I had read it, so that my memory of it was very hazy indeed, and it came to me with a most peculiar freshness. This was partly due to the fact that, until the thirties, it was, either by accident or design, entirely neglected as re-print material.

The story, which ran to four Gems, one of them a Christmas Double Number (published in November), can be summarised very briefly. Tom Merry was invited by his uncle, Mr. Fawcett, to make up a party of juniors for a holiday in Paris. A couple of stories are set in Paris, after which the St. Jim's boys, having become friendly with a French boy named Cernay, go to spend Christmas with him at the Cernay home, and become mixed up with bank robbers who are using a ruined chateau nearby as their hiding place, and who are playing ghost to keep visitors away.

I think that only the generous or the ingenuous could call this a very good series. The stories set in Paris read like a glorified guide to Paris, as though the author had explored the city and was determined to show his readers how knowledgeable he was concerning the French

capital. Nevertheless, the writing had much of that quaint, elusive charm so peculiar to Hamilton's blue Gem tales, and I confess that I enjoyed them. It was not until I reached the ruined chateau, with the long skirmish with the bank robbers that I found the tale became tedious and I hardly managed to yawn my way through to the end.

I fancy that some of the pen-pictures of Paris must have been outdated by the time the series was reprinted in the thirties. Tom Merry & Co. ride on the top of a bus, and the author mentions that passengers on the top pay less fare than those riding inside. I visited Paris many times in the later thirties, but never saw double-decker buses there. My memory is of single-deck buses, with a crowd standing on the platform at the back, so that one expected to see the engine rise in the air after the style of some of the old Fords in the Keystone comedies.

A lift, which provides Gussy with a rather padded-out sequence for comedy, also seems to be a relic of a bygone age.

Though this series is really in the pot-boiler class so far as its quality goes, there were certain peculiarities about it in 1909 which causes the reader to linger over it and wonder. By a coincidence, the reprinting of it in the thirties also offers food for thought.

In the opening tale of the series in 1909, "Tom Merry's Trip", Tom Merry makes up his party to go to Paris, amid much fun and games. But, at the close of the tale, in a bit, probably but not certainly tacked on editorially, the party is leaving Laurel Villa for the station when a telegraph boy brings Tom a wire to tell him that the trip is postponed, so the boys return to St. Jim's. Next week there was a sub story about roller-skating, and in the week after that the party actually sets off for Paris.

What was the reason for this clumsy postponement? It is possible that the author's "copy" was not to hand, but I regard this as unlikely, for I don't think an editor would have started a series of this type without having the follow-on tales ready. More likely, I think, that the editor made a belated decision to use the chateau ghost tale as the Christmas special at the end of November, so that a delay in the start of the holiday abroad was necessary.

The title of the tale in the Christmas Double Number was "The

Terrible Three's Christmas Party." Odd, because it was not the Terrible Three's party, but Cernay's party. In fact, apart from the ghost business, there is nothing Christmassy about the story. The word Christmas is there once or twice, and at the end there is a bit tacked on about "a merry Christmas", but that's the lot. My own view is that the story was not written as a Christmas tale at all. I have come to the conclusion that two tales were joined together, a few bits about Christmas were popped in, somewhat incongruously, and the result was used as the Christmas Double Number at the end of November 1909. After this, the boys returned to a St. Jim's still in the autumn term, and a few weeks later there appeared, admittedly a sub tale, "Tom Merry's Christmas Number."

Now, for very many years, the Cernay series was forgotten. Oddly enough, for scores of blue Gem tales were reprinted - some of them several times - in the Penny Popular and the Popular, the Cernay series lay gathering dust in the vaults at Fleetway House.

Then, the result of an astounding editorial decision, the Cernay Double Number turned up as "The St. Jim's Ghost-Hunters" in the Schoolboys' Own Library of December 1933. Astounding, because the Gem was then reprinting the blue Gem tales week by week, and the Cernay tale would be due soon. It was a remarkable piece of editorial aberration when one considers how much alternative material was available.

In 1933, even more screamingly astounding, the Gem published "Tom Merry's Trip", under the title "The Boy With Too Many Friends". Tom made up his party, and the party received this strange wire postponing the trip. Only this time the trip was postponed for four years, until the Cernay tale appeared at the end of 1937 as the very last of the red, white, and blue Gems.

So this obscure series is lifted into the limelight, not on its own merits, but by the strange mystery that surrounds it in 1909 and weirdly enough still clings to it nearly thirty years later. And we still puzzle over it more than another thirty years on.

By the thirties, of course, reprinting had gone from the sublime to the ridiculous, putting editors into a gigantic muddle, and, almost certainly, causing the death of that lovely old paper, the Popular.

Nelson Lee Column

A LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S

by Jim Cook

There are some episodes in the St. Frank's history that refuse to be forgotten. Incidents of a startling nature such as revolts against authority and dangerous adventures in foreign lands will always stand out in memoriam but there are the prosaic, the commonplace events, that also refuse to remain undisturbed.

One such episode concerns Cuthbert Chambers of the Fifth. I think it has happened only once in the annals of St. Frank's that a Fifth-former has been sent down to the Remove and history was made on that occasion for not only was it unusual and humiliating to be sent down to the Lower School in itself it also required a great effort to get reinstated to senior status. And Cuthbert Chambers was not good at great efforts. This pompous, arrogant Fifth-former, with his lordly airs, had exceeded his form-master's patience and the climax came when Chambers is caught playing cards. The Head is informed and confronted with Chambers' dismal record of staying always at the bottom of his class, Dr. Stafford decides to send him down. But Chambers wasn't the same as any ordinary fellow. He had been a senior-- and, at one time, skipper of the Fifth. He thought a tremendous lot of himself; he was big and brawny, and when the Removeites heard the news he was being transferred to their form it was unanimously agreed that trouble was looming.

At this same period Handforth of Study D in the Ancient House was at St. Jim's and due to the scheming of Vivian Travers the vacancy was filled by Chambers with the permission of Nelson Lee. Thus Church and McClure became the unhappy study mates of Cuthbert Chambers who at once set himself up as leader of Study D.

With the unexpected return of Handforth Chambers's reign as leader is short lived. But in the meantime, the wily Travers, in his pursuit of engineering a welcome break from the daily humdrum of school life, goads Chambers into fighting Nipper for the captaincy. As Nipper knocks Chambers out an accidental swing from him also sends

Nipper to the floor. With both knocked out the result is debated until Handforth announces he also is putting up for captain.

Thus a three cornered election campaign begins. It is remarkable and sad how quickly people forget the qualities of a good leader. It is distressing to see the sudden transfer of affection for a person who has all the qualities of a good general to a nonentity. But it is not unusual. There will never be a greater leader than Nipper, and the Remove know it. But people as a whole are temperamental and a sudden whim can grow into a demand.

Minutes before that fight, Nipper was the acknowledged captain of his form. Minutes after, the captaincy was being threatened by two others who, until that moment, wouldn't have dreamt of putting up for captain in view of Nipper's popularity. It is to be feared the juniors wanted the diversion more than the election.

In the event it was Chambers who won with 23 votes. Nipper received 20 and Handforth 2 votes.

This affair is often talked about at St. Frank's whenever an election is in the news.

It was inevitable that trouble would follow after Chambers had been elected. The erstwhile dunce of the Fifth, after being pitch-forked into the captaincy by the scheming Travers, had plenty of ideas one of which a Remove Treasury resulted in claiming taxes from the Remove. The financial status of the juniors was demanded and income-tax at a penny in the shilling was to go into the Reserve Fund. Loans could be granted at interest rates and all surplus money accumulating throughout the term would be used for a big feed on the last day of each term.

What at first looked like a great idea from all sides later turns sour when the income-tax collectors begin demanding money. Nobody likes paying income-tax, not even at St. Frank's, so after a stormy meeting, it was decided to make it a voluntary scheme.

Eventually, Chambers is tamed by the fags, and sets about improving his work in class to get reinstated in the Fifth. Spurred on by the indignity he suffers from being sent down to the Third form, Mr. Suncliffe gives a progress report to the Head and Chambers is reinstated to the Fifth.

THE CHANGING SCENE

by R. J. Godsave

The two World Wars through which some of us have lived, could be thought of as partitions separating one era from another. This thought can also be applied to the weekly papers in which we interest ourselves.

Pre World War I, with motoring in its infancy, a paper illustrating a horse-drawn brake bringing schoolboys back to school from the station on the first day of the term, would be quite normal. For the same thing to happen in the mid-nineteen twenties would be out of place. All publications must keep abreast of the times, and make necessary adjustments as changes came about.

It is remarkable that both the Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee Libraries, were introduced during World War I when there was a shortage of paper. Even these papers could not stand still either, and illustrators had to bring their fashions up to date.

An artist who excels in drawing a horse-drawn vehicle could hardly be expected to show the same talent in drawing a motor car. On the cover of the first double Christmas number of the Nelson Lee o.s. 78 "A Christmas of Peril" the illustration of a motor car looks very much like a room on wheels. Although the early cars were roomy, I do not believe they were as roomy as that.

In the Lees of the late twenties some of the juniors at St. Frank's were permitted to ride motor cycles, which again must have added to the trials of the illustrator.

As we all know the post years of World War II have given us many changes. The rural serenity of the country-side has been shattered by the motor car, and for any author to write about a caravanning holiday - such as we have enjoyed reading in the past - would now be impossible.

Although we must be regarded as being old-fashioned by the younger generation, at least we have the consolation of having very pleasant memories of our own carefree days.

* * * * *

WANTED : Magnets 1154, 1155, 1158, 1160 to 1165, 1199, 1201, 1202, 1205, 1208, 1220, 1222, 1223, 1230, 1232, 1234, 1235, 1263, 1268, 1303, 1309, 1323.

STANFORTH, 10 LYME ROAD, AMPHILL, BEDFORD.

The Postman Called

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

DR. R. WILSON (Glasgow): Full marks for the Annual. You get better and better each year. It has set me hunting through my Huxton Rymer stories, and, who knows, I may find time to read some.

W. CLOUGH (Sale): Many thanks for the Annual. It is a lovely number, quite as good if not better than the very excellent numbers of previous years. It was good to meet Mr. Buddle again, but the article that really touched me was the one by Jack Overhill, "Memory Lane." It was the sort of article I would like to write if I could write. It is unfair really to mention any article because they are all so good.

A. PACKER (Southgate): I did not think the previous Annuals could be excelled, but this year's is a superlative effort. My congratulations and my warmest admiration.

Each and every one of the items are delightful. It would be difficult to pick out the best.

Incidentally, Mr. Charles Wright must be a contemporary of mine. I also, for some years in my youth, exchanged Magnets, Gems, Union Jacks - in fact the lot, at Bunyan's. The young lady there was delightful and I used to get the same spring feelings as Mauly and Gussy did in the past about her.

E. N. LAMBERT (Surbiton): Congratulations on the production of yet another great Annual. My usual favourite is the Buddle story, but as I am owned by an animal - a lovable mongrel dog in this case - I must admit that the item featuring Mr. Softee has won first place this time.

I have met Mr. Softee several times on my visits to Crookham, but I was more acquainted with Mr. Chips, his predecessor, who honoured me with his special friendship. I was a frequent visitor to Excelsior House when the Editorial Office was at Surbiton, and always had a greeting from Mr. Chips. He did not extend his friendship to all and sundry, but he took a liking to me.

If I mistakenly sat in "his" chair he would slyly sit behind me on it and gradually make it so uncomfortable for me that I was systematically edged off it and forced to move.

It would be a dull world indeed without our animal friends.

J. MERRILLS (Canada): I was interested in the article by Gordon Hudson in November C.D. , "Should Frank Richards be Revived?" Granted Greyfriars stories by an author other than Frank Richards would not measure up to the standard of THE MASTER but at the same time new stories by a new author would stimulate new readers to the saga. Just as Frank Richards improved with the years a new writer could improve by his mistakes and produce some quite readable material. The substitute stories were not all that bad even though they were absolutely rejected by the more ardent collectors. With a new Magnet publication skilfully done, would come a revival of the Greyfriars Saga bringing many new readers, and with a little perseverance from older readers, could become in a few years as popular a publication as it once was. Greyfriars is a magic word and should be stimulated not only with reprints but with some new material of high quality as well. After all Sexton Blake was written by many writers some better than others, but all stories quite readable as time has proved. Sexton Blake has suffered loss of interest due to no new reading, reprint or otherwise, for some time. Let's hope Greyfriars does not suffer the same fate and is only remembered by a few of us older readers and sink into oblivion.

MARY CADOGAN (Beckenham): I saved the C.D. Annual for my Christmas reading - apart from an initial quick look through it to see what delights were in store. (And Mr. Softee's charms couldn't wait till Christmas - I just had to read the article on him straight away!)

Once more you are to be congratulated on presenting us with another heart-warming Annual. I was moved by Jack Overhill's nostalgic article, and of course by dear Charlie Wright's.

Mr. Buddle was in his usual excellent form, and showing new facets of his nature this time.

Harold Truscott's informative article on "Jack of All Trades" was much appreciated, and it is difficult from the splendid selection to single out items for special mention. But I'd like to say how good the illustrations and cover, are - and that, of course, I am glad "the girls" are so well represented in the Annual, in one way and another.

Thank you, and thanks to all contributors to the Annual. It is

very much part of Christmas for us all.

JOHN WALLEN (Liverpool): Congratulations, I never thought you could do it, but you and your contributors managed it. Collectors' Digest Annual for 1973 was even better than the 1972 number. Jack Overhill's article "Memory Lane" and Geoffrey Wilde's piece on "The Guns of Gangland" both deserve a special mention. But the finest feature by far was "Mr. Buddle's Old Flame." The scene where Mell is confronted with his duplicity, by Mr. Buddle, was very dramatic indeed.

Recently while discussing the "Old Papers" with three fellow enthusiasts, the old, old, question of just what was the finest Hamilton series arose. Naturally enough all our views were different. The Bertie Vernon series and Stacey series were both much appreciated. My own choice was the second downfall series. In my view an embittered Harry Wharton always drew the best out of Charles Hamilton. The first downfall series is powerful stuff, but in 1925, the best of Hamilton was still to come. Lancaster would be my next choice - Hamilton characterisation at its best.

W. SETFORD (Derby): I have an idea for the 1974 Annual. Why not reprint the excellent St. Jim's story, "Late Summer Folly", which appeared in a C. D. Annual in the early 60's? I am sure there must be many newcomers to the hobby, who would be glad of the chance to read this very fine yarn.

* * * * *

FOR EXCHANGE ONLY: Jack Harkaway (Brett's) - also pirated and hard-backed editions. Boys' Broadcast; Startler; Scout; Ranger; Fun & Fiction; Boys' Cinema; True Blue; Marvel; Black Bess (Edward Viles 1868) 3 vols; The Pilot; S.O.L. all KSB's; Dixon Hawke Library; Dixon Hawke Case Books; Nugget Library; early Boys' Friend; Boys' Realm; Champion 1951, two vols. bound, mint condition; 40 Buffalo Bills (Aldine) 1922, mint.

BERT VERNON

5 GILLMAN ST., CHELSEA, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA.

+ + + + +
"Collectors' Digest" from No. 195 (March 1963) to date, 128 issues, mint condition.
Offers wanted.

LEESE, BUNNY-HILL, COSTOCK, LOUGHBORO.

News of the Clubs

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

At the Christmas meeting seven regular members were there and also one new member, Bob White. Bob, with memories of the Gem and Magnet as a boy, has been buying the facsimiles; and had learned of our existence. How many times have people, believing they were alone in their nostalgia for Magnets, Gems, Nelson Lees, etc., suddenly discovered that the old schools are as alive as they ever were, with a numerous and enthusiastic band of 'old boys'?

Mention was made of the fact that not all readers of the C. D. are happy about the space devoted to Club reports. As an occasional report writer I feel that this is a fair criticism, and suggest that it is up to us to use the space for making contributions of general interest, and to avoid using it as a medium of self-praise. Mea culpa.

Apropos the preponderance of Magnets in the facsimiles, Vic. Colby said that he understood this to be because these were the profitable publications.

Stanley Nichols suggested that the fact that the Magnet and Gem were written for boys, many of whom are still alive; whereas things like the Union Jack were aimed at adult readers - many regrettably no longer with us - could in part explain this profit and loss situation. Marion Brockman pointed out that printed detective stories nowadays have to compete with the television set.

The members having wined, dined and wined again (as Hamilton's adults were allowed to do at Christmas) the meeting closed on a happy note at quite a late hour.

RON BROCKMAN



LONDON

Our first club meeting of 1974, held at the Richmond Community Centre, was a conspicuous success. Mary Cadogan opened the enter-

tainment by reading a charming paper "How I Became a Collector." Then Bob Blythe took over with one of his dips into the past consisting of a reading from the newsletter of 1957.

Laurie Peters conducted a cleverly constructed literary quiz, won by Brian Doyle. The ladies acquitted themselves with credit, as Millicent Lisle, Win Morss, and Josie Packman shared second place with Ray Hopkins.

This exciting contest was followed by a reading by Winnie Morss of an amusing extract from the Nelson Lee story entitled "The Vanished Tuckhamper."

A fascinating interlude was provided by a tape-recording of a B. B. C. broadcast in which P. J. Kavanagh, Amanda Phewnissen, and Charles Causley discussed the fictional characters of Biggles and Richmal Crompton's "William", and the two writers Georgette Heyer and Hemmingway. The recording was presented by the joint efforts of Mary Cadogan and Ray Hopkins.

Thomas Keene, a new member, exhibited copies of School Friend and Schoolgirl, from his personal collection.

The next meeting is on 17th February, at the home of Josie Packman at East Dulwich. If attending, please notify Mrs. Packman.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

§ § §

CAMBRIDGE

Considering the rail and petrol crisis there was an excellent attendance at the first meeting in 1974, on 13th January.

Members particularly enjoyed the tape-recording of a Broadcast talk by Jack Overhill on "Music in a poor man's home", going back to 1910, recalling Salvation Army Bands, Mouth Organs, etc., leading to the piano and gramophone - illustrated by his own playing of the Mouth Organ - Jack was warmly applauded by everybody for this most delightful item.

A quiz on Music Hall Characters by Edward Witton was attractive the omniscient Bill Lofts winning with 15 out of 20.

Harold Forecast played a selection of old records of Music Hall

Songs, including a forty-year old George Formby record, and Danny, a modern record of old Music Hall Songs.

Deryck Harvey talked on Music Hall, Variety and Film characters in Boys' papers and sparked off an animated discussion. Members were particularly interested when Edward recalled memories of his father, who had been a professional entertainer and film actor.

Finally Graham, one of Danny Posner's sons, played the guitar and led the company in cheerful singing.

Next meeting is 10th February: subject - Football Stories. It is hoped, League fixtures permitting, that Mr. Bill Lievers, Manager of Cambridge United, will be able to be present.

* * * * *

WANTED URGENTLY: Billy Bunter's Own, No. 2, Billy Bunter's Convict (Merlin), Rallying Round Gussy (Mandeville) and Floreat Greyfriars Record.

W. SEYFORD

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* * * * *

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OUR BOYS AND GIRLS WEEKLY

by W. O. G. Lofts

The other day, and for the first time in thirty-six years, I saw some copies of OUR BOYS AND GIRLS WEEKLY. What memories they brought flooding back to me, of when, as a twelve-year old boy, I was a member of a local church organisation. In early 1935, our leader produced a bundle of slim paged type of programmes, and said "A friend of the movement has started to publish a weekly magazine for boys and girls, and I expect every member to support it, by buying it each week."

I paid over my penny with some reluctance, and felt even more reluctant when I had skimmed its pages. Although praiseworthy in the moral sense, the brief four were extremely dull, and a feeling of horror struck me that I would have to buy this magazine weekly, when my valuable penny could have bought a brand new comic, or several second-hand Gerald Swan boys' papers at our local market stall.

About 8" x 5", the first issue was dated 3rd March, 1935, printed on buff paper, and edited by Herbert A. Court of the Victory Press, Park Crescent, Clapham Park, London, S.W.4. Its four pages contained very short stories, articles, poems, riddles, puzzles, and a text, the main feature being a series of lessons from the British Industry written by the editor, who had visited every industry under the sun, including biscuit makers and gas works.

Complaining bitterly to my mother, that I was being blackmailed into buying something I did not want to read, she gave me a penny extra each week, to bring it home to her each week to read, and to keep the peace as it were with the church group. It finally finished at No. 10, Part 5, 29th December, 1935, a total of forty-four issues. A typical moral short story in its pages was of an old man crippled so badly that he could hardly walk. Always attending his weekly club, the secretary asked how he did it. "Well," said the old man, "My heart really does it, and my legs follow after." As a respectable adult, I now appreciate the high moral quality of the paper, but as a boy, I wanted real stirring stories of school and adventure, and how Frank Richards could write them in the same high moral tone, without being in the least dull and sermonising.

Possibly one of the most famous characters featured in boys' papers, going back to the early part of this century, is Buffalo Bill. He is one of those fortunate heroes whose copyright does not appear to be owned by any one publishing company, yet this dashing cavalier of the ranges, has never failed to appeal to boys of all ages. Many of the stories are hackneyed, stereotyped and colourless, yet editors never seem to tire of publishing both series and serials.

In my opinion, the best Buffalo Bill publications ever, were the twelve page colour-strips, many of them written and drawn by the McLoughlin brothers. Denis McLoughlin's art must surely be some of the finest work produced since the war, and I would rate him as comparable with Frank Bellamy of 'Eagle' and 'Garth'. These Buffalo Bill colour comics were printed by Rembrandt Photogravure Ltd., the original publishers of 'Comet' and 'Fun'. They could be bought for 3d. Nowadays, the few ardent enthusiasts who collect them are prepared to pay up to 25p for copies in good condition. I was rather impressed with the art work of one of these papers by somebody who merely signed his name "Ron". He was not far behind McLoughlin in clear, decisive drawings, although the story was rather weak.

Buffalo Bill Annuals, also largely featuring the work of the McLoughlins, were available up until the mid-1950's. These two brothers also drew and wrote 'Blackhawk' and 'Roy Carson', more modern heroes. Of course, neither their style, nor the characters they drew and scripted, would appeal to the modern generation. Today's comic and story book enthusiasts prefer a jumbled cartoon strip which leaves little impression on the reader.

However, to return to the subject of Buffalo Bill, the 'Comet' was possibly the best of the papers which featured him in later years. Almost comparable with the 3d. features, was the back page, duo-colour serials which ran in this excellent comic, and for some time this was my favourite feature. Then the 'Comet' altered its format, becoming much smaller, with a five-page Buffalo Bill picture-story in black and white. Like many other readers of my own age, I began to lose interest. The stories were too condensed, cramming all the action into a few frames, thereby destroying the atmosphere which might have

been engendered by a long serial. The 'Sun' was guilty of this with their 'Billy the Kid', and, apart from the various reasons given for the death of these good old papers, I cannot help but think that the A. P. contributed in some ways towards it themselves. They destroyed the previous individuality which their characters had held for so many years.

The 'Knockout' was another paper which featured the buckskin-clad, fighting plainsman, this time in story form, with one illustration, sometimes serialised, sometimes as a series. Barry Ford was undoubtedly the best of the writers here, but after a time even these stories began to pall. Perhaps we were given too much of them. A break of three months in the year might have served to make us anticipate the return of our hero with relish.

Only a short time ago, Messrs. F. W. Woolworth had, amongst their 'paperback-remainders', hundreds of American reprints of Buffalo Bill stories, labelled 'Collectors' Edition'. They were really too corny to be acceptable to even the most enthusiastic BB collector. Surely some effort at producing a facsimile would have been preferable to merely reprinting the yarns in paperback-book form. There simply was not one iota of atmosphere to be gleaned from these 'remainders'.

Newnes' 'New Redskin Library' was possibly the best effort at true-to-type Buffalo Bill stories. Of course, they were very far-fetched, but who wants to read a William F. Cody story which isn't?

Sub characters such as Wild Bill Hickok and Texas Jack Omohundro led to these two pistoleers having series and serials of their own. In actual fact, the writer had limitless scope. He could blend fact and fiction. Just how many different reasons have we been given for Buffalo Bill's absence at the Little Big Horn massacre? Likewise, the many motives for Jack McCall's shooting of Wild Bill Hickok in Deadwood, make this murderer/hero a man of many different characters. I have read several versions completely exonerating him.

If we study Buffalo Bill at any length, we have one of the most complex characters of boys' fiction. I prefer to take one presentation of him (McLoughlin's, of course!) and build up my image of the scout from these 3d. papers and annuals. How I would dearly love to possess the whole set of those flimsy, colourful cartoon stories. I often wonder if other boys at that time troubled to save them. I certainly wish that I

had saved all mine.

IKEY'S WAY

by John Geal

The spending of your pocket money was an important part of life when I was a boy. Having set aside the cash for the purchase of the Boys' Book(s) of your choice, the remainder, plus any extra earned, running errands, went on sweets.

I, and most of my pals, dealt at "Ikey's". Of course that wasn't the shopkeepers real name, but the shop had been "Ikey's to our parents for years and the name had stuck. The owner had been in that shop a long time and understood children. He was aware that, with money so hard to come by, the spending of the odd $\frac{1}{2}$ d. or 1d. was a subject of prime importance and not to be undertaken lightly.

He had arranged his sweets along a special counter (behind a Chicken Wire grill) so that on entering the shop, one could walk the length of this special window and survey the whole glittering display. You were never chased, could spend ten minutes, if you liked, in making up your mind. He knew this was a moment of agonising choice and left you to savour it alone, or watched you debating the relative merits of 'Kali-bunker', 'Tiger Nuts' or 'Cokernut Chips', with one or two pals that had come in with you.

Having decided, came the "Weighing." Now no child likes to 'get done'. So many shops weighed sweets down out of sight of the front of the counter, or made sure the scales balanced just a shade on the shopkeepers side - kids watched this performance and hated it. With "Ikey" the scales were bang in the middle of the counter. You could SEE ALL! He would solemnly get the sweets, (almost all sweets at the time were loose, either in boxes or bottles). We would watch anxiously whilst they were tipped into the scale. He never hurried, no sleight of hand! They were weighed exactly. Then - when all movement of the scale had ceased - into the pan went one or more extra. "Clunk", went the scales, down on the stop on 'your side'. The face of the buyer would shine with content at having received more than his whack, and would leave the shop walking 'on air'.

"Ikey", the shrewd old Psychologist that he was, smiled farewell.

He was 99% certain, that in those hard times, your next ½d. would finish up in his Till.

* * * * *

WANTED: Schoolboys' Own Library, No. 185, £1.25 offeref for a good copy.

PAUL YATES

32 AVONDALE ROAD, MORECAMBE, LANCs.

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FOR SALE/EXCHANGE: Ally Slopers, Penny Dreadfuls (1880's), Scout, Chums, Marvels (1900's), Thomsons, Sexton Blakes, Radio Funs, etc. (1940-1950's).

JONES 43 DUNDONALD ROAD, COLWYN BAY.

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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.

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WANTED IN GOOD CONDITION: S.B.L. FIRST SERIES, 2,6,14,21,23,24,26,32,33,35,37,38,39, 42,46,47,48,51,52,55,58,77,88,90,93,99,101,112,117,145.
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* * * * *

"THE HILL"

by J. Wallen

I wonder if Charles Hamilton ever read "The Hill" - a tale of Harrow, by Horace A. Vachell.

This story was first published in 1905 and is based on schoolboy friendship.

Verney and Scaife have a tug of war over their mutual friend Desmond. Verney is a force for good, and Scaife evil. Scaife's main motive for attempting to win over Desmond is a desire to score off his despised enemy Verney.

A number of Hamilton names crop up. Lovell is one, and - surprise, surprise - "The Catterpillar" another. Scaife rather resemble Cardew, but has none of his better points.

The following passage demonstrates Scaife's sharpness. A master known as "Dirty Dick" brings a Duchess to meet the occupants of Verney's study. I quote --

"This is Scaife, Duchess" he said in his thick rasping tones.

"Scaife and Verney, let me present you to the Duchess of Trent."

He mouthed the illustrious name, as if it were a large and ripe greenage.

The Duchess advanced, smiling graciously. "These" - Rutford named the other boys - "are Egerton, Lovell, and-er-Duff."

Scaife, alone of those present, appreciated the order in which his schoolfellows had been named. Egerton - known as the Caterpillar - was the son of a Guardsman; Lovell's father was a Judge, Duff's father an obscure Parson.

In character Egerton is rather like Mauleverer. While Verney resembles Tom Redwing. "The Hill" in parts is very entertaining, but it lacks humour. Few instances of light relief is in evidence, and the story is so heavy that in parts it cries out for Comedy.

The story left me with a lump in my throat. This was I suppose, the Authors purpose, but speaking for myself, I like a story to entertain, and gladden the heart. "The Hill" does the former, but not the latter.

HAPPY OCCASION

Recently Mr. and Mrs. S. Gordon Swan celebrated their Golden Wedding in Australia. Their eight children were with them to make it a very special occasion.

Hearty congratulations to our distinguished contributor (a very dear friend of ours) and his wife. May they have many more happy decades together.

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

ERIC FAYNE,

EXCELSIOR HOUSE, CROCKHAM RD., CROCKHAM, HAMPSHIRE.

THROUGH OTHER EYES

by Les Rowley

Greyfriars, its Staff and Scholars, as seen by persons in everyday life.

The Management of Chunkley's Stores, Courtfield, Kent

"Ah! Of course, the bill," the voice of the young man who was manager of Chunkley's Stores, conveyed a certainty which I did not share. I had dropped in to see whether I could gain yet another appreciation of Greyfriars School and its inhabitants not to settle a bill ... especially as I had made no purchase!

"You will appreciate that the cost for meeting the damages will be heavy," continued this smooth young man, paying no attention to the indignant expression on my face. "Replacing three tables and thirteen chairs alone amounts to £124.53 and to this sum one must add that of £45 to cover the cost of broken china and glass. There is also the general charge for food - both eaten and damaged - for which I think you will agree that a charge of £20 is modest. Damage to the waiter's suit should amount to no more than £18 and doubtless you will wish to compensate him adequately for the disfigurement he suffered as a result of the assault that was made upon him.

"If it is your wish to apportion the blame I would recommend to your attention a boy named Coker. This boy - this ruffian - this Coker had booked a table in our Palm Court for three thirty p.m. precisely. As it had not been claimed by three fifty, I instructed the waiter to make it available to the next party who wished to take tea and it was accordingly offered and accepted by a party of five boys named Wharton, Nugent, Cherry and Bull and a coloured lad whose name I did not catch.

"At four fifteen the boy Coker eventually arrived with two friends. The Palm Court was full and there was a queue waiting for tables as they became vacant. Coker asked for his table and it was explained to him that as he had not taken it at the time booked it had been offered to Master Wharton and his friends. It was suggested to Coker that he take his proper place in the queue - a suggestion that was ignored. Proclaiming that he had a short way with fags, Coker made his way toward the table in question. He made his way alone, his two friends having suddenly decided to leave these premises. Coker was therefore guilty of queue

jumping and there were signs of sudden unrest among those who had hitherto been waiting patiently. Mr. Parkin, who is currently appearing as a 'Strong Man' in the fair on Courtfield Common, approached Coker with the intention of showing the boy the error of his ways. He reached Coker as Coker reached the table at which the five boys were sitting. Opinions seem to vary as to the ensuing sequence of events, but it appears definite that Coker repulsed Mr. Parkin's attempts to take him by the arm and lead him back to the queue. Coker resisted and either pushed or punched Mr. Parkin in the chest. Mr. Parkin, losing his balance fell backwards on to an adjacent table which collapsed under his weight. Coker then turned his attention to the five schoolboys sat at the disputed table. Raising his voice, he ordered them to leave. The lads tried to reason with him and even offered him a cream doughnut in the attempt to placate him.

Mr. Parkin had in the meantime recovered and now thought it politic to approach Coker again. Who struck the first blow is beyond the point. Coker had been aggressive from the start and it appeared that his ejection from the restaurant was essential. Accordingly, Francois, our waiter, approached and at considerable risk attempted to take Coker's arm to lead him away thus breaking off the encounter the boy had sought with Mr. Parkin. Francois suddenly found himself lifted and thrown on to a table at which some supporters of the local football club were enjoying a meal before the evening match. The rest is confusion, but it was only after the damage that I have already mentioned that Coker was assisted from this establishment by being frog marched to the door and ejected."

I was half way to the door before the manager of Chunkley's had reached the end of his catalogue of woes. I had no wish to be involved in the outcome of Coker's shindy with a fairground strong man or of the expense sheet so incurred. I opened the door and left.

