


STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Vol. 29 No 338

February 1975

SPECIAL ARTICLE BY W. GEORGE (WORLD'S RUNNING CHAMPION).

Boys' Realm
of Sport & Adventure



BOWLED · OUT!

A TALE OF COUNTY CRICKET & NIGLAW LAW, DUNDEE.

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17p

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FREEMAN WILLS CROFTS

Last month I referred to Guildford, where, just before Christmas I saw aprons decorated with large reproductions of the covers of certain comic papers. This month I return to Guildford, to think, for a few moments, about a popular writer of detective stories who lived at the tiny village of Normandy, near Guildford.

Between the wars, Freeman Wills Crofts turned out his tales about Inspector, later Superintendent, French, and I enjoyed a good

many of them. I wonder how many of my readers were acquainted with this writer. Before he took to writing best-sellers, Crofts was a railway engineer, and he used his specialised knowledge in many of his books, some of which were rather too technical to please everybody. Stories like "Antidote to Venom" deal with ingenious devices which seem to cheat a little. The breaking of cast-iron alibis formed much of the work of Inspector French.

Owing to his slightly prim and pedantic style, typical of plenty tec tales of the twenties and thirties, the works of Crofts do not seem to wear too well, even though they are a happy contrast with the brash, swearing, sex-ridden private eyes of the seventies. Personally, I enjoyed many Crofts tales, and can re-read them with pleasure.

Freeman Wills Crofts loved the charm, peace, and beauty of the Guildford he knew. Some of his stories were set in and around Guildford - for instance, "Murder at Guildford", "The Hog's Back Mystery", and others. He died about ten years ago. He would get a shock if he came back there today. A good title for a new Superintendent French novel would surely be: "What on Earth Have the Planners and Money-makers Done to Guildford?"

When I lived in lovely Guildford, it shared, with Wimbledon, the distinction of supplying its ratepayers with the cheapest electricity in the land. After the war the State took over the current and soon put an end to that nonsense.

BIG BEN

History shows us that, down the ages, Time and Necessity produce the right man for the right moment. They did so, for our London Club, twenty-five years ago. In January 1950, the club found itself without a secretary and without a treasurer. To help out, over a difficult period, Mr. Ben Whiter undertook to carry out the two jobs temporarily. Today, a quarter of a century later, Mr. Whiter is still carrying out the arduous duties in those honorary tasks. And what a wonderful success he has made of it all.

Not only is our Ben efficient and unfailingly enthusiastic. He is, in addition, a marvellous friend and a truly great man. The London Club, and the hobby as a whole, can never repay the debt they owe to

Ben Whiter - and he would not allow them to, even if they could.

The hobby has many rewards for those who love the hobby and work for it. One of my own personal rewards has been knowing Big Ben and enjoying his friendship. Collectors' Digest salutes him in his Silver Jubilee Year as Secretary-Treasurer of London.

THE LAST GOOD-BYE

With much sadness we learn of the passing of Harry Broster, once a bulwark of our Midland Club. Harry, who was a fairly regular contributor to this magazine a few years back, was a keen Nelson Lee fan. His death is a great loss to the hobby.

Plenty of readers and club members who visited Excelsior House at Surbiton will remember our Housekeeper, Mrs. Hollock. A shadow was cast over our own Christmas by her illness, for she had planned to spend the festive season with us. She died on New Year's Eve. Nellie, as she always liked to be called, was on my staff for over thirty years, from 1940 until she retired when we came to Hampshire. And since her retirement, she spent many fortnights with us in Crookham every year. Somehow life will never be quite the same again with our Nellie gone.

THE EDITOR

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Danny's Diary

FEBRUARY 1925

The year 1925 has been good to us Rookwood fanatics so far, in the Boys' Friend.

The month opened with a really funny story, "The Other Tommy Dodd." Tommy wanted to go to the circus, but he was detained, and knew that Mr. Manders would be looking in at the form-room from time to time to make sure that he was there. Jimmy Silver had the brilliant idea of putting a dummy to sit at Tommy Dodd's desk, - while Tommy went to the circus. Unfortunately, during the afternoon, Cuffy went in to speak to Tommy in the form-room, and the dummy collapsed -

and Cuffy thought Tommy was dead. I laughed fit to bust.

Next month, still with Sankey's circus, a tiger escaped - and Putty, by chance, managed to trap it at Rookwood. This tale was "Putty's Capture". In "Bound By His Promise", the footer fixture with St. Kit's arrived, and, as Rookwood always walked over the very weak St. Kit's team, Jimmy Silver told Gunner he should have a place in the Rookwood team. Then Billy Bunter arrived with the news that Harry Wilmot was now captain of St. Kit's juniors, and they had beaten Greyfriars. And Gunner holds Jimmy to his promise.

Finally, "The St. Kit's Match" was a rib-tickler. The Rookwood team sets off for St. Kit's, with Gunner still insisting on playing. But Oswald & Co. take a hand and Gunner is kidnapped. So Jimmy gets off the hook.

Star turn in the Sexton Blake Library this month is "The Amazing Affair of the Renegade Prince", featuring Zenith, the Albino. I loved it.

Mr. Asquith, who was heavily defeated at the last election, has been given an earldom, and is now the Earl of Oxford.

Doug took me to town one evening, and we went to the varieties at the Alhambra, Leicester Square. It was a big bill, and one of the best acts was that of Randolph Sutton who sang a brand new song entitled "On Mother Kelly's Door-step, Down Paradise Row."

A very, very weird and wonderful collection of tales in the Gem this month. I suppose some people like them, or the editor wouldn't publish them, but I found them almost unreadable.

"The Mystery of the Mill", a very long tale which ends up with very small print in the final pages to squash it all in. It's a sequel to "Trimble, the Hero" of last month. Tom Merry falls in a stream while on a cross-country race. Talbot tries to rescue him, and they are both helped by a boy who has escaped from a reformatory. They get to a mill, where the miller is running a gang of counterfeiters. Tom and Talbot are kept prisoners. Blake and Wildrake and the rest get on the track. The criminals are arrested. It turns out that Lord Eastwood had been helped by the reformatory boy, not Trimble - and so on - and on --

"The Boy from Broadway" was pretty stupid, or else my taste has gone haywire. Gussy goes on the stage to act as "The Boy from Broadway",

a musical comedy. He takes the place of Chollop. Chollop disguises himself as Gussy and goes to St. Jim's and does fearful things - as Gussy - and gets himself expelled - as Gussy. Gussy, singing on the stage, has a row with the musical director. He goes back to St. Jim's to clear his name - or something --

In "Grundy on the Trail", St. Jim's is visited by Mr. Joshua Mellin, a rhabdomantist. That's someone like a water diviner, except that he divines metals or treasures in the earth and not water. A gang is after the St. Jim's treasure. The chums get in an underground tunnel which leads to Abbey Island. Guns are fired, and the Head and Mr. Railton are amazed. So am I.

Last of the month in the Gem was "The Cross-Word Craze at St. Jim's". Dr. Holmes, the Headmaster, composes a crossword puzzle and offers £10 to the first one who solves it. As a result, the footballers go slack, and Fatty lets goals in. Tom Merry drops four fellows from his team for slacking, so a very weak team meets Greyfriars in the "Cup Final". But Harry Wharton has also dropped some of his players. So it's a poor game. Figgins & Co. win the £10. And the game is played again and Tom Merry's lot win. There ain't no justice.

At the pictures we have seen Jack Holt in "Call of the North"; Annette Kellerman in "Venus of the South Seas"; Jackie Coogan in "Little Robinson Crusoe"; Ramon Novarro in "The Red Lily".

Still on the subject of cinemas, a new cinema has been opened this month at the top of the Haymarket in the West End of London. It is called the Capitol. And they have started building another big cinema on the corner of Jermyn Street. It will be called the Plaza, and it is expected that it will open early in 1926.

The magnificent series about Harry Wharton as a rebel has continued and ended in the Magnet. To start the month, "The Worst Boy at Greyfriars", as his form-master called Wharton has set out to justify that title. He is caught at the Cross Keys by Mr. Prout, and is let-off with a Head's flogging. But, in the end, Wharton is caught breaking bounds again, and this time expulsion seems certain. And Mr. Quelch will be happy to get rid of him.

Then "Harry Wharton's Last Chance", the final tale in the series. In spite of his last fling, he is given one more chance to make good,

though it will take him a long time to win back the esteem of his form-master. At the end, Bob Cherry resigns the captaincy, and Wharton becomes junior captain once more. The Magnet has never before given such a powerful series as this one has been, and I don't reckon it will ever give another quite so effective.

Of course, the next stories couldn't help being a terrible anti-climax. Myers of the Second Form is in the lead in "To Shield His Father". Myers learns that his father is fleeing from justice. Last of the month was "The Barring of Bolsover", a rather heavy-going affair in which Bolsover, quivering with annoyance against his form-master, burns Mr. Quelch's manuscript, "the labours of his best years". Mr. Quelch forgives, but Harry Wharton & Co. don't forgive. And Bolsover minor gets lost in the snow and Bolsover Major saves him. And everybody is sorry for being a cad. I'm sure that people with tender hearts will have loved it. I'm much too tough.

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BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

This month I propose to devote the whole of Blakiana to articles on the unique covers of the Sexton Blake Library and the Union Jack. I trust these will be of interest to all Blake fans, especially as they do illustrate some of the social history of our times. I have in mind a project to publish a picture book of Sexton Blake illustrations covering the period from 1893 to 1968. The idea was suggested by one of our very good Sexton Blake friends. The task will be colossal and so will the price in these days of high inflation, but I hope the job will be done in due course.

With further reference to the Waldo article in the December C.D., Mr. Charles Day has kindly sent me a letter about this particular affliction, so I include an extract as follows:- "I am informed by a medical friend, who is in a senior position at a local hospital, that this condition is called Morvan's Disease or Syringomelia (disease of the spinal cord) and causes loss of sense of touch in certain nerve endings,

especially in the extremities." Mr. Day goes on to say that E. S. Brooks was one of his favourite authors. Who dare say that our Hobby is childish when we can gain such knowledge from it?

PINK COVERED UNION JACKS

by Josie Packman

One might well say how can those plain pink covered Union Jack covers be of much interest. But I am sure they are. A recent purchase of some of these early Union Jacks, together with the receipt of the accompanying articles gave me the necessary fillip to write this addition to the Saga of the Covers Story. I sorted out three U. J's in particular as their covers are very singular indeed. No. 264 dated 31 October, 1908, has a tale entitled "The Deaf Mute". The cover drawing is that of several pairs of hands in various positions, obviously the Deaf and Dumb sign language. After checking in one of my Encyclopedia's I finally managed to decipher the message. It was "The Deaf Mute" the title of the story. A most ingenious cover drawing!!

Union Jack No. 258, dated 19 September, 1908, has a copy of a real photograph entitled "A Typical Scene in a Kentish Hopfield". The story is called "The Hop Pickers".

Until quite recent times - and the March of Progress - people from the slums of London made a trip to the hopfields every year. Apart from their earnings in the hopfields they looked upon this annual event as a holiday, the only one most of them were ever likely to get. The story of The Hop Pickers describes the conditions under which these poor people lived and worked. In this story Sexton Blake was able to solve a murder mystery with the help of some of these good hardworking folk. A third Union Jack No. 271, dated 19 December, 1908, also has a real photograph as the basis of the cover picture. It is that of the German Kaiser, taken obviously when a much younger man than he was during the Great War of 1914 - 1918. The title of the story is "The Kaiser's Mistake" a truly prophetic one. One might say these tales are very dated, but then, isn't everything, even yesterday's newspaper?

These Union Jacks are available from the Sexton Blake Lending Library.

The variety of covers one can find in the Sexton Blake Library is enormous, considering the years of its existence from 1915 to 1968.

Some of the finest drawings are those in the first half of the 1st Series, most of which were by Arthur Jones. Our other famous artist, Eric Parker, did not appear on the scene until 1923. A number of these early covers were made up of three or four small pictures depicting some of the action in the accompanying story, most attractive and in many cases quite sinister.

A particular favourite picture of mine is that shown on S. B. L. , No. 199, 1st series, entitled "Tinker's Lone Hand". The illustration is of Tinker, seated in Blake's armchair by the fire with Pedro at his side. The lamplight shining from the nearby table casts a glow on the open book Tinker has been reading, the colouring of the whole picture suggests the flickering light from the open fire. A truly delightful painting. How different from the modern pictures of Sexton Blake's cold looking office in Berkeley Square.

THE EARLY UNION JACK

by O. W. Wadham

The Union Jack always had an attractive cover even in the days of 1913. It had a big sale in New Zealand at that time, in fact it was quite up to the sales of the Magnet and Gem. Must have had as large a circulation too judging by all the copies I came across at school. In story papers these were the leading ones, also was the Marvel. At school they were everywhere. I had no trouble in getting them for free as exchanges were the rule with the lads at that small Carterton School in New Zealand, I used to attend. The Union Jack caught my eye first on the bookstall, it was always so thrilling and attractive in character and beat all the rest for its wonderful covers. There were Yvonne, Dr. Huxton Rymer, Plummer, and other well-known characters, all pictured on the covers and they appeared very often in this popular paper at that period. The Christmas numbers were the greatest attraction. How I wish I had kept them all, but like the other boys, I passed them on.

COVER CONVERSION

by R. J. Godsave

Since becoming a regular reader of the Sexton Blake Library through the agency of Josie Packman, I find that my choice of Sexton Blakes relies very much on the excellent cover drawings of those published in the mid-twenties. If this appears to be taking the line of least resistance

then I must plead guilty and state that in every case the contents come well up to the samples in the shape of the thrilling drawing or drawings on the excellently designed cover.

Many of the adventures take place abroad, which gives the artist and author so much more scope than being confined to Great Britain. One of the most striking covers is that of No. 380 "By Order of the King" 31, 5, 25. This is a tale of detective adventure in England and Abyssinia. In view of the tragic history of that unhappy land before the second world war, and the last few weeks, the story somehow comes very much to life.

One could go on and refer to many other Sexton Blakes of this period which were so rich in illustrations and gripping adventure stories. Since I am one of those old-fashioned people who dislike change of any sort I have no inclination to read any of the modern Sexton Blakes. However, it may be necessary to modify my ideas as I have had to in the case of the Nelson Lee Library by finding that in many cases the later series are equal to the old.

The Sexton Blake Library had a distinct advantage in the fact that it was not left to one author, but had quite a few writers who were able to contribute their own ideas and styles which resulted in giving the readers in some instances exciting scenes taking place in the far East, one of the favourite venues used by G. H. Teed.

* * * * *

Nelson Lee Column

BOZ

by C. H. Churchill

One character often featured in the old small series of the Nelson Lee was Boz - Nipper's little dog. He was the first pet mentioned belonging to any of the St. Frank's boys. He first appeared in No. 160 old series, "S. O. S. or Tricked by Wireless," which was one of the "Captain Burton's Quest" series and the first of many summer holiday adventures featured in the Nelson Lee.

He actually belonged at first to one of the crew of the "Adventure" Lord Dorrimore's yacht. In after years Dorrie's yacht was called the "Wanderer", but we never heard whether it was the same boat renamed

or another one.

Returning to Boz, however, he made his debut in the first chapter and distinguished himself by licking Umlosi's face while the black giant was sleeping on the deck in the hot mid Atlantic afternoon. He was described as a kind of Spaniel, white, with liberal splashes of black and a bushy tail. He had often "broken bounds" by wandering aft and had made a set at Nipper, following him around. Nipper, rather liking the dog, offered the crew member ten bob for him and so the deal was completed.

As to his name which was Spotty, Lord Dorrimore remarking that the dog's face always reminded him of Charles Dickens suggested that that should be his name. Nipper demurred however, and said that Boz was the best and most suitable and meant the same thing anyway. So it came to pass that "Spotty" became "Boz" from then on.

The little dog proved his worth many times over in the days to come, possessing a nose as acute as a trained bloodhound. He was invaluable in the present series, helping to trail Eileen Dare when she was captured by cannibals and was mainly instrumental in effecting her rescue.

Back at St. Frank's, Boz played a part in many series when any tracking was required. The old series Lees contained dozens of detective episodes, in many of which Boz was featured. The last time he was mentioned, as far as I can see, was in the Ezra Quirk series. In No. 548 "The Schoolboy Conspirators" he was used by William Napoleon Browne in one of his Magician's tricks (Chapter 14).

From this day on it seems as though Mr. Brooks forgot all about him and in fact I believe Nipper had an Alsatian named "Wolf", some years later. I do not possess the later Lees so cannot give any precise facts and figures. To me, however, Boz will always be a most interesting supporting character in the old series.

ST. FRANK'S IN THE "REALM"

by R. J. Godsave

The connection between the St. Frank's stories in the Boys' Realm, 2nd series, and those running currently in the Nelson Lee Library in the year 1919, is of interest if only because the stories in both papers were by the same author, E. S. Brooks. The regular readers of the

Lee could be excused if he or she thought otherwise.

It would appear that Brooks deliberately wrote the St. Frank's stories in the Realm in such a style that they could not be confused with the type running in the Lee.

Hal Brewster & Co. of the neighbouring River House School, could not be said to figure largely in the Nelson Lee. In the Realm the River House juniors were featured as great rivals of the St. Frank's juniors with a series devoted to a sports competition between the two schools. A series in the Realm which lasted six weeks, concerned a temporary Remove master - a Mr. Woodhouse - of which there was no mention in the Nelson Lee.

Two members of the Remove made their introduction in the Realm and were transferred to the Lee. Timothy Tucker who was to become a fairly important character in the Lee saga and Augustus Hart who only became a supporting character before completely fading out. Following the Brooks' treatment of Nelson Lee minor characters, a series in the Realm was devoted to Augustus Hart as a leading character.

Incidents which occurred in the Lee sometimes had its sequel printed in the Realm. In o. s. 236 of the Nelson Lee "Exit the Tyrant" Handforth & Co. render a service to the Earl of Grandmore and are invited to spend Christmas at Grandmore Priory. Their adventures were recorded in the Realm under the title of "The Ghost of Grandmore".

The Christmas story in both papers became for a short while fused into one with Lord Dorriemore issuing invitations in the Lee to Nipper and his friends to spend Christmas at Cliff Castle in Kent, which proved to be only a short distance from Grandmore Priory. In the Realm, Handforth & Co's stay at the Priory proved disastrous and they are pleased to accept Lord Dorriemore's invitation to join his guests at Cliff Castle and spend the rest of the holiday there.

The break between the two papers comes when Lord Dorriemore organises a New Year's Carnival. This was ignored by the Lee which stated that the Cliff Castle guests would be leaving on New Year's Day and going to their various homes. In the Realm the selfsame guests remain at the Castle and take part in the Carnival.

* * * * *

Charles Hamilton had a liking for dramatic-sounding titles, especially in earlier days, and "Ashamed of His Sister" had been the previous week's Gem story. Magnet 202 was about Arthur Talbot of the Fifth form, a character who was apparently invented for this particular story (like Bishop in the Gem story mentioned). Talbot was popular with the juniors, a fact which of course enabled the Removites to play their full part in this tale, which opened with Harry Wharton & Co. about to invite him to tea. Much to their surprise, he laid about him, smiting right and left. He then walked down to Friardale station in a bad temper, and had an interview with his father in the waiting-room, an interview that lasted twenty minutes, the interval between the down and the up trains. Mr. Talbot merely repeated what he had earlier stated in a letter, that he did not want his son to enter for the de Courcy scholarship examination, but he would give no reason. It turned out that Talbot's elder brother had left home, and Talbot later attributed thus to his father's tyranny. At all events, he decided to enter for the scholarship despite his father's wishes.

It has frequently been remarked that Charles Hamilton had a special fondness for certain names, which he tended to use again and again. Magnet 200 had included a tale of Tomsonio's circus, of which Jack Talbot was a member, whilst Reginald Talbot was later to feature in the Gem. Similarly, de Courcy was afterwards to appear as a character at Highcliffe, and Charles Hamilton's writings are studded with similar examples. It is strange that he should have resorted to this device.

Another strange point about Magnet 202 was the reproduction in miniature of four pages from Magnet 199. Readers were advised to buy two copies of the Magnet each week for the seven weeks of the competition, so that they could retain one complete miniature copy as well as sending one in as entry for the competition. Ten shillings was to be awarded for the neatest bound entry, with some consolation prizes of a shilling. It is doubtful whether many readers purchased duplicate copies of the Magnet for seven weeks, but no doubt the editor was ever optimistic.

Magnet 202 was dated 30th December, 1911, but the Christmas double number had appeared a fortnight earlier. The only seasonable touch in No. 202 was a half-page of jokes and conundrums, the Greyfriars tale being merely an ordinary term-time story. It did include some comedy with Bunter and Alonzo Todd, though it ended on a very serious note after some highly dramatic episodes. One is left wondering why Talbot was ever allowed to go to Greyfriars at all, but to say more would be to spoil the pleasure of anyone who has not yet read the story.

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 198. THE MYSTERY OF HARRY DORRIAN

Our latest "classic serial" ends next month. When it was introduced to you, last Autumn, I suggested that it is not an outstanding story, but that it holds a good deal of interest for the student of Hamiltonia. I then sat back and waited for the reactions of readers. Plenty have written to tell me that they are enjoying it, and it seems that our Northern Club has been sufficiently intrigued to discuss it at a meeting.

The question I have asked myself for a long time is whether or not it is a genuine Hamilton story. I tend, just slightly, to the belief that it is not. That is a minor detail, for it is only one of several problems to which, nearly seventy years later, there is really no reliable answer.

It is not a great story, even though it makes pleasant, old-lavender reading. It is woolly, plotless, entirely inconsequential. But, as I have stressed, it was written a long time ago, when Hamilton's best work was going into the Gem and the criticisms I have mentioned could apply to plenty of his writing at that time.

For as long as I can remember, it has always been accepted that Harry Dorrian was Charles Hamilton; he never denied it, and never suggested that any sub story was published under the Dorrian name. But the original Dorrian tales have been almost non-existent for many years. I have never seen any but my own copies. It is possible that those who accepted Dorrian as Hamilton may have known nothing but the

Tomsonio Circus stories in the Magnet and Gem.

I cannot believe that any sub-Dorrian tale can have been commissioned for Pluck by the editor. For the most part, the stories in the various series in Pluck did not appear in consecutive issues. The miss of a week or a month between stories in a series did not matter an iota, for it was the normal practice in Pluck. The dozen St. Jim's stories in that paper appeared first at fortnightly intervals, and, later, with a month between stories.

Furthermore, there were not many Dorrian tales. They were always run in Pluck as "second features", never as the main attraction. It is hard to think that they were sufficiently popular for the editor to be clamouring for more of them. And, later, as reprint material, they were almost completely ignored.

The writer of "The Circus Riders", whether or not he was Charles Hamilton, knew his Greyfriars background; Tom Brown had only just been introduced into the Magnet; the mention of Bob Cherry's adventures with Dodger was a reminiscence of a couple of caravanning stories which had featured in the Magnet a few weeks earlier. A reader, trying to assess the situation all these years later might well decide that, if Hamilton was not the writer of "The Circus Riders", then Hamilton was not Harry Dorrian at all. But Talbot was a favourite Hamilton name.

There is a still more astounding factor. The story by Harry Dorrian in Pluck, following "The Circus Riders", was "The Circus Ventriloquist" who was, of course, Billy Bunter. But that very same week, in the Magnet, the Frank Richards story was "The Circus at Greyfriars." This gave an entirely different version of how the Tomsonio Circus came to pitch on Friardale Common. Bunter is unable in the Magnet tale, to go to the circus, through lack of funds, and, in pique, sets the wild animals loose. There is a more concrete presentation of Jack Talbot, and, melodramatic though it is, it is a much better story.

It is incredible that a writer would give two different versions of how Greyfriars first came into contact with Tomsonio's Circus, both versions appearing the same month in their respective papers. And advertisements for both stories appeared side by side in the Magnet the

week before.

It is equally incredible that an editor would dream of publishing two different versions in the same week - but it actually happened. And if an editor could do strange things, so could an author.

During the whole time that the Dorrian tales were running, an advertisement for Pluck appeared in the Magnet week by week.

A week or two after "The Circus Riders" in Pluck and "The Circus at Greyfriars" in the Magnet, Tomsonio's Circus turned up in the Gem in "The Circus at St. Jim's" and its sequel "Jack Blake's Little Dodge" - and these were the best stories of the lot.

So what is the solution? My own view is that, if a sub-writer was used for the Pluck tales, then Charles Hamilton himself commissioned him and paid him. The style of "The Circus Riders" is rather that of C. M. Down - pleasant enough, happy-go-lucky, not solid enough to have any lasting effect. With every other sub-writer without exception the reader experienced what the late Gerry Allison, so rightly and wisely, described as the crunch between the teeth. But Down's candy-floss just melted away and left nothing lasting. And Down was a friend of Hamilton.

There is a legend that a relative of Hamilton's wrote stories, and that the author used them occasionally as his own. My pet theory is that Hamilton started the Harry Dorrian series, only to find (perhaps for the first time, but certainly not the last) that he had too many irons in the fire - he was doing a great deal of writing at that time - and let either his relative or Down carry on with the series.

On the other hand, Hamilton prided himself that, when one set of characters was guested upon a sister paper, he managed, subtly, to give a different "feel" to the tales. In fact, he was remarkably successful in doing this. It is quite possible that he did it with "The Circus Riders"

But those two versions of how the Circus came to Greyfriars - one by Harry Dorrian and the other by Frank Richards - both published at the same time, are, as the Rio Kid would have said twenty years later, a licker. Maybe, after all, the two versions were just a sly trick to maintain the illusion that Frank Richards and Harry Dorrian were two separate people.

* * * * *

NEARING THE END. Our classic serial from nearly seventy years ago.

THE CIRCUS RIDERS

"Competitors for the Tomsonio Cup, this way, please."

Joey Pye called this out in a loud tone and there was a movement at once among the Greyfriars juniors. They came scrambling over the seats from all parts of the circus.

Mr. Quelch was seen to look at the swarm of juniors rather doubtfully, but, after a moment's conference with Wingate of the Sixth, he smiled indulgently, and did not interfere.

The would-be broncho-busters clambered into the ring and ranged themselves in line - fifteen of them in all, marshalled by Mr. Pye.

Shouts of encouragement came from the auditorium.

"Go it, Wharton!"

"Stick to it, Tod Sloan!"

"Show 'em round, Bunty!"

"Keep your eyes on the cup, Owl!"

Bounding Joe, the Buck-jumping Broncho, was brought forward, and the first in the line, who happened to be a biggish fellow named Dabney, of the Greyfriars Upper Fourth Form, and who was just under sixteen, was hoisted up on to Old Joe's back by two grinning footmen.

The competition had begun.

Now, Old Joe was in his most skittish mood. He was an old horse, experienced in all manner of cunning tricks, and when the humour took him, he could throw some moves which put the green efforts of younger horses to shame.

On first feeling Dabney on his back,

Joe stood stock still, with his head down. Dabney, emboldened by Joe's inactivity, gave a click with his tongue, and jerked the reins.

Joe stood stock still.

The audience began to titter, but the signor winked at Mr. Pye.

Dabney was just about to give Joe a smack with his hand when the horse gave a couple of sudden bounds forward, followed up immediately by a terrific buck. His back was arched like an angry cat's, and his four hoofs landed on the ground together.

Dabney gave a yell, and shot gracefully out of the saddle, to fall on his hands and knees in the tan, half a dozen yards away.

There was a shout of laughter from the audience.

Old Joe trotted round the ring, and the two footmen went in pursuit.

Dabney picked himself up, looking very sheepish. As he made his way back to his seat, Bob Cherry called out:

"So much for the Upper Fourth, Dab, old man."

The next rider was Bulstrode, the Remove bully at Greyfriars. He met with a very similar fate to Dabney's, except that he kept his seat till Old Joe's second buck. Then he described the same graceful curve in the air, and landed on the tan with the same dull thud.

"So much for the Remove, Cherry, old man," yelled Dabney.

And so the contest went on, with Old

Joe turning up a winner every time.

Skinner and Stott, both of the Remove, returned to their seats in quick succession, rubbing themselves as they went, and Hurree Singh, the Indian junior, Nugent, Kidman of the Third Form, and two lads from the village, followed at varying intervals.

After a quarter of an hour only six remained of the devoted fifteen, viz, Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Tom Brown, the lad from New Zealand, Billy Bunter, and two village lads.

Of these, one of the village lads soon retired defeated, and Bob Cherry took his place in Old Joe's saddle.

Bob was not a horseman, and he knew it. So he adopted different tactics from his predecessors. He disregarded stirrups and bridle altogether.

He took a firm grip on the pommel of the saddle with both hands, and compressed his grip on Joe's broad back with his knees.

"Right! Let her go!" he muttered.

Round the ring bounded Joe, head down and back up, but Bob held on like grim death. The audience yelled with laughter at Bob's unorthodox horsemanship, but at last they gave a cheer as they saw how pluckily he held on.

Then, with a buck that would have done credit to a real Wild West broncho, Old Joe stopped dead, and poor Bob flew over his head and buried his face in the tan.

He got up, rumped and breathless, but rather pleased with himself as he heard the signor announce the time he had stayed on.

"Two minutes, four seconds! Much the best so far!"

The audience cheered, and Bob returned to his seat with a modest blush

beneath the tan which was sticking to his perspiring face.

The next to mount was the remaining villager, the son of a Friardale butcher, who had been used to horses from the time he could walk.

A furious tussel opened between him and Old Joe, but Joe won in under three minutes.

It was now Billy Bunter's turn, but the fat junior did not seem anxious to push himself forward. He dodged round Wharton in alarm.

"I don't think I feel well enough to ride that beast, after all, Wharton," he said nervously. "He doesn't look so quiet as he did."

Harry Wharton grinned. He had been expecting this.

"You can't back out of it now, Billy," he said. "You must keep up the reputation of the Form, you know. Go on, and take your toss if you can't stick him."

"I can't. Ow! I feel faint."

The signor frowned, and beckoned to Billy with his long whip.

"Next please!" he said sharply.

Tom Brown grabbed Bunter by the arm, and shoved him forward.

"Get on, Peckham!"

Bunter gave a roar, and squirmed and wriggled in the grasp of the sturdy lad from New Zealand.

"Help! Rescue!"

"Go on!"

"Help! Murder!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Let him go, Brown," he said.

"The young rotter's half dead with fright." Brown grinned, and released the fat

junior's arm.

Bunter was off like a flash. He scuttled to the side of the ring, and clambered over the barrier, his eyes behind his big spectacles positively bulging with terror.

"Here, come back," shouted the signor, giving his long whip a loud crack, and winking at Mr. Pye.

But Billy Bunter heeded not. Amid howls from the audience, he scrambled into his seat next to Bob Cherry.

Signor Tomsonio was laughing heartily. He beckoned to Tom Brown, and the lad from New Zealand mounted Joe. He shortened the stirrup-leathers, and took firm hold of the reins as near the bit as he could.

Then began a desperate struggle between the horse and the boy. Old Joe discovered that the tricks that unseated the other amateur "broncho-busters" left the New Zealand lad almost unmoved in the saddle.

The horse bounded, and he bucked, and he kicked, and the audience applauded as Tom Brown was seen to keep his seat.

"Four minutes!" announced the signor.

The Remove cheered wildly. The next minute their cheers were hushed. Old Joe seemed to have heard, too, that he had only one minute more to get rid of his plucky rider. He suddenly galloped round the ring.

Tom Brown, who was beginning to blow a bit by now, thought he had conquered the horse. He sat easily in his saddle. Suddenly old Joe stopped dead, sending the tan up in a cloud.

Tom Brown was caught napping. He tumbled head-first over Joe's neck on to the tan.

"Four minutes, forty-eight seconds!"

said the signor, smiling. "Well done, young sir,"

The Remove cheered lustily as the New Zealander, smiling, walked back to his seat.

Now there was only Harry Wharton left. He was the best athlete in the Form, but Joe seemed to be a hard nut to crack.

Harry mounted confidently, giving poor Joe, who was beginning to tire, a friendly pat as he did so.

Jack Talbot, who was watching the competition with interest from the wings, gave a nod of approval as he saw the Pat. He knew what a valuable thing it was to get on good terms with your horse beforehand.

Harry Wharton's caress seemed to have taken all the fire out of the old horse, and, after a few tentative bucks, he allowed himself to be ridden quietly round the ring, looking as if he had never known what it was to buck in his life. The spectators gasped with surprise, and then roared applause.

The boy's mastery over the horse was perfect and complete. He rode about the ring as he pleased, and seemed in no hurry to get off, even when the signor called out:

"Five minutes! The cup goes to this young gentleman."

How the audience generally and the Remove in particular cheered as the signor presented the battered old cup to the smiling boy.

And as Wharton walked back to his seat, after having given old Joe a few final pats, bearing the Tomsonio Cup with him in triumph, Jack Talbot turned to his pretty girl chum Clotilde with shining eyes.

"What a splendid circus-rider that chap would make!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "How I wish he was in

the company with us!"

And Clotilde, with equal enthusiasm, answered: "So do I!"

(This Old, Old Story Will Be Concluded Next Month)

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BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 11. ENTER M. G. M.

I have made it clear that, for several years in our early history, our main bookings were made with First National. I had a very soft spot for F.N. We ran our first feature film from them, and, for a time, played almost their entire output.

For a good many years, First National was the most powerful company in the film world - even Mary Pickford, the most popular and the most shrewd of all film stars, was tempted away from Paramount and had made three First National pictures some ten years earlier.

Somewhere, however, the great company declined, and, before long, First National product would be released by Warner Bros. However, for the moment, they were still going strong. For some reason, we only played three F.N. films this term. Two were Ken Maynard vehicles - "Lawless Legion" and "Cheyenne". The latter was the last film made by Maynard for F.N. He now joined Universal Films. We played several of the Maynard films from Universal, but they lacked the high quality of the F.N. films and were, I fancy, purely run-of-the-mill westerns.

And now Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer came to our screen. "More stars than there are in heaven" was the M. G. M. catch-phrase.

They certainly made consistently the finest films of all. Our first MGM film was Tim McCoy in "The Bushranger", the merits, or otherwise, of which I have long forgotten. Between that and our final M. G. M. production - Gene Kelly and Donald O'Connor in "Singin' in the Rain" more than twenty years later, we were to play almost the entire MGM output including great features; the Hal Roach comedies of the inimitable Laurel and Hardy, the much-underpraised Charley Chase, Our Gang, Thelma Todd and Patsy Kelly; an enormous stream of cartoons including, later on, every Tom & Jerry, Barney Bear, and the rest, played by us in later years in the very first week of release. But I must not anticipate.

Other M. G. M. pictures this term were William Haines and Josephine Dunn in "Excess Baggage"; Buster Keaton in "Spite Marriage"; Karl Dane and George K. Arthur (a very popular light-comedy team of the day) in "All At Sea"; Buster Keaton in "The Cameraman"; and Ramon Novarro in "a glorious epic of the air" (according to the campaign sheet) - "The Flying Fleet".

From Universal came Reginald Denny in "His Lucky Day" and the same star in "Embarrassing Moments"; Hoot Gibson in

"Points West"; and Glenn Tryon with Sue Carol in "It Can Be Done".

From Gaumont came John Stuart and Estelle Brody in "Sailors Don't Care". With this we played our first Laurel and Hardy, "We Slip Up" (named in America "We Faw Down").

We ended that term with a First National picture "Good Luck", a horse-racing affair starring Conway Tearle and Barbara Bedford. In the same programme was our second Laurel and Hardy, "Berth Marks". Also in this programme was the only Chaplin we ever played: "Sauce for the Goose". This was one of a series of very old Chaplins which Wardour Films

re-issued - different companies were often rushing out a stream of old Chaplins as the years went by.

"Sauce for the Goose", presumably an old Keystone, was a flop with our own audience who much preferred Laurel and Hardy. We showed no more Chaplins.

I cannot recall anything of the two Keaton features we played that first term from MGM. I always have the feeling that most of the old comedians abandoned some of their appeal when they left 2-reelers and went into features.

(ANOTHER ARTICLE IN THIS SERIES SOON)

* * * * *

The Postman Called

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

BILL LOFTS (London): I greatly enjoyed reading the C. D. Annual over Xmas. In answer to Tom Johnson's query Richard Harry Starr lived to be over 90, as he did not pass on until almost the end of 1968. Whilst Mr. Starr was "Richard Essex" who wrote Spartacus under that name, he was not "Lewis Essex", who was a gentleman named Levi Isaacs. Levi Isaacs as "Louise Essex" was prolific in the girls' fiction field, was years younger than Richard Starr, and was also by all accounts a dark-haired, extremely good-looking man.

TONY GLYNN (Manchester): The annual was greatly enjoyed: particularly Mary Cadogan's wartime memories. Also Bill Lofts' piece on the artists recalled by John Jukes - what a pity so little is known about so many of the old comic artists.

ERNEST HOLMAN (Leigh-on-Sea): I very much enjoyed the Annual again. I thought it was a very nicely balanced issue indeed. The varied items were all very readable, I was glad to see the Girls' side of things included, as well as the Artist's view, the latest Buddle, and - as a household also 'owned' by the greatest of creatures - the story of the

other 'Misters'. In fact, a thoroughly enjoyable issue. Keep it up!

JOHN TOMLINSON (Burton-on-Trent): I confess to a rising irritation with Danny and his classing almost all substitute stories as a load of rubbish. During 1924 and 1925 there were many sub tales in the Gem and the Magnet that I thoroughly enjoyed. Two Greyfriars cricket stories by Pentelow in 1924, were very good, but Danny brushed them aside with contempt. In the Gem I enjoyed "A Chinee at St. Jim's" and "Lumley-Lumley's Coup", but Danny thought them not worth reading. Two genuine stories in 1925 about Manners's feud with Torrence bored me, but I expect Danny will praise them to the skies. I daren't think what he'll say about "Knight of the Pump" by Pentelow.

BEN WHITER (London): The Annual is as good as ever; right up to the high standard of its predecessors. Re the correspondent in the December C.D. who wrote about the club reports. Fair enough; keep them brief; but he should note that most items in C.D. and Annual are written by club members. A winning treble this year must be the items by Mary Cadogan, Les Rowley, and Ray Hopkins.

NEIL LAMBERT (Surbiton): I was interested in the Editorial in which you mentioned the Maskelyne and Derant Theatre. I particularly recall the latter because I remember being taken there about forty years ago on a choir boys' outing. It was situated in Regent Street, near Langham Place, just opposite All Saints' Church, near where the BBC now stands at the head.

RAY HOPKINS (New Cross): I specially liked Les Rowley's visit to Wharton Lodge and I also liked Mary Cadogan's lively article on how she worked her way up through the comics and girls' papers. It was nice to hear in Mr. Truscott's article someone talking about some of one's own favourite hard-back authors. Brian Doyle's tribute to HYLTON CLEAVER'S Mr. Dennett was much appreciated also. Always lots of amusement engendered when one reads his school stories, even though not encountered until one long passed one's own schooldays.

Ernest Holman's summary of the famous second issue of the MAGNET, about which one has heard but never had the chance to read, was greatly appreciated, also.

What a lovely reproduction of Mr. Chips on page 114 - how very "alive" the picture is. I am sure you will have received many thanks from other readers for telling us about Mister Softie's predecessors. Nice to read of Len Wormull's enjoyment of the shortlived BULLSEYE which reminded me of my own digging into this odd paper when it first appeared.

Finally, a most appreciative thank you to you for including a Mr. Buddle story in the Annual. One always enjoys hearing about this likeable schoolmaster and the way that he calls upon Meredith Senior's bound volume of GEMS to aid him in his detective efforts is greatly enjoyed.

ARTHUR FENNER (Highams Park): It is over ten years since I became a C.D. reader. How the time flies! It seems like half of that. It is five years since I lost my wife. How she loved to read "Danny's Diary" laughing over his escapades and Gran and Auntie Gwen. C.D. is still something to look forward to. My thanks to you and to the many contributors who help to keep alive the fame of Charles Hamilton.

* * * * *

News of the Clubs

CAMBRIDGE

The meeting on 12th January, with Bill Lofts in the Chair, had films as its main discussion theme. A most enjoyable gathering continued till 7 p.m.

Memories went back to shows of 1910. Among those productions specially mentioned was "All Quiet on the Western Front" which Vic Hearn recalled. This was the film which brought home to him the realities of war.

Various memorable films were mentioned by members, and Jack Overhill recalled pre-1914 days when entrance to some programmes was just one penny (the real penny!).

In the course of an animated discussion, nearly fifty titles were recalled, and everyone agreed that the meeting had been a great success.

It was agreed to send a message of congratulation to the Northern

Club on the award of a knighthood to their President.

o o o

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

Thanks to the kind offices of Ron Brockman, our Christmas meeting was held, once again, in the delightful surrounds of the Graduates Club. Suffice to record that our programme was typical of our meetings, with splendid food and a wide variety of discussions, but no formality to it all. We all hope that our confreres in England had meetings as jolly as ours.

SYD SMYTH

o o o

LONDON

A new rendezvous at Gladstone Park with the Baddiel family as hosts, for the first meeting of 1975.

At the reception Bob Blythe had painstakingly arranged in two groups, numerous copies of the old papers and books and which, later on, members had to identify, remembering the titles. Winner was Norman Wright and his prize from the hosts was a Boys' Friend Library. Marjorie Bilbow then rendered a tape recording from the former B. B. C. item "Home For the Afternoon" and this dealt with several of the club's members giving their view as to why they collect the old papers and also their interest in the hobby.

A quiz by Ben Whiter was won by Bob Blythe, Norman Wright, Joyce Dawkins and Graham Bruton. A Courtfield Cracksman reading by Winifred Morss was followed by an exam on it and the winner was Millicent Lyle.

An excellent year's Nelson Lee Library report was given by the curator, Bob Blythe.

Tom Wright read a funny St. Sam's story entitled "An Affair of Honour".

The hospitality of the Baddiel family was greatly enjoyed and they were accorded a hearty vote of thanks.

The Annual General Meeting of the Club will take place at 27

Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S. E. 22, on Sunday, 16th February.
Hostess, Josie Packman.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

* * *

NORTHERN

Saturday, 11 January, 1975

As this is the Jubilee year of the Northern Club we discussed what form our celebrations might take and the possibility of a dinner later in the year. Our plans will be publicized as soon as they are known, so that members and friends may book the day!

After conversation on a variety of topics (some more indicative of a Fabian Society meeting than a book club!) we took part in a Greyfriars Quiz presented by Geoffrey Wilde. The Magnets concerned were those published by Howard Baker and we were to name the speaker and the series as Geoffrey read out items of conversation.

First came Mollie Allison with thirteen and tying second place were June Arden, Ron Hodgson and Bill Williamson with twelve.

The Secretary would like to correct an error he made in reporting Harold Truscott's talk at the November meeting (CD December).

Harold had said that it was Hamilton who wrote about 'the other Greyfriars' in 1907, which fact makes it all the more remarkable that the style of writing was so different and the school was certainly not our Greyfriars!

Our meetings continue to be held at the Swarthmore Educational Centre, on the second Saturday of each month, from 6.30 p.m. onwards. New members and all interested in the Hobby will be warmly welcomed.

"YOU NEED NOT BE ASHAMED TO BE SEEN

READING THIS BOOK"

by James W. Cook

Most of you will remember seeing this excellent piece of advice on the flylead of a book popular in our hobby. Once, when travelling from London to South Wales, I saw a boy pull from a pocket a well-worn CHAMPION in a crowded compartment of the train. A man sitting

opposite suddenly became very excited as he spotted the book and for the next five minutes we were all entertained on the delights of old boys' books.

No doubt, that enthusiastic Old Boy didn't mind in the least letting it be known he still loved to read boys' books. But who among us would go as far as that? Who among us would dare to advertise the fact that he - or she - still reads the magazine of our - their - school-days?

But what are we afraid of? Are we embarrassed in exhibiting one of our vices? If it is a vice. There's nothing vicious in reading a book that was published in our youth at a time when moral standards demanded excellent literature and taste. When even the cheapest of juvenile fiction maintained a moral duty to its readers to 'carry pure, healthy literature'. Are we diffident at letting people know we still keep an interest in the world of our school years; or are we fearful of dignity?

If *infra dig* upsets us I am more distressed when I am accused of reading 'comics'. Nobody in our hobby would refer to our old papers as 'comics', but outsiders invariably have a penchant for describing the hobby books as such. These scribblers who classify our school-detective-adventure papers as comics, dishonour their own profession.

Have you ever noticed that you can never really get away from our hobby? For you can depend on it you will get a reminder from the world of books, radio and television.

Most of us at one time or another have 'got away' from our hobby either by chance or design. At least we intended to consign our enthusiasm to the limbo of yesterday for a while. But it isn't easy.

Look at all these reminders.

There's Loder (Magnet), the gambler and scoundrel in Thackeray's VANITY FAIR. Mary Ann Cluppins (Sexton Blake) friend of Mrs. Bardell - Pickwick Papers, and, of course, Mrs. Bardell (Sexton Blake).

Then there's Clinton (Nelson Lee) a schoolmaster in Hugh Walpole's MR. PERRIN and MR. TRAIL. Phipps, Lord Goring's servant in O. WILDE'S AN IDEAL HUSBAND. Phipps is also a servant in the Nelson Lee.

Chas. Hamilton's supporters will recognise Levison, a murderer

in EAST LYNNE. And Newcombe from Thackeray's THE NEW-COMBES. W. Scott's PEVERIL OF THE PEAK features Outram and Hacker is a schoolboy in Angela Thirkell's Barsetshire series which name may have originated in that lady's mind from reading Hamilton.

Was Chas. Hamilton thinking of Stalky & Co. when he created Mr. Prout, the Housemaster in Kipling's book?

And was Edwy Brooks another Kipling reader when he thought up Mr. Pagett?

Perhaps Dorothy Sayers was familiar with Greyfriars to an extent that she named Bunter for Lord Peter Wimsey's valet. And was Harry Blythe influenced by Wilkie Collins' character, Franklyn Blake, in THE MOONSTONE, the first English full length detective novel?

Perhaps Mr. Brooks thought up Mr. Crowell after reading Dickens' NICHOLAS NICKLEBY.

There's plenty more if you look for them.

Even today's 007 (James Bond) is old hat. Kipling called it a locomotive engine in 1898!

And parodies on SHERLOCK HOLMES are not unusual. Maurice Leblanc wrote ARSENE LUPIN v HOLMLOCK SHEARS in many clever parodies.

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DEATH OF DICK WHORWELL

We learn with regret of the death of Dick Whorwell on 30th December. He had a lifetime interest in the old papers, and, though he always remained on the fringe of the hobby, he was one of the most colourful characters. His great favourites were the early blue Gems, and Mr. Len Wormull recalls how Dick used to wind up his letters always with the words "Must go now or old Ratty will be after me."

Mr. Whorwell's age at the time of his death would have been about 76.

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STORY PAPER COLLECTOR. Good copies wanted for binding. All issues from 1942 - 1954. Issues for July: 1958: 1962: 1963: 1964. Issues for April and October 1962.

MUSEUM PRESS, 30 TONBRIDGE ROAD, MAIDSTONE.

REVIEWTHE CAVE

by Richard Church

PICCOLO (Pan Books) 30pRepublished 1974

Whether twenty-five years qualifies a book for inclusion in a publication containing in its title the word 'Collectors' is, no doubt, a debatable point.

Nevertheless, the recent re-issue of one of the few books for boys written by this well-known novelist, poet and critic, is, I feel, worthy of more than an ordinary mention.

Charles Hamilton reckoned there was nothing better than writing for boys. Richard Church, who won prizes for his novel 'The Porch' in 1937, and for 'Over the Bridge', the first volume of his autobiography, in 1955, certainly thought it was well worth while.

'The Cave' was first written in 1950, was revised somewhat in 1960 and now comes to the surface again. It is a most readable story, of about 50,000 words in length. It concerns five young schoolboys, members of 'The Tomahawk Club' - Alan, self-appointed leader; thoughtful, bespectacled John; gruff, plodding George; fat Cuthbert, known as 'Meaty': and tiny Harold (a solitary brother amongst an army of older sisters) referred to as 'Lightning' because of his excitable nature. They decide to spend a day exploring an underground cave, on the understanding that they return home by seven o'clock.

Unlike many schoolboy stories, there is not a great deal of conversation - but the descriptive passages throughout are painted in the author's own excellent style. The adventure of the boys' underground exploration makes a splendid story - the separation of two of the boys from the rest, the eventual joining up of both parties - the gradual development of individual characters - the failure of the leader to 'lead' - the drawing-out of gruff George to 'take over' when danger threatens, jollied along by the cheerful and fat 'Meaty' (in charge of the food!) - the thoughtful 'working it out' method of John - and the enthusiasm and lack of fear of little 'Lightning' - all these points are very cleverly brought out as the story progresses.

When they eventually find their way out of the cave after some

'Lost World' type of adventures and discoveries, they are able to return just in time to meet the deadline of seven o'clock.

E. S. HOLMAN

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THE AMALGAMATED PRESS ROBIN HOOD
LIBRARY

by Norman Wright

The Amalgamated Press Robin Hood Library does not share the fame of its Aldine namesake. Perhaps it did not deserve much praise, it certainly did not last very long, a matter of fifteen months. In appearance it was very much like the Nelson Lee Library, containing thirty-two pages.

The first number appeared in April 1919, "With bow and blade" was its title. The tale opened with Robin living near Sherwood with Gaffer Hood, a yeoman farmer. By the second chapter he had been outlawed and as usual headed for the forest. After defeating Red Hugh, an outlaw leader, Robin took charge and rearranged things into the traditional take from the rich and give to the poor manner. The first tale continued to be packed with action.

Friar Tuck was brought into the band. Maid Marian was rescued and of course Robin was proved to be a nobleman - Robert Fitzurze.

Two original characters were also introduced. Blake Peter, a roguish lord who became Robin's arch enemy and featured frequently in early numbers, and Thom Cure All. Thom was an ingenious fellow who provided the brainwork behind many of the outlaws schemes. As his name implied he was a doctor. He even performed minor brain operations in a number of the stories!

The first fifteen issues contained very long cover to cover stories. They were well written and developed a continuing plot. Richard the Lionheart was introduced and the series ended with Richard restoring Robin's castle, etc. Alas this situation could not last. Richard was killed in the Crusades and Robin's enemies forced him to become an outlaw once more.

From this point the stories began to deteriorate. Animals featured in a lot of issues. Thom Cure All has a pet bear named Barney, useful for scaring off cowardly Normans. A polar bear was encountered in number thirty, when Robin was captured by Northmen and

marooned on an iceberg. An exciting wolf hunt was described in issue twenty-five. The cover of one story showed the outlaws riding on an elephant, the creature being an orphan whose Hindu master had been killed.

The elephant was still with the outlaws at the end of the story, being used as a type of medieval tank.

Elephants seemed to have made rather an impression on the outlaws for the story titled "The elephant hunters" began - "Robin Hood sometimes of Sherwood Forest, stood on the broad steps leading down to the courtyard of the palace of the King of Kerra in Africa. He and his merry men had come there ... to hunt elephants." Other issues contained escaped tiger and other felines, all grist for the Sherwood mill.

One of Thom Cure All's inventions was gunpowder, used in many stories. According to my history book gunpowder was not used until about a century after the reign of bad King John. Clever chaps these outlaws! Not, however, clever enough to prevent the library losing ground. Number 33 had seen a change of policy when a serial was introduced. "King of Canals" by David Goodwin, occupied the first ten pages and half of the front cover. Stories of the supernatural began to appear and a new villain "The Hooded Man" was in number 42, an issue that was memorable for having a leopard AND Thom saving the life of King John. By number 49 "King of canals" had finished and a Dick Turpin serial by Morton Pike began. By now the end was very near. In the editorial to issue 54 (by the way 54 was the first one to have an editorial) the editor said that readers had been asking if it would be possible to have one paper to replace the Robin Hood Library and its two companion papers. The editor ended his page by asking readers to let him know what they thought of the idea. Whatever they thought only a few weeks later the Robin Hood Library, the Prairie Library and the Detective Library, were squeezed into one, the Nugget Library.

Why did the Robin Hood Library end? I think perhaps readers were fed up with their hero galavanting around the world. Anywhere in England was fine, but darkest Africa was stretching authors licence a bit far.

* * * * *

WANTED - First World War Magnets and Dreadnoughts. Also early Greyfriar's Heralds.
Write -

LOYNES, 14 HANOVER COURT, TENKESBURY, GLOS., GL20 5DU

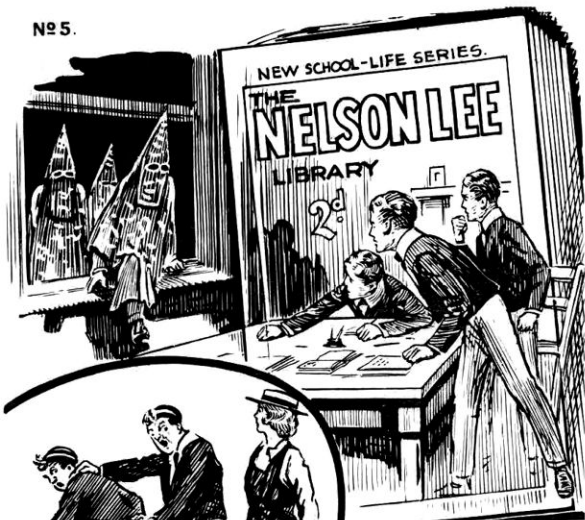
WANTED: Good loose copies or volumes containing some of BOYS' FRIEND - issues between Nos. 1182 and 1256. Good copies essential. Also Dreadnoughts, preferably bound volumes.

ERIC FAYNE

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