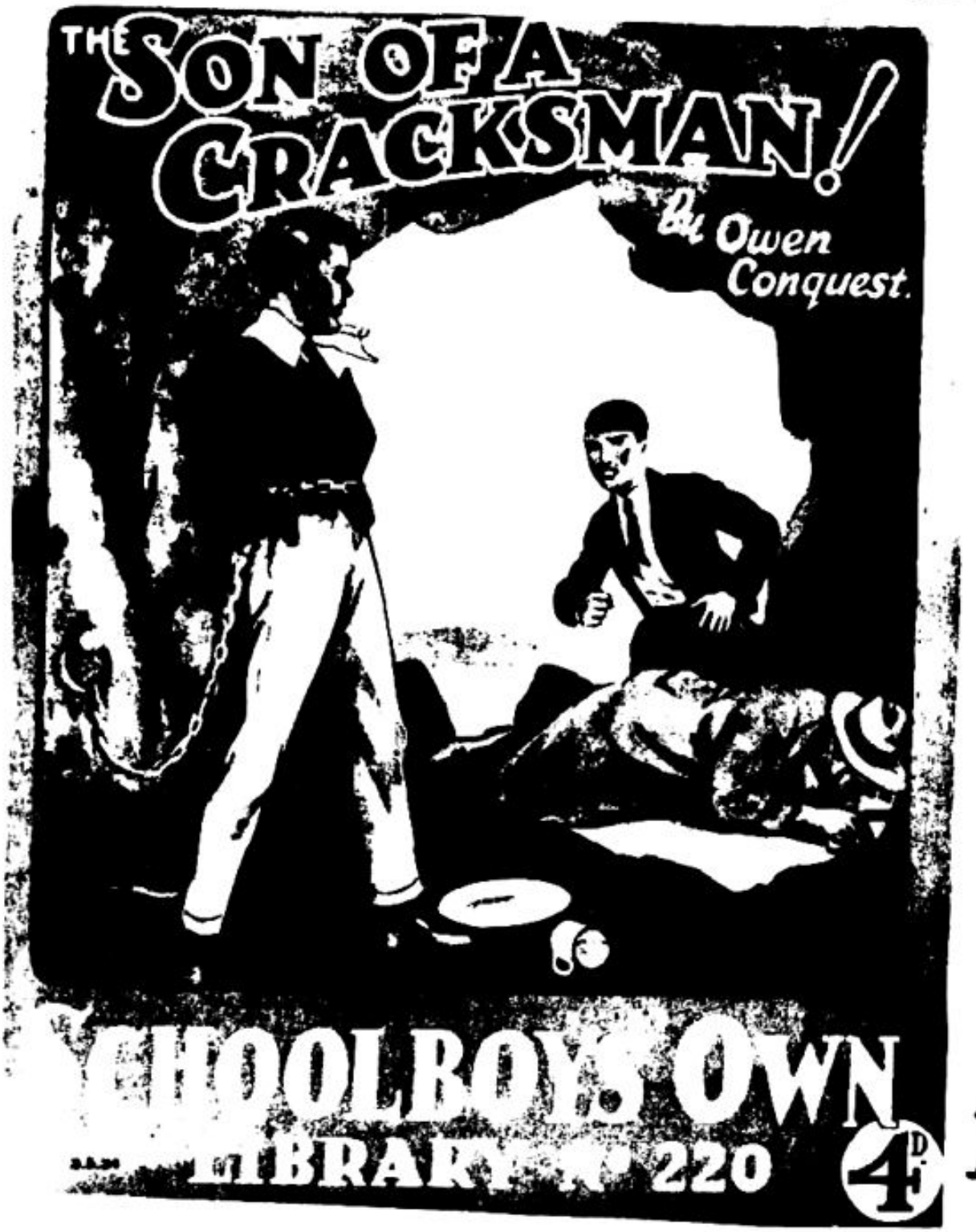
STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL. 29 NO. 344 AUGUST 1975



SPECIALS THIS MONTH

Bound Comics, pre 1944 unless otherwise stated.

Film Fun, 15 Vols., 1922-1949 (some $\frac{1}{2}$, some $\frac{1}{3}$ years, also about 400 single issues, most years, £1.50 each.)

Kinema Comics, 5 Vols., $\frac{1}{2}$ years, around £40. 300 single copies £1.50 each, most years.

Butterfly, complete 1927, £54 in one Vol. 800 single issues, £1 each, most years.

Jester, 600 loose copies only, all dates, £1 each. Other single issues are available of Knockout, Comic Cuts, Comic Life, Firefly, Fun/Fiction, Funny Wonder, Jingles, Joker, Jolly, Larks, Lotofun, Merry & Bright, Sparkler, Tip Top, etc. Many of these are from the collections I obtained at Sotheby's Auction recently.
Boys papers in bound volumes.
Magnets & Gems (late), Populars, Boys Journal, Marvel, Sports Library, Young Britain, Modern Boy, U.J. Detective Supplement, Union Jack, Detective Weekly, Thriller, Boys Realm, Champions, all the Lees, Chums, Captains, BOA'S, etc., etc.
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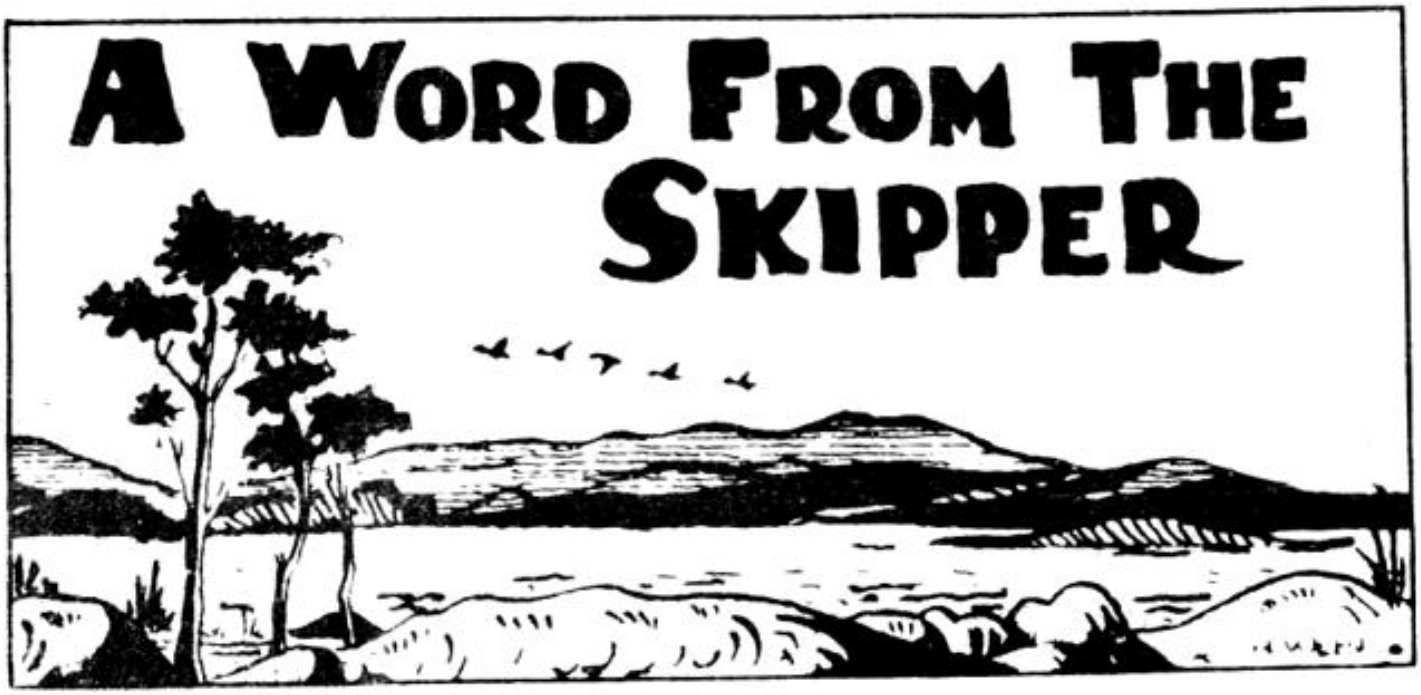
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR
Founded in 1941 by
W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST
Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 29 | No. 344 | AUGUST 1975 | Price 18p

A WORD FROM THE SKIPPER



DISASTER, 1912

The little old Cunard liner "Carpathia" was four days out from New York on her way to carry her passengers to the sunshine of the Mediterranean. It was about one o'clock in the morning on 15th April, 1912, that passengers were awakened by strange activities at a time when the ship should have been shut down for the night. The ship itself was shuddering and trembling from stem to stern as the liner strained to surpass her normal maximum speed of 14 knots. There were loud noises from the decks above the cabins of the passengers, and there was

constant activity as members of the crew rushed from here to there with perfectly organised speediness.

Another thing which seemed remarkable was the intense cold. Passengers who had been sunbathing during the day now shivered in what seemed like Arctic temperatures. There was only cold water at the taps; the radiators were stone cold. Everything was rattling as the old ship strained to do more than she should.

The crew had orders not to rouse the passengers. They were far better out of the way of what lay ahead. But some of them went out to ask what was the matter, only to be told: "An accident, but not to our ship. Stay inside."

Finally, after a long delay and much wonderment, they got the reason for what was happening: "There has been an accident to the 'Titanic'".

Nobody could believe it at first. "The 'Titanic' is on the northern route and we are on the southern."

"We're going north like hell. Get back to your cabin."

And they were, too. Going north at a speed of which nobody would have believed the "Carpathia" capable. Every ounce of heat and steam was going into the boilers; boats were being slung in the davits over the sides; ladders, cargo nets, winches, were all being got ready for the rescues; mattresses, food, everything they could think of was being prepared for the rescued.

The 'Titanic' was the first ship to send out the new S.O.S. signal. And the 'Carpathia' was the nearest ship to receive it - but the 'Carpathia' was 58 miles away. Four hours journey at 14 knots. But those 14 knots were coaxed up to 15, 16, 17 knots - no wonder the old ship throbbed and creaked. And, as they reached the ice-field at last, they raced on without decreasing speed, but with a huge look-out posted - weaving in and out and around the icebergs as the 'Carpathia' tore on.

All this is inspired by the disaster to the 'Titanic' which occurred on Sunday night, 14th April, not long before midnight. The film 'Titanic' was put out on television a week or two ago. It was a good film, though the story-line was not strong. But, in any case, the [illegible] star was the "unsinkable" ship herself, doomed to disaster from the one thing that could possibly have sunk her. There was a later film on the 'Titanic', o:

course, and probably an even better one. The British-made "A Night To Remember", based on the wonderful book of the same title, by Walter Lord.

The loss of the 'Titanic', the most beautiful and most luxurious ship ever built, on its maiden voyage, has stunned and dwarfed the imagination ever since it happened over sixty years ago. But, in many ways, the story of the 'Carpathia' and its dash to the rescue is every bit as memorable. I wonder that that, in its turn, has never been made into a motion picture.

One of the most fascinating chapters in Walter Lord's book is the one devoted entirely to acknowledgments. The origin of every item of information, in a work which is full of information, is given. It is because Walter Lord acknowledges his many debts to others, and explains them in detail, that his book is so convincing in every way. And he brings a breat warmth of style to his account of that disaster among the ice floes and the many acts of heroism which occurred.

It has been said that the tragedy of the "Titanic", with its appalling loss of life, was the end of an era. That summer the concert parties sang the ballad "The Ship That Will Never Return", and there is no doubt that mid-1912 was overclouded by what had happened. Maybe, between the disaster and August 1914 there was something of a vacuum. We're all too young to know for certain.

In the world of the old papers things went on just as before as the Golden Age moved slowly into its glowing sunset. True, in 1912, Hamilton Edwards, for some reason, passed out from the Amalgamated Press confines, and his empire of boys' papers missed him sadly. But the Gem and the Magnet were going strong, the Penny Popular was giving evidence of the popularity of Tom Merry by reprinting the early stories of St. Jim's, and the bookstalls groaned under a load of tip-top periodicals which were to last for several years yet. The 'Titanic' shook a nation's complacency, the 'Carpathia' brought a tingle of pride, and the old papers carried on as though their heyday would last for ever.

ANNUAL 1975

All being well, the Annual will be with you in mid-December as usual. This year, in a remarkable article, Roger Jenkins gives us

some "Glimpses of Yesterday" in which he is in reminiscent mood and discloses how he, himself, was a little too gullible concerning some of the swindlers who tried to make easy and quick money in the early days of the hobby. It is fascinating reading.

Mary Cadogan is her usual charming self as she discusses her "Favourite Tomboys", and Harold Truscott is in high form as he talks about "Adult School Stories". Those are just three of the great articles in this year's bumper Year Book, coming along in December.

If all goes well, we hope to include the order form for the Annual with our next issue.

THE EDITOR

* *

DANNY'S DIARY

AUGUST 1925

Lovely summer we are having, and we had a grand holiday with my Gran and Auntie Gwen in Essex. Gran doesn't get out very far these days, owing to the weight of her years, but she keeps lively and is lots more fun than plenty of younger people.

In the Boys' Friend, the tip-top summer holiday series has continued throughout the month. In "Paying Guests", that's exactly what Jimmy Silver & Co. find they are on Captain Muffin's yacht, the Silver Cloud. They thought they were having a free holiday as guests of Tubby Muffin, but Captain Muffin charges £4 per head each. And, as he points out, he never charged less than £3 a week, all in, at his seaside boarding house, so £4 a week, with a cruise on a yacht thrown in, can't be complained about.

In "The Rookwood Yachtsmen", the pals become hot rivals against Smythe & Co. who are also on the trip. In "Jimmy Silver & Co. at Sea", the ship puts in at Barnstaple Bay, and Lovell runs into his usual trouble at Appledore. In "Rivals of the Silver Cloud", Ponsonby & Co. of Highcliffe join the ship, and there is immediate trouble.

Last of the month is "The New Passenger". Jimmy Silver gives a lift in the rowing-boat to a man who, it turns out, is yet another passenger to join the ship. His name is Ulick Lee. Lovell is furious

when he discovers that Lee has been given his, Lovell's, cabin. A great series, and I hope it goes on for weeks yet.

In parliament, a British Film Quota Act has been passed. This is a new law, intended to help British films. Every cinema has to show a percentage of British registered films, and every renter has to handle the release of so many British films.

Continuing the new South Seas series in the Nelson Lee Library, the month's first tale was "The Wanderer's Quest". The party comprises Lord Dorrimore and a number of St. Frank's boys, some Moor View girls, Nelson Lee, Mr. Stokes, and the Kutana chief, Umlosi. They are seeking a wondrous island of pearls.

The series continued with "The Isle of Coral". A rival expedition under Jonathan Prescott has also reached the island.

In "The Pearl Hunters" there are some exciting incidents. There is a great hurricane which carries Willy Handforth away on a tree and lands him on a coral needle from which he is rescued by Tessa Love. In "The Secret of the Lagoon" there is a tremendous fight when the rival party tries to drive off Dorrie's party. Finally, "Beset by Cannibals", in which things seem to be going all too well for Prescott and his rascals who intend to maroon the St. Frank's party on a distant atoll. Lovely summer reading.

There are three picture palaces in Colchester. I went there several times. At the Hippodrome I saw Hoot Gibson in "The Riding Kid from Powder River"; at the Vaudeville I saw Douglas McLean in "The Yankee Consul"; and at the Headgate I saw Clara Bow in "Wine". At home, during the month, before we went to Colchester, we saw Lionel Barrymore in "I Am The Man", Tom Mix in "The Deadwood Coach", Viola Dana in "The Beauty Contest", and Johnny Hines in "The Early Bird."

This month's Schoolboys' Own Libraries were weak. No. 9 was "A Schoolboy's Honour", a pretty awful tale about Wingate, and No. 10 was "Jolly Roger's Way", a tale of St. Katie's by Michael Poole, and I can't read him.

"The Case of the Man Who Never Slept" was an unusual Sexton Blake Library tale which I bought to read when I was at Gran's and I liked it.

August's first Gem was "The Hour of Atonement", a sequel to

the Talbot-Marie Rivers tale which was last month's final. The Head has taken the school under canvas at Stormpoint, "because he considered a change of air and environment would be beneficial to all". In the end, Jim Dawlish fled - as he always does in this sort of tale. Next was "Study No. 9 on the Warpath", about a misunderstanding between Gussy and Cardew. Cardew drives a car very recklessly. Pretty grim. Next came "Camp and Caravan" which was the start of a trip in a motor caravan and introduced a character named Nippy. Then "The Shadowed Caravan" introducing two rogues named Patchy and Sooky, plus Gordon Gay & Co. Last of the month was "Kidnapped" which introduced Cousin Ethel and Doris Levison for no good reason. And there is a mystery about Nippy.

The editor says the St. Jim's stories in the Gem are now permanently enlarged so Martin Clifford can show what he can do. But the real M.C. seems to have gone into retirement.

But even though the Gem is a bit feeble just now, the Magnet is great, with the holiday series about Bunter at Bunter Court.

First of the month was "Billy Bunter's Master-Stroke". Bunter has taken Combermere Lodge and re-named it Bunter Court. He manages to trick Mauly, and he also manages to imprison Mr. Pilkins, the estate agent, in the cellar. In "The Mystery of Bunter Court", Bunter finds it necessary to add Walsingham, the butler, to the number of people imprisoned in the cellar. It's a giant laugh from beginning to end.

Then "The Bunter Court Eleven" in which Bunter skippers a team of village fellows, led by Parker. "The Prisoners of Bunter Court" added merrily to the great series. When people at Bunter Court get nosey, they are likely to disappear - into the wine cellar. And the latest one to go that way is Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of St. Jim's. But Bunter's hilarious reign is nearing its end. In "Billy Bunter's Bolt", the Owl finally has to take to his heels with a crowd of furious creditors on his tail. In this one Bunter meets up with Coker and a caravan. Must be the most clever comedy series ever in the Magnet, this one.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: So it is exactly fifty years since the Cinema Quota Act became law. The idea was to aid the British film industry. The Act had two prongs: the Exhibitors' Quota, by which every cinema had to book a percentage of home-made films. Also, every renter had to distribute a similar percentage of British films. The trouble was that there were

not enough good British films to go round, and, in consequence, the best ones were milked away to the exhibitors who could afford inflated rentals for them. And a mass of low-budget "quickies" were rushed out to meet the act - and for many years these cheap British "quota" pictures were awful. Renters, or the American ones at any rate, manufactured a mass of quickies simply to meet their own part of the Act. And cinemas like the Empire and the Warner (and no doubt plenty of others) which had long seasons of certain films from overseas, showed the British quota quickie at about 11 o'clock every morning, one showing only per day, to fill their part of the Exhibitors' quota. I recall "Sexton Blake and the Bearded Doctor" being shown thus, in the mornings, at the Empire, and "It's Not Cricket", a British comedy, being shown solely in the mornings at the Warner Theatre. The Act may have done some good, but my own idea is that it was harmful (like so many half-baked bills which are landed on a long-suffering public).

Schoolboys' Own Library No. 9, "A Schoolboys' Honour" was a drastically pruned version of the Schoolboy Film Stars series of 1920 - five of the dreariest Magnets ever, squeezed into one S.O.L. to make the worst Greyfriars S.O.L. in the Library's history.

* *

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

Well here we are with another fine article from our old friend Vic Colby. Bette tells me that Vic was rather poorly earlier this year so that's more to his credit that he can sit down and write about our favourite detective. May we all offer our best wishes to Vic and trust that he is now better.

Next month we have another date to celebrate - the 60th Anniversary of the launching of the Sexton Blake Library in September 1915!!!! I hope to be able to fill Blakiana with something special so if anyone would care to write a few words please let me have them by the latest date of the first week in August to meet the editor's deadline. Many thanks to all those kind people who send me material and those who write to say they appreciate Blakiana.

JOSIE PACKMAN

TINKER IN TROUBLE

by Vic Colby

Some sound had broken on his ears - vague and indefinable. He was sure he had heard something - something out of the ordinary; but he could not place it, could not even reproduce it in his mind. It had

not been the cry of a nightbird - that was all he felt certain of. But whatever it had been, it had come from the woods. He was conscious of an unpleasant tingling down his spine. Indefinable though it was, there had been a queer suggestion of something weird and uncanny borne to him on the wind. Something now appeared from amongst the trees - big and ungainly, seeking a way through the fence that barred its path. Presently it found a gap and passed through. He could make out a pair of savage eyes in the gloom, but the shape was still indistinct. For a moment he had the impression of a cat like form the size of a large panther, as the creature started off across the grass. Then it rose, running ape-like with rounded back and hanging arms. Whatever it was it had passed very close to him. "Lor" he breathed, "What was it?". An ape would have climbed the fence, a panther, anything of that sort would have leaped it easily. The impression of fierce brute eyes, was still in his mind, bewildered and confused. Something hideous and evil. But what was it?

This piece of gripping prose could easily have come from "The Island of Dr. Moreau" by H. G. Wells, but in fact it came from S. B. L. 2nd series, No. 697, "The Secret of the Surgery" by Warwick Jardine and it was Tinker who listened and looked, filled with nameless dread. As a matter of fact Tinker suffered a great deal in this story. He was most enterprising and assiduous in his devotion to duty, but was doomed to have his car run off the road twice, to be imprisoned in a house of horror, escaping only after an ordeal of suspense. Caught in a downpour of rain, his clothes soaked, he crawled into a barn drenched and chilled, and worn out with lack of rest surrendered to sleep in his wet clothes, he woke with swimming head and raw sore throat. Hatless, dishevelled, with mud thick on his shoes, he reached the village Post Office, unsteady and ill with fever. His voice was thick and husky on the trunk call to Baker Street, but succour from Blake was denied him as his beloved Guv'nor had been taken to hospital, where he would remain for at least a week! Poor Tinker, forbidden previously by Blake to involve the police, a solitary threepenny piece in his pocket, no money for transport, not even a cigarette to give him a modicum of comfort. In desperation he turned to the one woman he considered to be above reproach and poured his story into her startled ears. She gave him a

fully-loaded gun and locked him into a small room with a grill overlooking the Temple so that he could learn the identities of the worshippers of Isis, moon-goddess of Ancient Egypt. Later she would call for him and help him further. But what is this? The lights in the temple go up and who is the Priestess seated on the ivory throne, but Tinker's trusted benefactress!

He examined the cartridges in the gun she had given him, blanks, all of them.

Horror of horrors, something stirred at the feet of the Priestess, a lithe animal shape, he saw the sheen of its tawny skin, a leopard! Its neck was encircled with a jewelled collar, the silver chain attached to it held in the priestess's hand. Tinker's mind reeled as the drifting haze of incense smoke thinned and he saw revealed the fair human head on the leopard's body. A nightmare creation from the house of horrors, the monstrous work of human hands. A living Androsphinx believed essential for the full worship of the moon goddess. A perfect living counterpart of the massive stone sphinxes flanking the ivory throne. As he watched with swimming senses, he saw the creature stir and lift its head. The missing blonde! Tinker swayed, ashen faced, clutching the grill for support. He collapsed. On recovery he found himself bound hand and foot. His mind was on the ghastly operation that had transformed the lovely blonde into a living Sphinx. He stared at the Priestess aghast. Words broke from him in husky bewilderment, "How could you let them?" "Let them" she echoed. "I suggested it". Poor old Tinker, trapped and betrayed was finally flung into a cell back in the house of horrors loft and left to die of the pneumonia which racked his frame.

However, Sexton Blake had not gone to hospital. This story was to deceive the enemy while he gained access to their stronghold. Now he came to the rescue carrying Tinker from his cell in his arms. Tinker's eyes were closed, his lips moving. "He will be alright, though a hospital case" Blake assured a friend. So it proved, for Tinker was afterwards to be the best man at the friend's wedding.

It transpired that the creature Tinker had encountered at the beginning of this article, was the crude work of the fanatical doctor cult leader, using an ape and a leopard as a trial run. This monstrosity

had escaped, was rounded up and shot by the crooks themselves. Only the brilliant surgeon that the crooks had later kidnapped and forced into their service was able to produce the woman-leopard that had shocked Tinker so greatly. This transformation was completed weeks before Blake was brought into the case. However, Blake was able to step in at the last possible moment and stop a second identical operation on a girl he had been seeking.

The brilliant surgeon could never have undone his evil work, and it was with a feeling of relief on Blake's part that the woman-leopard sphinx perished in the blazing plane that was to have carried her and the crooks to safety. The cult leader himself fired the shot that brought down the plane as he had learned that the priestess and her accomplice had used the cult that he believed in fanatically to serve their own ends.

As the plane crashed Sexton Blake reached the cult leader, who snatched up his rifle. Blake's hand flashed to his automatic, covering the man with the rifle. The cult leader smiled, "I'm not hoping to shoot you Blake". "You would not get the chance" Blake replied. "Put down that rifle". The cult leader laughed. The nose of the weapon in his hands pressed up against the heavy flesh beneath his chin. His right hand stretched down to the trigger guard. Blake hurled himself forward. The cult leader laughed again and in the middle of that strange laugh he thrust down the trigger. He was dead before he hit the grass, the last of a horrible collection of pitiless and frightening characters, and the end of a story that although "not for the squeamish" was breath-taking in its impact, and very truly un-put-down-able.

RETURN OF AN OLD ENEMY

by S. Gordon Swan

Sexton Blake's earliest case was probably that recorded by W. Shaw Rae in ½d. U.J., No. 125, "How Sexton Blake Won His Spurs", That story has already been dealt with in a previous article in the June 1971 issue of the Collectors' Digest -- how Blake, "scarcely out of his teens", tracked down a scoundrel named Egbert Trewolf who was eventually sentenced to death, that sentence being commuted to life imprisonment. At the time that article was published, the present writer was not aware that there was a sequel.

Much later in his career the detective was destined to meet his

villain again. The story of this return match may be found in ½d. U.J., No. 228, "The Third Man", also by W. Shaw Rae. (The title was to become familiar some half-a-century later as the name of a famous film.)

Blake befriended a young man-about-town named Harold Fenfield, who had received a note asking him for fifty pounds in return for information about a plot to steal his diamonds. The diamonds in question were a family heirloom worth thirty thousand pounds and were locked in a safe at Fenfield's country house. They were to be worn by his fiancee at her wedding to the young man.

The detective kept the appointment in Fenfield's place and, while interviewing Sam Shise, the writer of the note, was surprised by another man who stood on the threshold of the room -- "a man of middle age, his features scarred and lined by crime and suffering -- a wicked, saturnine countenance, bearing the unmistakable stamp of the gaol-bird.

"Blake had not seen that face for many years, but he knew it at once, instantly recognising the evil features as those of Egbert Trewolf, a wretch whom, in his early career -- his first case, indeed -- the detective had hunted down. The villain had been sentenced to death, but his punishment had been commuted to penal servitude for life. Now he had obtained a further remission, and by mistaken clemency, was again let loose to prey upon society. ("Mistaken clemency" -- how painfully appropriate that phrase is to the modern attitude towards incorrigible criminals.)

Blake had a narrow escape from death and went through some hair-raising experiences in eluding his old enemy. His next move was to go down to Fenfield Abbey to guard the diamonds while their rather irresponsible owner enjoyed himself in town. The detective was accompanied by his preposterously-named Chinese assistant -- We-wee -- who put up at the local hotel.

An attempt to steal the diamonds by three men was frustrated by Blake and the Chinese boy. The men concerned in the robbery attempt were Sam Shise and Egbert Trewolf, while the third man remained unidentified. The criminals next tried to nobble a racehorse which Harold Fenfield was entering in the local race-meeting. Again their efforts were abortive, thanks to the vigilance of the Chinese boy.

On the day of the race it was found that the jockey appointed to

ride the favourite had been put out of action by the enemy. The Chinese boy rode in his place and, needless to say, the Fenfield horse won. Back at the Abbey Fenfield discovered that the diamonds had gone from the safe, which was open, but Blake assuaged his alarm by producing the jewels from Fenfield's hat-box, where the detective himself had placed them. At which moment there sprang from an adjoining room the ex-convict, Egbert Trewolf, with a knife in his hand. As he leaped at Blake, the detective shot him dead.

In the next room were found Sam Shise and the third man, who turned out to be a bosom friend of Fenfield, who had also aspired to the hand of the girl Fenfield was to marry.

This story was reprinted in Penny Popular No. 71, under the title of "The Fenfield Conspiracy". One sequence, in which the Chinese boy was nearly hanged, was left out and several amendments were made, one being that Tinker was substituted for the Chinese, and Pedro was briefly mentioned, but took no part in the action.

The most notable alteration in this later version was that, instead of killing Trewolf, Blake knocked him unconscious with his revolver and Trewolf was afterwards sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. Evidently Blake's effective method of disposing of the criminal, while acceptable in 1898, was considered too drastic for readers in 1914.

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Nelson Lee Column

LORD DORRIMORE AND THE DECLINE OF RELIGION

by R. Hibbert

Pre 1914 your boys' story hero thought it no shame to acknowledge that he was a Christian. Pre 1900 he gloried in it and didn't hestitate to say out loud that he was grateful to God for all his mercies.

Post 1918 God was seldom mentioned; not in boys' papers. Perhaps the reader was supposed to know that all the decent chaps in the stories were practising Christians or orthodox Jews so religion could be taken for granted. Most fictional schools were run by Doctors of (I think) Divinity, and Prayers and Chapel were heard of now and again.

But whatever happened at Prayers or in Chapel happened off stage. Nobody got religion; and what a series that would have made; 'Longbottom of the Remove sees the Light, or the Leaven in the Lump'. Not even the very good boys talked about God or said such things as, "I say chaps, that was a jolly good sermon the Doctor preached at Vespers. Who'd have thought he could have gone on for $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours on Leviticus Chapter 26, Verses 27 and 28?"

But, although largely ignored, Constant Reader of boys' papers had the feeling that God was still there.

And then Edwy Searles Brooks had one of his major characters put forward a different point of view.

So casually too.

There we were - Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore and Constant Reader leaning over the after rail of Milor's steam yacht 'Wanderer'. We were smoking our after dinner cigars - no, I tell a lie; Nelson had just finished his after dinner cigarette - and staring thoughtfully out over the North Atlantic. All at once old Dorrie started preaching atheism.

"It may not be worth much," said the sporting millionaire peer on page 7 of Nelson Lee Library, No. 265, 'Bound for Brazil', 3rd July, 1920, "but I am a Materialist, and you can't make me anything else."

Not just a materialist, but a Materialist. A fully paid up Free Thinker. He handed out this shattering information between puffs on his cigar and commonplace remarks about his immunity from sea sickness.

I don't know what effect his words had on impressionable lads who were modelling themselves on fictional sporting peers, but I should like to know how many adolescents refused to go to Sunday School and Church on 4th July, 1920.

"It may not be worth much, Dad, but I am a Materialist, and you can't make me anything else."

"If you're not in your best suit, and on your way to St. George's in two minutes, I'll clout you ----. And, another thing, someone keeps pinching my Woodbines."

Pity Nelson Lee didn't talk to Dorrie that way. When he came out with "I'm a Materialist, and you can't make me anything else" Nelson just laughed and said, "My dear fellow, I'm sure I don't want to."

Missed a chance there did Nelson. When you think how omniscient

he was you can be sure he'd have all the standard arguments for proving the existence of God at his finger tips.

But he didn't do any evangelising at all. Your impressionable reader might have an uneasy feeling that the Great Detective was a Materialist too.

And if that was so he and Dorrie have a lot to answer for.

Consider the facts.

In the Summer of 1920, Dorrie informed the Youth of England that Materialism was the In Thing. Nelson didn't say him nay.

That same year the Church of England started a register of its more or less active supporters. When the names on the new Electoral Rolls were totted up it was found there were only 3½ million; a mere tenth of the English nation.

Worse was to come.

Before the Great War 42.8 young people out of every 1,000 were confirmed and 300 out of every 1,000 went to Sunday School. By the end of the Fifties the numbers were down to 34 per 1,000 and 133 per thousand respectively. Easter Day communicants dropped from 85 out of 1,000 in the early Twenties to 51 out of 1,000 in 1968.

And it was the same with the other Protestant churches; a steady emptying of the pews; and yet the country's population had gone up from 30½ million to 41 million.

I blame it all on Dorrie.

And it was no good his saying, disarmingly, on page 23 of Nelson Lee Library, No. 274, 'The Return of the Wanderers', 4th September, 1920, "--- I'm no good in this world, an' I'm not likely to be. I'm simply roamin' about causin' all sorts of trouble wherever I go." By then the damage was done.

Let this be a lesson to us all; especially those of us who are inclined to be facetious. No matter how replete we might be with after dinner brandy, after dinner cigars and After Eight Mints let us choose our words carefully when the Youth of England is listening and taking everything we say as gospel.

A IS FOR ARTIST

by William Lister

I was thrilled when I saw my first short story in print, and more

than thrilled to see the artist had GIVEN IT an illustration. I like to see a few pictures scattered among my reading matter.

Does an artist read the stories till something "clicks"? or does he just pick a subject at random? I have often imagined myself as an artist (pure imagination, I assure you) and during my reading I chose paragraphs that I would like to illustrate. This is it, you tell yourself, this would make a good picture. If I really were an artist, I would like to illustrate thriller stories - the spooky kind. The type that flows from the pen of Edwy Searles Brooks.

Take "The Ghost of Bannington Grange" published in the "Monster" Library, or "The Haunted School", the Ezra Quirke epic. One of the disappointments of the "Monster" was the lack of illustrations. The cover page is good. It catches the mood. An old-fashioned type ghost, complete with a skeleton face, robed in ectoplasm and with arms out-stretched, scaring the life out of four of the St. Frank's boys. Two small insert pictures depict robust skating scenes. Reading the tale, I felt I could have romped home with trying my hand at illustrating a dozen or more ghostly descriptions, that would make your hair stand on end, dear reader. It is, perhaps for the best, for the sake of my readers' nervous systems, that I cannot draw.

For illustrations one fairs better with "The Haunted School" and Ezra Quirke.

How would you like to look in a mirror and see the most grotesque face this side of eternity as the jacket cover reveals Handforth doing?

Time and space would fail me to tell of scenes such as the eerie Ezra Quirke with the white owl perched on his shoulder. The mysterious Ezra complete with black robe and crystal ball pointing a bony finger at his victim.

Take the one of the vague shape of a white-bearded man clothed in the manner of the Middle Ages, or the horrible dripping hand poised above the door and the one of two black eyes hovering in space.

A delightful effect and in keeping with the story is obtained by the artist giving an occult flavour to some of his pictures by frame effect.

On the bottom right and bottom left of the pictures sits a figure of Budda, from each a wisp of incense rises gently to the top of the page. Great stuff.

A - is for artist, and here we have an artist that knew his stuff. I wonder if he knew that the stories he was illustrating would turn out to be the most popular of any St. Frank's series? Would he know that way down the years to 1975 there would be those still viewing his work? The man chosen to illustrate the immortal Quirke tales.

Who was he? Readers of "C.D." know by now I never come up with any names or statistics worth anything. If I hazard a guess I would be wrong. No, sir, I leave all such matters to the experts.

* *

JACK, SAM AND PETE - AND ALGY

by W. T. Thurbon

The editorial comment in C.D. on Algy aroused my interest, as I must be one of the fast dwindling band of J.S. & P. fans.

It is a general opinion among those of us who remember the three comrades in their heyday that the coming of Algy spoiled the series. Both Herbert Leckenby and John Medcraft expressed this view, with which I agreed when I wrote on the decline of Jack, Sam and Pete in a 1950's Annual. Clark Hook was a Victorian writer - he was chosen to write the first story for the Marvel, the first Harmsworth Boys paper. I don't suppose that when he wrote his first J.S. & P. tale, the incomparable "Eagle of Death", in the Halfpenny Marvel he realised he was setting himself a task that would last for the rest of his life. But they caught on - some twenty odd appeared in the Halfpenny Marvel, they appeared fairly regularly in the first twenty Penny Marvels, and from No. 20 onwards they appeared regularly until about 1922. Bill Lofts' researches have shown that they were for many years the A.P's main money spinner. Over the years the climate of the stories changed; it is interesting to compare the Halfpenny Marvel stories in their original form with the Popular Reprints of 1912. The more bloodthirsty tales of 1903 were omitted from the 1912 Popular. In many ways it was a pity Clark Hook did not stop writing J.S. & P. tales about 1911, when his type of adventure story was becoming ourdated. I was, even as a 12 year old in 1915, conscious that the current J.S. & P. tales were not like the old ones that used to be about my house when I was younger. It is curious that the two long-lasting series, before Frank Richards introduced St. Jim's, were Jack, Sam & Pete, the work of one man and Sexton Blake.

the work of a syndicate. Incidentally, why did Blake catch on when so many other detectives proved ephemeral? What does Josie think is the explanation?

The introduction of Algy to the Jack, Sam & Pete tales was a disaster; it spoiled the balance; Pete became Algy's stooge, and Jack and Sam, once well drawn characters became lay-figures. John Medcraft described him as fatuous - with which I agree.

But this brings us to a completely different point; that is, the importance of Tom Merry. Earlier A. P. tales had been mainly adventure and detective - owing much to Rider Haggard and Conan Doyle. School stories (apart from the "quality papers" - I use the term for the Captain and B. O. P. which were generally too expensive for us poorer boys - in the sense in which it is now used of the Times and Telegraph) School stories were not outstanding - and Charles Hamilton was only one of a number of writers. Then he wrote of St. Jim's in "Pluck", and invented Tom Merry - and married St. Jim's and Tom Merry. Out of the blue he had invented a whole new school of writing - his own work; without entering into the arguments about them, the substitutes; and the imitators. From St. Jim's came Greyfriars and the great character studies, Wharton, and the immortal successor of Falstaff and Dickens' Fat Boy, Bunter, to add a character to English folk-lore. But would Greyfriars, Rookwood and all the host of Hamilton and Hamilton-type schools ever have emerged but for Tom Merry? Why was Tom Merry so attractive? Hamilton drew better St. Jim's characters in depth, Talbot, Cardew, etc., apart from the great Greyfriars characters, but there is a peculiarly sunny attraction about Tom that makes him a universal favourite - who of all the Hamilton characters would you take with you on a holiday? Surely Tom.

So Hamilton dominated the A. P. scene, and apart from Sexton Blake, who in any case has Tinker, everyone brought in boy characters and heroes - even Nelson Lee, Blake's only rival. So Clark Hook brought in Algy. But this was not his metier and Algy was a failure, and Clark Hook should have written him off or dropped J. S. & P.

But we are still left with the phenomenon of the dominance of Hamilton - why did one man have such influence on the whole A. P. ? And in doing so either make other writers switch to his boy heroes, or turn into failures. Surely no other writer has had such influence. And I am

sure that without Tom Merry we should have had no Algy and Jack, Sam and Pete would have followed a different course.

* *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 202. IT WILL GO DOWN, OF COURSE

The Fistical Four of Rookwood were having a dainty tea on Captain Muffin's yacht, Silver Cloud. "It will go down, of course", observed Captain Muffin. The four schoolboys were slightly surprised. They did not see any reason why Captain Muffin should mention that the dainty tea would go down. After all, any meal, dainty or otherwise, was expected to go down.

Fifty years ago exactly, the readers of the Boys' Friend were enjoying the Silver Cloud series and having the time of their lives. Many of Hamilton's best plots were peculiar to Rookwood. This one of the Silver Cloud was not that, though it was tried out first, and most successfully, at Rookwood. It was novel, not because it was a series set on a yacht, but because a number of boys went to the yacht expecting to be the guests of Tubby Muffin's uncle. They were guests all right - but they were expected to pay for that privilege. Paying guests, as boarders are euphemistically called.

That was in 1925. Eight years later, at Easter in 1933, the author sketched in again the theme of the paying guests on a yacht - in the Magnet this time, for Billy Bunter's relative, George, who owned the Sea Nymph. This 1933 series was pleasant enough reading, though it rang a little too familiarly for those who recalled the Rookwood series. The Sea Nymph series was really a few stories, related to one another only by the link of the ship. There was no developing plot, and, for the discriminating, it was below the standard of the 1925 series.

So, let us ignore Easter 1933, and leap ahead another 16 years to 1949 when, for the third time, the author returned to the theme of the fellows who accepted a holiday invitation, only to find that they were expected to pay for it. This time, the boys find themselves the "paying guests" of Bunter's Uncle Carter at Folkestone.

Brown, the weird manservant of Tankerton Hall asks the boys if they would like a fire in their sitting-room. "I'll tell Sam to bring up a

basket of logs, and I'll put it down."

It occurs to the boys that there is no reason why Sam should not put down the basket of logs unaided by Brown.

Which was the better of the two stories - the Rookwood summer holiday series of the unknowing "paying guests" or the Greyfriars Christmas story with a similar theme in 1949? For my money, the Rookwood series was very much the better of the two.

It wasn't only the ship's setting, though that was attractive, with the vessel crusing along the south coast of England, calling at Devonshire and Cornish bays, and up the west coast as far as Blackpool. But there was a freshness, a spontaneity, a kind of a joy of living which seemed to be lacking a quarter of a century on. The boys of the summer of 1925 must have loved every minute of it, even though there was, possibly, just a wee bit too much Lovell in the series.

An adult, of course, can detect just a little too much contrivance in it all, but providing that was well-handled, as it was in this series, contrivance did not matter.

Apart from the Rookwood boys, which party included the Fistical Four, Muffin, and Mornington, there were Smythe & Co. of a higher form and Ponsonby & Co. of Highcliffe. It was very unlikely indeed, really, that Captain Muffin would have wanted to fill up his floating boarding-house with schoolboys. A sea captain might retire and decide to take in paying guests. But it seems most improbable that a boarding house proprietor would turn sea captain, be able to buy a large and luxurious yacht, and fill it up with schoolboys at £4 a week all found. Surely, even at the prices going in 1925, £4 a week would have been far too low a price for a sea cruise of this type. Early in the series Jimmy Silver & Co. discovered, in a deliciously humorous tale, that they were "paying guests". In the post-war Bunter book, the Greyfriars boys did not discover until the end of the tale that they were expected to pay their way, and the delay was unbelievable.

The Rookwood series came vividly to life after Ulick Lee, the nephew of the previous owner of the yacht (a bank robber whose haul of precious diamonds had never been discovered), joined the ship. The last two or three tales were tense and exciting as Lee clashed with Lovell and then Mornington until the thrilling climax was reached. A

rather novel slant of the plot was that the diamonds were never discovered while the party was aboard the yacht, which showed unusual restraint on the part of the author. When the new term began, Muffin told his schoolfellows how the police had searched the yacht and had found the diamonds in a specially-prepared hiding-place.

The Silver Cloud series is one of the happiest memories of Rookwood's last year in the Boys' Friend.

"Billy Bunter's Christmas Party" should have been equally as good, but it really wasn't. I always felt - and it is, of course, only a personal viewpoint- that it was a tired and pedestrian affair, even though the paying guests theme was anything but hackneyed. It should have been good. There was the old, old house; there was Christmas; there was a ghost; there was a mysterious young man who, in typical Hamilton style, was not so mysterious to the reader. But somehow it all lacked atmosphere. The ghostly bits were never eerie; the paying guests lark went on for too long; it was heavily unlikely that a boarding-house proprietor, who advertised his establishment, would fill it up with schoolboys. Perhaps, most of all, it just did not ring true that fellows like Harry Wharton & Co. would spend their Christmas in a boarding-house, and be embarrassed when they were expected to find £2.10s per day to pay for their board and lodging. (Mr. Richards recognised that inflation had taken a hand between 1925 and 1949.)

I regret to say that I even found the very democratic Sir Hugh Tankerton a bit of a bore. But then, Hamilton, like Agatha Christie, was always a bit coy with his young adults and at his most successful with older ones.

Of course, the Silver Cloud series was bought almost entirely by boys. "Billy Bunter's Christmas Party" was supported almost entirely by the not-so-young. And, though some of those not-so-young certainly viewed the world of Greyfriars through rose-coloured glasses, the passing of the years did make a difference.

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WANTED: Magnets Nos. 1118 - 1121; 1175; 1181; 1184; 1188; 1453; 1455; 1459.

J. CONROY

256 TOWNSEND AVE., LIVERPOOL 11

And so we break up at the end of our Summer Term at Rookwood - over fifty years ago.

LOVELL'S REVENGE

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

Every word in Mr. Greely's booming voice had been heard by the merry group in the corridor.

"I say, it's rather a shame on Purkiss," gasped Newcome. "He's had his trip over here for nothing."

"That's all right, if he summons old Greely in the County Court --"

Jimmy Silver & Co. waited quite anxiously for half-past three, when Mr. Montgomery Smith was due to call.

Mr. Greely, in his study, was quite unaware that another visitor was almost due. He has collapsed into his armchair, in a state of wrath and astonishment, to which no words could have done justice. Unless this man Purkiss was a lunatic or intoxicated, Mr. Greely could not comprehend the amazing episode at all.

It was quite a long time before Mr. Greely was able to settle down with his newspaper again.

He settled down at last, however, though occasionally he gave expression to an angry snort, indicating that all was not quite calm within.

He looked up angrily at a knock on his study door.

"Come in!" he snapped.

Tupper opened the door.

"Mr. Smith, sir!"

"Mr. Smith!" repeated Mr. Greely. "Kindly enquire his business before showing him in, Tupper. I do not --"

"He said it was an appointment, sir," said Tupper. "He's 'ere, sir."

Mr. Montgomery Smith bowed himself into the room.

He was a large, plump, portly gentleman, not unlike Mr. Greely himself in figure. He had a happy smile and a jocular manner.

Tupper retired, and was closing the door when a foot stopped it. He stared round at Lovell.

"That's all right!" whispered Lovell. And the page departed, leaving Mr. Greely's door ajar.

"Good afternoon, sir!" said Mr. Montgomery Smith, bowing. "Mr. Greely, I presume?"

"Quite so, sir!" said the Fifth Form master. "But to what --"

"I was afraid at first, sir, that I should have to telephone and defer this interview," said Mr. Smith. "Nevertheless, I am quite at your service, Mr. Greely. Dancing, I understand, you do not wish to study."

"Dancing?"

"But general deportment --"

"Deportment?"

"Quite so! Reassure yourself, sir," said Mr. Montgomery Smith, with a wide wave of a large hand. "It is never too late to mend. I have had one pupil, sir, of a more advanced age than your own - a war profiteer, sir, whose manners were, I regret to say, unspeakable, infinitely inferior to your own, my dear sir - but in a single term at my establishment, the

change was amazing. I made him, sir, into a gentleman. I have not the slightest doubt that I shall be able to do as much for you, Mr. Greely."

Mr. Greely gasped.

From the corridor there came a suppressed sound.

"Are you a madman?" roared Mr. Greely.

Mr. Montgomery Smith jumped.

"Eh? What? What did you say, Mr. Greely? I - I do not quite follow --"

"Or are you drunk?"

"What!"

Mr. Smith backed away.

"Calm yourself, sir, calm yourself!" he urged. "My intention is to help you, to help you in every way. No man ever more needed my help, if I may say so. Sit down a few minutes, sir. Perhaps I can get you a glass of water -- Calmness, sir -- calmness, I beg."

Mr. Greely spluttered.

"I am bound to mention, sir, that you gave me no hint of this," said Mr. Montgomery Smith, rather warmly. "I was led to believe that your defective manners were simply due to neglect - to want of training. No hint was given me that I had an inebriated man to deal with."

"In-in-inebriated!" stuttered Mr. Greely.

"I should have been told so; it would have been more frank on your part, Mr. Greely, to warn me that I had to deal with a man unfortunately a slave to drink --- Oh!"

Mr. Greely suddenly interrupted him.

This man, whom he had never seen before, had not only butted into his study unasked and insulted him, but he was actually accusing Mr. Greely of being intoxicated.

He sprang at Mr. Smith, and with a mighty swipe, sent Mr. Smith spinning as far as the door.

"Whoop!" roared Mr. Smith as he landed.

"Now, sir, take yourself off!" boomed Mr. Greely. "If you do not desire me, sir, to kick you out of this building, take yourself off and play your foolish pranks, sir, upon someone who is in a humour for ridiculous fooling. I am not, sir - I am not!"

"Oh, dear! Wow!"

Mr. Smith felt his nose, to ascertain that it was still there. It felt as if it was not.

He limped to his feet, and Mr. Greely rushed forward to hurl the door open, and, doubtless, to help Mr. Smith into the passage. But that terrific punch on the nose was rather more than Mr. Montgomery Smith was disposed to take patiently. As Mr. Greely crowded him, Mr. Smith in his turn hit out, and the Fifth Form master of Rookwood came down unexpectedly on his own carpet.

Mr. Montgomery Smith tore the door open and hurried into the corridor. Mr. Greely was up in a second, blazing with wrath, and he fairly bounded after Mr. Smith.

"Rascal! Ruffian!" he spluttered. "Scoundrel!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. were almost in hysterics now.

The sight of Mr. Greely chasing the astonished and alarmed visitor into the corridor was too much for them.

They shrieked.

"Help!" panted Mr. Smith, as he rushed down the corridor with the infuriated Mr. Greely on his track.

Fortunately, fear spurred on Mr. Smith faster than wrath spurred on Mr. Greely. What would have happened had the enraged Fifth Form master overtaken him cannot be said. Fortunately, Mr. Montgomery Smith won that exciting race.

He left the House, with his hat in one hand and his umbrella in the other, and ran for the gates.

Mr. Greely, perhaps recalled to a sense of propriety by the yells of laughter that echoed down the corridors, halted at last, and strode back to his study. Jimmy Silver & Co. melted away before his approach.

Mr. Greely strode into his study, and slammed the door with a terrific slam. In amazement and wrath he paced the study, utterly perplexed by these strange happenings, utterly shaken out of his usual ponderous composure. And when, later on, he rolled into Masters' Common-room to tea, he was conscious of lurking smiles on the faces of his colleagues - smiles that broadened when Mr. Greely excitedly described the weird happenings of the afternoon, and asked his colleagues what it could all possibly mean?

. . . . .

In the Fourth Form passage the Classical Fourth fairly rocked with laughter. Putty of the Fourth, past-master in the art of leg-pulling, freely admitted that Arthur Edward Lovell was a great man.

It was agreed on all hands that Mr. Greely had had just what he had asked for; and Lovell was no longer chipped -- the great jest on Mr. Greely succeeding him as a general topic.

Which was very satisfactory to Arthur Edward Lovell; and it was still more satisfactory that Mr. Greely, much as he puzzled over the affair, never dreamed of suspecting that it was a Fourth Form rag. That was a relief to the end study; for undoubtedly Arthur Edward Lovell had risked a Head's flogging in taking his revenge on Mr. Greely.

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BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 17. BEN HUR - AND THE END OF AN ERA

Memories crowd in on me of our silent days. Here are just a couple of amusing ones which I recall with a smile.

At one time, in an effort to boost business, some cinemas (and I recall it happening one evening when I visited the Regent at Chatham) used to give away a collection of prizes to holders of lucky ticket numbers during the evening. It gave me an idea for a novelty item one term in our own cinema.

Our audience would collect numbers as they entered the auditorium for the Friday performances. Just before the screening of the big feature I would throw a number on the screen, and the holder of the number would collect a prize of some sort.

One week, for a prize, our matron made up a delightful packet containing a luscious lamb-chop, a number of new potatoes, and a quantity of peas in their pods. The winner was a day girl, the elder of two sisters, a girl of about fifteen with sharp features and a caustic manner. She could easily have been Thomas Henry's model for Richmal Crompton's "Arabella Simpkin". On Friday afternoon she went off with her Sunday dinner. On Monday she came to me and said, in her sharp, sour manner: "Please, sir, Mother says don't you think we get enough to eat at home?"

At that time there was a high-class variety act named Marino and Norris, playing the leading music halls. Marino was a glorious [illegible] colour, and played the piano while singing with his partner. Norris, who was really Norris Smith, very black, and the possessor of a fine bass voice. He was a charming man. His son was with me for many years, one of the finest lads I ever had in school.

When "Show Boat" went on at Drury Lane, Paul Robeson played the lead, while Norris Smith was his understudy. When Robeson left the show, Norris Smith took over the leading part. Paul Robeson sang "Ol' Man River" and other songs from "Show Boat" on H.M.V. records; Norris Smith sang them on Columbia. (I believe I still have that 12-in. Columbia record among my souvenirs.)

It occurred to me that Norris Smith's son would be proud if we played his father's record in the cinema. So I prepared a slide, innocently enough. Our slides in use at that time had varied background pictures with a space left for overprinting. So, as Norris Smith, via the gramophone, started singing the famous song, I flashed the slide on the screen.

I heard a great roar of laughter from the audience, and I rushed to the window port to see what it was all about. On the screen were the words "Mr. Norris Smith", but, unfortunately, the background picture was of a particularly repulsive black gorilla. I could have kicked myself for my carelessness.

A final thought on Norris Smith. He often came down to see our Amateur Dramatic shows, in which his son, for years, was a leading light. On one

occasion he brought Paul Robeson with him.

And now, back to the Small Cinema. From Paramount this term we had Jean Hersholdt, Nancy Caroll and Buddy Rogers (who married Mary Pickford) in "Abie's Irish Rose". From Universal came Laura La Plant and John Boles in "The Last Warning"; Ivan Mosjoukine in "Prince of Adventurers", and the same star in "Michael Strogoff". Those last two may well have been European films.

From Gaumont British came Alf Goddard in "Alf's Button"; also Brigitte Helm in a German film "At The Edge Of The World".

From Wardour we had Emil Jannings in "Faust", Gustave Frolich in "Treason", Lya de Putti in "Manon Lescaut", Monty Banks in "Adam's Apple" and Jameson Thomas and Lillian Hall-Davis in "The Farmer's Wife". From B.I.F. (just what the letters stood for I forget, but it was one of the smaller renters) came "Shiraz", "the sweet story of the Taj Mahal", probably an Indian film. From Warner Brothers (our first Warner film, the first of many hundreds) was Syd Chaplin in "The Fortune Hunter".

Now M.G.M. reissued their magnificent production "Ben Hur" with music and sound effects. This would be another of my big ten of the Silents, superior, in my view, to the later production featuring Charlton Heston. In this silent version the stars were Ramon Novarro, May MacAvoy, Carmel Myers, and Francis X. Bushman. It had enjoyed an extremely long run throughout 1927 at the Tivoli in the Strand before it was generally released in Britain. Oddly enough, I never saw it on its original release, though our matron often used to say to me "You should see 'Ben Hur'."

Now, however, it was re-issued with music and sound, and I booked it. We played it on our silent projectors, and I masked off the sound track in the film gate, so that naturally we had a slightly smaller picture than normal on the screen. I thought it a wonderful picture. (Later on, after we installed sound, I gave it a return visit with music and sound effects.)

Another big film that term from M.G.M. was Harry Carey in "Trader Horn". It was very long, and we played it without any supporting programme. I can't remember anything about it.

And, from M.G.M. that term, came Norma Shearer in "The Last of Mrs. Cheyney". They had advertised a silent version in the Kine Weekly, and that was what I thought I was getting. But when it arrived it was the talking version, with sound on film. I was at a loss. I decided to play the talking film, masking off the sound track on the projectors. It must surely have been fearful, especially as silent films were projected much slower than sound films. But anything went at that time. We had reached the bottom of the barrel with a vengeance.

Our last silent film was John Barrymore in "General Crack", from Warner Bros. I think it was a big 'un, but I have long forgotten what it was all about. And so an era ended.

(Next article in this series: WE GO TALKIE!)

The Postman Called

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

MISS E. V. FLINDERS (Hitchin): I'm always pleased to see the Collectors' Digest each month. I like the illustrations by the old artists on the back page. A lot of work was put into the sketches in those days. Now, artists have to compete with machines and mass production of pictures, pictures and pictures again!! No wonder modern illustrations are all outline and black masses. It's no wonder, too, so many children can't read with nothing for them to "feed" on.

I was interested in the mention of Hancock in the pre-war Gems. I was still taking the Magnet and Gem, although I was in my late twenties. I thought Hancock ruined the happy friendship of the St. Jim stories. He trampled on everybody, most especially on poor old Gussy who was my favourite. I think it would have been better to have done away with some of Gussy's mannerisms - his monocle for instance and his lisp, both of which were very old-fashioned anyway. He was always as good as gold and interesting with it. By the way, I always liked Tom Merry better than Harry Wharton.

D. WESTCOTT (London): With regard to the Small Cinema series (July), Carl Brisson was Danish, born in Copenhagen; lightweight (amateur) boxing champion of Denmark. Later he was middle-weight champion of middle Europe (as stated) and Scandinavia. "The Ring", which I have seen in recent years, was British, directed by Alfred Hitchcock. In it, with Carl Brisson, were Ian Hunter and Gordon Harker. Brisson became a big West-end musical comedy star in the thirties. I have the cast of the version of "Les Miserables" which you showed. It was French. The main parts were played by M. Gabriel Gabrio (Jean Valjean) and Jean Toulout (Javert). It was said to have a cast of 5,000 people in six thousand scenes.

R. J. McCABE (Dundee): I seem to be enjoying C.D. more than ever, if that's possible. Especially Danny's Diary and the Biography of a Small Cinema. Many of the events and the pictures mentioned stir up the memory.

BILL WATSON (Chelmsford): I took special note of the article on the

old Gangster stars. Great though Edward G. Robinson was, I feel that James Cagney was even better. I have read many books on Cagney, Robinson, and Raft and, apart from Raft who was rather a bad boy, they were just the opposite, in real life, of the parts they played on the screen. I am still a great reader of the Magnet, and all my spare cash goes on the old mag.

BILL LOFTS (London): I wonder if any of the older members of the Northern Club, can recall a magazine published at Leeds (1893/1926) entitled THE MAGNET. This was I believe devoted to the interests of the music-hall profession, and it would be most interesting to locate a copy. BOYS WONDER LIBRARY (in answer to O. W. Wadham) was edited by E. L. MacKeag, and ran for 26 issues. Its main idea was simply to present a half-priced/half-paged BOYS FRIEND LIBRARY. It was of course a flop, when all its contents was reprinted material. It did have a sister library entitled RUBY LIBRARY (not mentioned in OLD BOYS BOOK CATALOGUE) which ran for the same length of time. It will be most interesting eventually to see if Cliff House or Morcove was used in this series.

G. W. MASON (Torquay): Many thanks for the 'Collectors' Digest', which always lives up to my expectations. A stable oasis in a desert of uncertainty, if I may frame such a metaphor, would fit the C.D.

I was particularly interested in Mr. Wadham's reference to William Gillette, the actor who characterized Sherlock Holmes in 1916. As a further point of interest in this respect, Mr. Gillette donned the 'Sherlock Holmes' ' garb a decade earlier, when the great detective appeared on the Edwardian stage.

There may be many readers who have at some time or other wondered how the great Holmes received his first Christian name. His creator, Conan Doyle, received this particular flash of inspiration whilst playing circket with an amateur team against the M.C.C. Conan Doyle had the luck to score thirty off the bowling of a man named Sherlock - and Sherlock Holmes it was!

E. DARCY (Australia): Another of the old boys' writers has passed on. My old friend Edward Home-Gall, died last November, and the news

has only just reached us.

HENRY GATISS (Stanley): At 58 years of age, and an ex-coalminer, I am still a Greyfriars fanatic since about 1929. Even coal miners liked the old Magnet. Some of their wives, too. Does that surprise you? Frank Richards was the Greatest!

C. OLIVER (Newcastle-under-Lyme): I was very interested to read your editorial article concerning Richmal Crompton in the June issue. I find Archie a tiresome character in her William books, most of which I have, though I did not purchase any after "William and the Moon Rocket". Changes in the pattern take the gilt off things. In the illustrations Jumble, William's dog, changed his appearance; William, when addressing his father, always did so as "Father" never as "Dad". Small things, no doubt. Perhaps, absurd really to be given as reasons for losing one's liking for books although I still enjoy reading through those that I have from the first one to "William and the Brains Trust".

* *

News of the Clubs

MIDLAND

Nine members 'signed in' for the June meeting. Perhaps it was the glorious Greyfriars style weather, but everyone seemed more than content to sit around and let the meeting drift by as a conversation piece on various aspects of the hobby so close to our hearts. Good talk at all times couched in terms of amiable equanimity, accompanied by much munching of orange cakes, slaked with coffee.

Tom Porter, wearing his erudition lightly, described and then brought forth (in the manner of magician born) his eagerly awaited Anniversary Number and Collectors Item. The former was Gem 1323, dated 24/6/33, 42 years old, entitled 'Barred by his Chums', a reprint of Gem 84 then bearing the title 'Sacked'. The Collectors Item was a copy of Modern Boy 146, an important one for it carried the first of the memorable Captain Justice series.

Meetings are held in the evening of the last Tuesday of each month (except August) at Dr. Johnson House, Birmingham.

NORTHERN

SATURDAY, 12th JULY, 1975

Chairman Geoffrey Wilde opened the meeting with his accustomed wit, on this occasion remarking that it was the first time the Secretary had attended a meeting 'plastered'.

The Secretary hastens to point out that the chosen epithet in no way referred to a state of inebriation, but rather to a plaster-encased limb!

He said that in jumping off a wall he had broken his leg, or, to put it less dramatically and more clinically, he had fractured his tibia!

On being asked to explain further, the Secretary quoted the old adage, 'Look before you leap', and said that he hadn't!

Mollie gave us a long-awaited talk on 'The Famous Fives', for, she said, we must not forget Enid Blyton's characters.

And, said Mollie, it was rather interesting to compare them with 'our' famous five of Greyfriars. Julian, the leader, with quite a turn of repartee, corresponded with Harry Wharton. Happy-go-lucky brother Dick corresponded with Bob Cherry.

It was difficult to compare the two girls and the dog, but Ann was rather like Frank Nugent - she didn't like the adventure but she didn't like being left out. Georgina, like Johnny Bull, was the outspoken one. Mollie remarked that one would have to be careful what one said about the dog, Timmy, and yet there was about him something reminiscent of Hurree Singh, for Timmy had all the canine sagacity one could wish for - they would not have been allowed to go out without him.

Mollie followed up her talk with readings from 'Five on a Hike Together' and 'Five go down to the Sea', and we later discussed a possible plagiarist use of 'the famous five' and also the secret seven'. After all, Hamilton had chosen these themes and titles first!

Finally came a quiz by Geoffrey Wilde on Greyfriars characters. Tying in first place with eight points each were Ron Hodgson, Ron Rhodes and Bill Williamson and in second place with five came Jack Allison.

LONDON

The popularity of the East Dulwich venue was once more apparent on the 20th July when Josie Packman, the hostess, had her usual good attendance. Josie began the proceedings with a very fine C. D. competition in which participants had to enumerate from the January to June issues, the artists portrayed on the back cover, the papers featured on the front cover and a list of the overseas contributors. Bill Lofts was the winner. Ray Hopkins was an easy winner of Laurie Peters' Characters and Titles competition. He used a little strategy and thus a creditable winner. A lady 'Thespian' this month in Vale Eaton who gave a masterly reading from Richmal Crompton's "Still William" playing superbly the parts of William and Violet Elizabeth. Brian Doyle reported the progess of proposed celebrations of Frank Richards' Centenary scheduled for 1976. From far away Invercargill, New Zealand, came a tape from Mervyn Branks to Josie featuring old boys' books and papers. This was played over and proved to be very interesting. The Diamond Jubilee of St. Frank's, Sexton Blake and Rookwood luncheon party was agreed to and will take place on 19th October at the Rembrandt. Two U. S. A. editions of the Sexton Blake Library, "Muckrakers" and "Golden Girl" exhibited by Josie who was thanked for her hospitality. Finally, Bob Blythe played over the tape recording of the Rev. Good's speech at the Northern Leeds Club Silver Jubilee dinner party.

This 17th August, at Courtfield, 49 Kingsmead, Ruislip. The five Acramans will be your hosts.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

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Litho-duplicated by York Duplicating Services, 12a The Shambles, York.