

STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS DIGEST

VOLUME 30

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JUNE 1976

The Magnet

2^d



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EVERY SATURDAY

With Ending October 12th 1925

20p

BARGAINS, BARGAINS, BARGAINS!

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STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by
W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

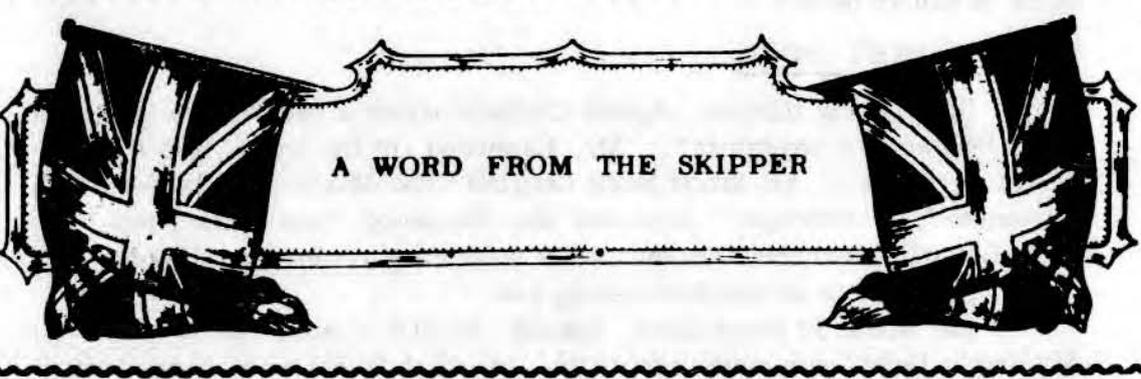
Vol. 30

No. 354

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A WORD FROM THE SKIPPER

THE 'TECS

My eyes lingered on one line in this month's instalment of our serial "classic". It was this: "Their shadowing, perhaps, was not exactly so skilful as that of a Sexton Blake or a Martin Stern".

I thought: "Now, who on earth was Martin Stern?"

Obviously, like Sexton Blake, he was a detective. Why is it that one character lives on for ever, while another, possibly equally good, is lost in the mists of time?

A large number of fictional detectives were created in the first fourteen years of this century - I can bring to mind a few of them, though

I doubt whether I have read stories of many of them. There were Martin Stern, Frank Ferrett, Adam Gaunt, Val Fox, Nelson Lee, Ferrers Locke, Will Spearing, Markham Swift, Dixon Fleet, and plenty others, their creators and themselves long forgotten, in some cases.

Yet Sherlock Holmes, from the Strand Magazine, and Sexton Blake from the Union Jack, live on, part of British folk lore; Nelson Lee, created in fine stories by Maxwell Scott, lives on, but only on account of his going to St. Frank's and his take-over by E. S. Brooks; Ferrers Locke is recalled solely from the fact that he featured in a number of Hamilton school stories.

Daunt, Ferrett, and the rest are as dead as doormails. Were their creators and writers really inferior - or is it all due to a mere quirk in human taste?

MURDER MOST FOUL

In the early thirties, Agatha Christie wrote a short story entitled "Mr. Eastwood's Adventure". Mr. Eastwood, of the story, was a writer of thrillers, his latest being entitled "The Mystery of the Second Cucumber". "Although," reflected Mr. Eastwood, "ten to one, my publisher will alter the title and call it something rotten like 'Murder Most Foul' without so much as asking me."

Just about 30 years later, Agatha Christie's story "Mrs. McGinty's Dead" was made into a film, in which Poirot was changed into Miss Marple (with Margaret Rutherford heavily miscast as Miss M.) and the title was changed to "Murder Most Foul".

Oh, irony of fate!

STILL AT THE FAIR

I have had an enormous mail this month as a result of the item "So Long at the Fair" in last month's C.D., and many readers have gone to a great deal of trouble to help me. With one exception, all have referred to the story of the vanishing lady in the Paris hotel. The letters and the telephone calls were all refreshingly different one from the other, and all gave me various bits of information. There have obviously been a number of different writers and publishers dealing with the theme of the story. The most popular is "The Vanishing of

Mrs. Frazer" in a volume edited by Dorothy Sayers and published by Gollancz. Most correspondents agree that the date was 1900, though one sets it as eleven years earlier.

I am deeply grateful to all who have written me on the subject. The letters have provided me with fascinating reading.

Only one reader has been able to trace the magic bat story. Mr. Ray Hopkins, after taking an immense amount of trouble, tells me that the story was named "The Enchanted Bat", from a Harold Avery collection of short stories under the title of "A Toast Fag". According to Mr. Hopkins, the British Museum catalogue states that the book came out first in 1900 (coincidence that we should land on another 1900 item) and that Avery's first book was "The Orderly Officer" (1894) and his final one was "The Side Line" (1939). "A very long, rewarding career", observes Mr. Hopkins. And so say all of us.

Nothing, yet, about Tom Merry's cheerful face in verse.

TAILPIECE

The Rev. Tann of Sutton sent a letter to a national newspaper in which he remarked that "recent stamp issues have been quite frightful, and our decimal coins abysmal." Few of us will disagree with those comments. In this magazine we have often referred scathingly to those awful decimal coins with which we were landed, at a cost to the taxpayer of goodness know how many millions of pounds and for no good reason at all. Of our "special" stamps, this latest lot remind me of those patterns we used to make as children by putting a blot of ink on a sheet of paper and folding the sheet.

The recent stamps honour "social reformers", though two of them are quite unknown to me for their good deeds. Yet the Post Office, as we all know, has spurned the idea of honouring Charles Hamilton, a man loved by millions all over the world, with even one special stamp. Who are the dictators who make these decisions - and who on earth thinks out the designs? Some of the smaller countries issue beautiful stamps? Why can't we do the same?

THE EDITOR

DANNY'S DIARY

JUNE 1926

With the Australians over here it is not surprising that everybody in the country is cricket mad. It's a topping kind of madness, all the same. Unfortunately, the weather isn't very good so far. On Derby Day it pelted with rain for hours on end. They say it is only the third time in the history of the race that there has been a wet Derby. Coronach won the race.

As there were no periodicals in the last week of May, owing to the General Strike, all the first issues of the month were dated 28th May and 5th June.

Apart from the first story, the Magnet has been exceptionally good this month. But goodness knows who has been drawing the covers all through the month. Mr. Chapman is doing the interior pictures, but the covers are pretty grim.

In "Bunter's Treasure Trove", Skinner altered a newspaper report with Indian ink, and also forged a letter from Mr. Bunter, to make Billy Bunter believe that his father was a millionaire.

The next two tales were original in plot, and great fun. In "The Persecution of Billy Bunter", the Owl is a great trial to Mr. Quelch, who decides to give him extra tuition every day. So Bunter disappears. When he turns up, he tells Mr. Quelch that he hoped his disappearance would cause Mr. Quelch to repent. I laughed my head off. In the sequel, "Bunter's Barring-In", Bunter is put in the punishment room. But in a mirthful sequence, Bunter managed to lock Mr. Quelch up in the punishment room - and now it is Mr. Quelch who disappears. Great fun.

Last of the month was "The Slacker's Awakening", the slacker of the title being Mauleverer. The Greyfriars pals, with Mauly and Marjorie and Clara, have a picnic in the vaults of the old priory, and explore the vaults afterwards. But Ponsonby closes the stone, so that none of them can get out. Most of them struggle through the passages to the Greyfriars end, but Marjorie is lost. Mauly saves her. Very good tale, with a sequel coming next week.

A new stand has been built at Lord's, but there is some complaint among the cricketers because the roof is red, and they lose sight of the red cricket ball against the red of the new stand's roof.

Two excellent tales in the Schoolboys' Own Library. "The Faddist Form-Master", an early one from the Magnet about a master named Mr. Chesham, and "Tom Merry's Trust", an exciting long tale of St. Jim's. There is also a new issue out of the Monster Library, cost a shilling, entitled "Neath African Skies".

First story in the Nelson Lee was "Handforth the Martyr". St. Frank's juniors held their Whit Monday sports on Chelsea Football Ground at Stamford Bridge, and, round about Empire Day, Handy got the Empire spirit with a vengeance. Next came "St. Frank's Gone Mad". Handy received an Austin Seven as a birthday present from his aunt, and also a driving licence which was mysteriously fiddled. And St. Frank's went dotty, though it was part of a plan.

Third tale of the month was "Handforth to the Rescue", telling of the third schoolboy Test Match, and how Handy drove his Austin Seven to rescue two of the English team who are marooned. Finally, "Handforth Gets the Sack". Enoch Snipe was the guilty one, Handy got the blame, and Willy Handforth won justice for his brother.

Mr. Alan Cobham has been in the news quite a lot this year. This month he left Rochester to fly solo to Australia.

At the pictures we have seen Marion Davies in "Zander, the Great"; Rin Tin Tin in "Below the Line"; Ramon Novarro in "The Midshipman"; Monty Banks in "Keep Smiling"; (that last title reminded me of Jimmy Silver); and Betty Bronson and Ricardo Cortez in "Not So Long Ago".

It has been a poor month in the Gem. Last month's lovely series was just a flash in the pan. The editor says he is now starting the extra-long stories of St. Jim's which all his readers have been asking for. Unfortunately, extra-long stories are not often extra-good, and these new ones in the Gem are no exception.

"The Mystery Cricketer" is a famous player who has accepted a post at St. Jim's as cricket coach. He insists that all players bat with their left hand. Turns out at the finish that he's a lunatic escaped from an asylum. Awful tripe! "D'Arcy's Night Out" tells how Gussy thinks

he would make a good safe-opener, and there is a mysterious house named Summerfield Towers. The editor called it a "rousing tale". It sent me to sleep.

In "The Madness of Manners", Mr. Linton is unjust to Manners, and Manners burns the manuscript on which Mr. Linton has spent the best years of his life. Luckily, Mr. L. kept a carbon copy of his MS, Dreary tale. Last, "The Schoolboy Inventor", a weak tale of rivalry between St. Jim's and the Grammar School, but Bernard Glyn helps Tom Merry & Co. None of this lot is by the real Martin Clifford. There is a new serial in the Gem, "A Phantom Throne" by Sidney Drew. I wonder whether it's really new, or whether it's an old one dug out for another airing.

I have the Popular every Tuesday, and I love it. The Greyfriars and St. Jim's series in which Billy and Wally Bunter, the doubles, change places is still going strong. The Rookwood series is the one where Mornington contrives the expulsion of Jimmy Silver, repents and confesses, and is then expelled himself. There is an excellent Robin Hood series, an interesting Nature Supplement, and a serial by David Goodwin.

At Whitsun we visited Aunt Fan who lives in Balaam St. at Plaistow. (She is not really an aunt, but is Mum's cousin.) She took us to the first house at East Ham Palace on Whit Monday, and we saw Florrie Forde in a nice revue "Here's To You". Florrie Forde is a plump lady who sings with a powerful voice. There were two comedians in the show named Bud Flanagan and Chesney Allen, and they made me laugh a lot.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S. O. L. No. 29 "The Faddist Form-master" comprised three consecutive stories from the very early halfpenny Magnet of 1908 - a neat little series, perhaps the first of all Magnet series. It was the most frequently reprinted of all Greyfriars tales, appearing in the Magnet, the Penny Popular, the Popular, the Dreadnought, the Gem, and the Schoolboys' Own Library. In the most recent Annual we reproduced the cover of the Dreadnought in which it appeared. S. O. L. No. 30, "Tom Merry's Trust" comprised two consecutive stories in the blue Gem of 1909, in which Tom Merry's cousin, Hubert Dorrian, entrusted Tom with a little box containing diamonds. There was an interesting comment on Illicit Diamond Buying, which was prevalent at that time in South Africa.

The Bunter-Exchange series in the Popular of 50 years ago, referred to by Danny, originally appeared in the Magnet and Gem of 1919. The Mornington-Silver series came

from the Boys' Friend of mid-1922.)

* * * * *

Nelson Lee Column

A QUESTION OF AGE

by R. J. Godsave

One of the difficulties with which authors of the weekly school stories had to contend was the age factor.

Since these stories were mainly written for readers of the 11-17 group it was necessary for the main characters to be within this age. Authors writing for this teenage group would find no difficulty to write of a boy of 15-16 years pitting his wits against someone a few years older.

The two series I call to mind in the Nelson Lee Library are those of Ernest Lawrence and Jerry Dodd. In both cases the skill of those two boys was directed against professionals in boxing and cricket respectively. Although they were rather on the young side to be able to do this, to my knowledge it never evoked any criticism of the author from the original readers.

There does seem to be a difficulty on the part of teenagers to be able to communicate with their elders, and only when one reaches the ripe old age of about 20 years does it become easier. A natural levelling of the generation gap seems to follow which puts everyone on an equal footing.

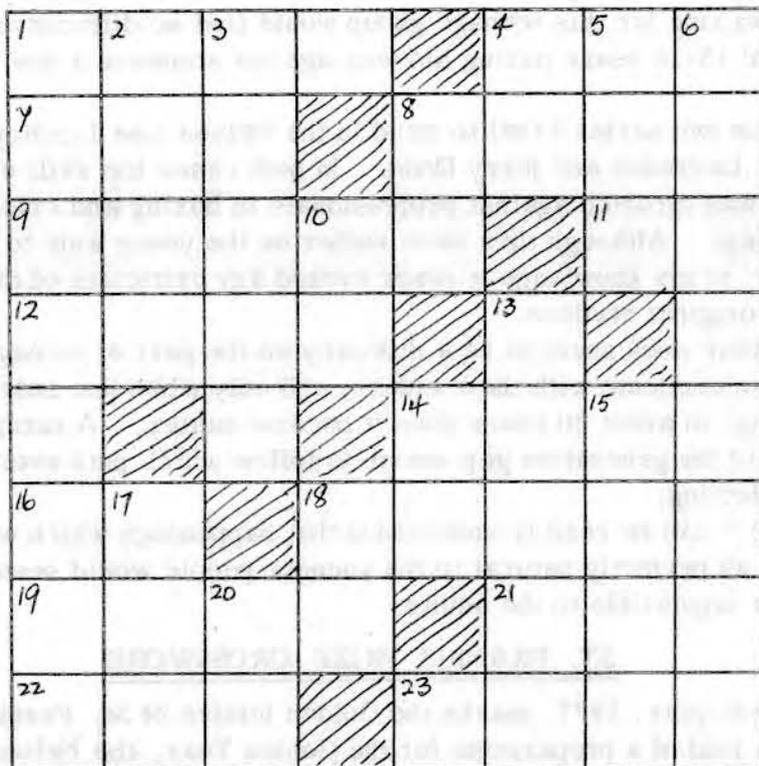
So it can be readily understood that happenings which would be regarded as perfectly natural to the younger people would seem to be somewhat impossible to the adults.

ST. FRANK'S PRIZE CROSSWORD

Next year, 1977, marks the Golden Jubilee of St. Frank's School, and, as a kind of a preparation for the Golden Year, the Nelson Lee Column is offering its readers a prize crossword. The puzzle and a generous prize of £5 are supplied by Nipper of St. Frank's.

Send in your solutions to the Editor, Excelsior House, Crookham Road, Crookham, Hampshire. If you do not wish to cut or mark your copy of C.D., you can always make a copy of the puzzle. Entries may

be sent in on a copied square, or in a list, but please print clearly. If there is only one correct entry, the full prize of £5 will be awarded for that. If, however, more than one correct entry is received, the prize will be divided into two, and £2.50 will be awarded to each of the first two correct solutions opened at this office. In the case of no correct solution being received, the prize of £5 will be divided between the senders of the two nearest correct solutions first opened.



A ST. FRANK'S CROSSWORD

CLUES

ACROSS

1. A St. Frank's matron.
4. Helmford Ratepayers' Association
(initials reversed).
7. Sipped in the White Harp.
8. St. Frank's House (rev.).
9. Never welcome.
11. " - Safra", part title of O. S. 216.
12. Condiment.
14. Succeed - in reverse.
16. Half a Roman garment (reversed).
18. Runs under Paris.
19. Nelson Lee's dog.
21. Atmosphere.
22. Handy's sister.
23. Bannington North Dental dept.
(initials).

DOWN

1. Nearest port to St. Frank's.
2. Half a college?
3. Plyer makes an answer.
4. Initials of junior in Study 16.
5. A listener.
6. Town 20 miles from St. Frank's.
8. Pet lunatic of Study Q.
10. Towards in reverse.
13. Airship in Northestrian series.
14. Two-thirds of famous detective.
15. Part title of O. S. 215.
17. Denial in reverse.
18. Initials of junior in Study 15
(reversed).
20. Los Angeles?

* * * * *

BLAKIANA

conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

This month's article by our old friend Gordon Swan includes an amendment for all to make in their Sexton Blake Catalogues. The author of U. J. No. 476 should be changed to A. Blair. I do hope all these little corrections and additional information which I publish from time to time has enabled you all to keep your Catalogues up to date. It is now over ten years since the Catalogue was first published and during that time we have discovered lots more information on the Blake Saga. Gordon has also written a short poem on Sexton Blake which I have pleasure in including in Blakiana this month.

(Mr. Swan's verses are overleaf.)

COMING SOON; THE PEARL JUBILEE - the 30th
Birthday - of COLLECTORS' DIGEST

THE SAGA OF SEXTON BLAKE

by S. Gordon Swan

On reading the exploits of Sexton Blake
While solving many a mystery,
I have found that by treading in his wake
I have followed the course of history.

In the Balkan War he played his part,
The Great War he saw to conclusion;
In Petrograd he witnessed the start
Of the Russians' red revolution.

When D'Annunzio seized Fiume Blake was there,
Involved in a manner surprising;
With Cavendish Doyle in another affair
He helped quell the Moplah uprising.

And so from event to event he passed
Till the World War convulsed each nation;
He thwarted the Nazis from first to last,
His deeds were a lit'rary sensation.

Against a pageant of world incidents
The doings of Blake were recorded.
Was ever a greater train of events
Than the Sexton Blake Saga afforded?

WHAT! THAT HOARY OLD CHESTNUT

by Raymond Cure

"What! that hoary old chestnut" would have been my reaction to any story with a lost memory theme, at least, up to a couple of years ago. Lost memory, dreams and insanity and similar plots have a job to get past an editor, with these themes one can go beyond that which is possible. To follow a tale that peters out as a dream or a picture where a totally unsuspected character turns out to be the real murderer (owing to insanity) or, as in real life, the crook or murderer claims to have no memory of the occasion, always leaves a certain feeling of dissatisfaction in the reader's mind.

However, some such tales make it, as in this case, "The Man Who Lost His Memory" by Anthony Skene, the Sexton Blake Library No. 153, of the Third Series. Douglas Jerrold our victim, is a bank clerk accused of cooking the books, so to speak. He does not think he

has done wrong but cannot remember. But he is lucky, he has a sweet little wife named Nan. Believe it or not, she trusts him, she is one of those wives who believes that her husband can do no wrong. They often turn up in fiction if not in real life. Dear little Nan, she persuades our Sexton Blake to look into the case and you know Sexton Blake. He soon proves our Douglas had lost his memory, more than that his mind had been tampered with.

Mind tampering by operation was not so popular in those days. It has become popular since, owing to the efforts of Hitler and various other dictators. Today it is quite easy to believe that somebody can tamper with your noddle which had happened to Douglas Jerrold. In addition to cooking the firms books he was accused of murdering a bookmaker. Poor fellow, he could not believe he had done it, but he could not deny it, his mind was a blank.

However, Nan Jerrold stood by him and right behind her stood Sexton Blake and Tinker. Things may look black for Douglas but the dice are loaded in his favour. Give me Sexton Blake and though I sat in the death cell with but an hour to go, if I was innocent, not a hair would I turn. Justice would be done.

However, back to my opening remarks. I said that up to two years ago I would not accept that a man could do things or have a body laying around and know nothing about it.

The day I left work, one hour after finishing time, and took 25 minutes to cycle home, had my dinner, talked at a rapid rate a lot of nonsense, was finally persuaded to go to bed and woke about one o'clock in the morning wondering why I was there, was THE DAY I believed it can happen.

The doctor said at my age it could happen. You have a blank, you must not worry or try to remember or you worry unnecessarily. Apart from the Foreman's statement, he heard the clocking off bell ring and wondered why I was an hour late, and a lady who saw me cycle home and what my wife told me of when I arrived home, I do not know what happened to this day.

If a body had been found brutally done to death in the room where I work, I would not know whether I was the murderer or not. The police and Jury may prove me guilty, I would be unable to defend myself.

Today I am more ready to believe the lost memory story. It has become second nature to believe, It can happen even if your brain is not tampered with.

Truth is stranger than fiction after all. My sympathy was with Douglas Jerrold from the start. "The Man Who Lost His Memory" by Anthony Skene was all the more appreciated because of my own little adventure and in future the "memory lapse" plot will have a high place in my reading.

(This particular story can be obtained from the Sexton Blake section of the London Lending Library by applying to myself, Josie Packman.)

THEY LIVE AGAIN

The following stories feature in the Sexton Blake book to be published by the firm of Arthur Barker:

"WITNESS FOR THE DEFENCE". Union Jack No. 416, dated 1911, author E. J. Gannon,

"A CLUE FROM THE DEEP". Union Jack No. 62 in the 1/2d series dated 26th June, 1895.

"THE CLUE OF THE DEAD EYES". Union Jack No. 72, 1/2d series dated September 1895. Authors of the two last named were, respectively, E. Treeton and A. Grahame.

WHO WROTE "THE GREAT TURF MYSTERY" by S. Gordon Swan

It is a well known fact that a number of authors recorded the adventures of George Marsden Plummer in the Sexton Blake Saga. Off-hand one can quote at least seven: Michael Storm, Norman Goddard, John W. Bobin, Lewis Carlton, G. H. Teed, Walter Edwards and Arthur MacLean.

As regards the independent stories in Pluck, most of which featured Plummer on his own, I think Norman Goddard wrote a few of them, but it is possible that another writer or writers contributed some of them to that paper, the name of William Freeman has been mentioned in that connection, but I have no information on that score.

The purpose of this article is to point out that one author whose name has never been associated with the series wrote at least one

George Marsden Plummer tale.

In November 1912, two Plummer stories were published in successive weeks, namely U. J. No. 475, "The Case of the £500,000 Loan" and No. 476, "The Great Turf Mystery". In the Sexton Blake Catalogue both are credited to Norman Goddard. There is no doubt that Goddard wrote the first one which deals with Plummer's attempt to establish himself as president of a South American Republic. But what concerns us is the second story, "The Great Turf Mystery". Reading this immediately after the first one, one is struck by the fact that this story is written in a totally different style from that of Norman Goddard. I have no hesitation in affirming that, while Goddard may have been paid for it, William J. Bayfield better known as Allan Blair, wrote it.

Allan Blair wrote a number of racing stories for the Union Jack and the Sexton Blake Library, as well as a racing series for Pluck (The Victor Wild tales). A story dealing with the Sport of Kings may have been required for the Union Jack with the additional attraction of Plummer and Goddard may have been unable to supply it. Mindful of the disastrous "Case of the Colonial Cricketer" in which Andrew Murray was called on probably at short notice - to produce a cricketing story and wrote one in which the match scores were full of discrepancies the Editor this time may have decided to get an expert in the racing line. As a consequence was "The Great Turf Mystery", and the name of Allan Blair should be added to the list of those who write about the master-criminal with the green eyes.

P. S. by Josie Packman. Another author who wrote of Plummer was W. Shute named as the author of the Union Jack No. 1093 story called Plummer's Death Ray. A poorish tale in which Plummer is supposed to have been killed by his own death ray. As this tale appeared in 1924 the editor must have had a red face when he had to print later tales of Plummer written by G. H. Teed.

The story of the "Great Turf Mystery" was re-written and published in No. 348 of the Detective Weekly under the title of The Great Racing Racket.

* * * * *

During the nineteen-thirties there was some concern in the editorial office in case Bunter should appear to be too coarse or gross. C. H. Chapman recalled discussions on this point between the editor and the artists, a commendable concern for standards that might have seemed slightly old-fashioned even then. The series about Billy Bunter's windfall could possibly be regarded as Charles Hamilton's own contribution towards improving Bunter's slightly tarnished image.

The story began with Vernon-Smith offering to give Bunter a lift in a hired car and then dumping him in the middle of the countryside, miles from anywhere, to repay him for interfering in the Bounder's concerns (a trick that he played on an earlier occasion). Bunter was thus conveniently on the spot to observe the ultimate get-away vehicle of a smash-and-grab raider, and the £50 reward was eventually paid over to him. The second number related how Skinner, Snoop, Fish and Ponsonby all showed an unexpected interest in Bunter, and how eventually the money was given to his mother to enable her to have a holiday in Bournemouth to recuperate from an illness.

Mrs. Bunter tended to be a somewhat shadowy figure, perhaps because the idea of anyone actually being fond of Billy Bunter was too difficult to imagine. Nevertheless, this story was undoubtedly intended to contribute to the rehabilitation of Bunter, and his feelings for his mother were definitely meritorious, but still it is easy to see how the editor was concerned about Bunter: gambling at cards and billiards was something of a deterioration in his character, and the delightfully audacious Bunter of the Whiffles series was a far call from the Bunter who sneered about his £50.

Vernon-Smith was another Removite whose character underwent a similar decline: he gradually became harder and more unscrupulous as time went on, and lost the elusive charm of the late 'twenties. Although the Bounder later showed some remorse for the trick he played on Bunter in this series, his quarrel with the Famous Five at Lantham cricket-ground seemed quite unprovoked and unreasonable, as though Charles Hamilton could not always trouble to provide adequate

motivation for people's actions towards the end of the Magnet's run. The one bright spot was the use of Kipps to provide some necessary sleight-of-hand. The number of Magnet stories featuring Kipps could probably be counted on the fingers of two hands - an indication of the rich possibilities that existed among the subsidiary characters of the Greyfriars Remove.

* * * * *

(70 years ago this was a "Splendid NEW School Story". Today it is our "Classic Serial".

MISSING

"Dear me!" said Dr. Holmes, passing a hand across his brow. "This grows worse and worse."

"I was afraid the inspector would blunder," observed Mr. Kidd.

The doctor held a letter in his hand. It was in the same scrawl as the letters he had received the previous day. It ran as follows:

"Sir, - Are you going to pay up, or ain't you? I knew the plase would be watched last night. If the saim game is tried again, you will never see the boy alive. If you wont him back, this is wot you have got to do. Send a boy to put the money on the steps leeding down under the castle. If you send a man, or if you don't send, you will never heer from me again. If the money ain't put there by three o'clock, you won't see Darcy agin alive."

"That is an empty threat," said Mr. Kidd. "He would never dare to hurt the boy, though undoubtedly D'Arcy must be having a most uncomfortable time. Ah, here is Mr. Skeet!"

The inspector entered, looking a little dubious. He knew that he had

bungled the affair, though he was not at all inclined to admit it. The doctor handed him the letter. He read it through.

"Of course, you won't pay the money," he said. "We'll have them soon, sir."

"Them!" said the doctor. "You think there is more than one?"

"Certain, sir. There's a whole gang of them. I watched last night with Constable Simms, and they attacked us."

"Did you make a capture?"

"No, sir," said the inspector, with a blush. "They were too many for us. We wasn't expecting such odds to tackle. We chased them through the wood, but they gave us the slip in the dark. We were both pretty well knocked about."

"Did you discover the identity of any of them?"

"Not for certain, but I think that Barenegro, the gipsy, was one. There were four, at least."

The doctor looked worried. Mr. Kidd's face expressed incredulity.

"Well, what is to be done?" asked the housemaster abruptly.

The inspector tapped the letter on

the table.

"He won't get away from us a second time. Send someone to pretend to take the money, and I'll have my men on watch round the ruins."

"You think he will fall into the trap?"

"I'll answer for it, sir."

"He is certain to be on his guard."

"He'll find me a match for him,"

said the fat inspector.

Mr. Kidd did not look so sure of it.

"There seems to be nothing else to be done," said the doctor; and, after some further discussion, the inspector took his leave.

"Now about sending the money, Mr. Kidd," said the doctor. "It is, of course, impossible to comply with the ruffian's demand for a boy to be sent with it."

"I don't know, sir. Nothing could happen to the boy, and Barengro may not turn up unless his conditions are fulfilled."

"You think, then, that he will be on the watch to see who comes to the rendezvous?"

"I think it is certain".

"But in that case the police will see him."

"I think not. It occurred to me yesterday that the ruffian's hiding-place might be in the old castle. Kildare and I searched the ruins thoroughly. We found nothing. I have heard stories of secret chambers and passages under the old castle."

"I have heard such stories, but never attached any importance to them."

"There may be truth in them. That would account for this appointment being made by the kidnapper. He has some

secret way of getting there to take the money. He evidently intends to watch for whoever brings it."

"Then if the police surround the ruins he will see them, Mr. Kidd."

"I think it probable," the house-master replied drily. "I do not believe there is more than one man in the matter, in spite of the inspector. And I believe he is too cunning ever to be captured by Inspector Skeet."

"But if he escapes again the rascal may wreak his rage upon the unfortunate boy," exclaimed the doctor, deeply distressed.

"It is possible. If I may make a suggestion --"

"Please do."

"I would send the money as he demands. If the police make a capture, it will be recovered. If they fail, as I fear they will, the rascal may keep his promise and release D'Arcy. In short, carry out the inspector's own plans, but let the money be really there in case of accidents."

"It is a considerable sum to risk, but I would gladly pay twice as much to assure the boy's safety," said Dr. Holmes. "I will take your advice. If the scoundrel gains this sum, he is almost certain to try to keep the boy still a prisoner in the hope of obtaining more."

"Quite possibly; but we shall have time to work in. The question is, whom shall we send? I would suggest Blake, who is cool and courageous, and much attached to the missing boy."

The doctor hesitated.

"It is a terrible responsibility, Mr. Kidd."

"I do not see what harm can come to him, sir. He will not even see the gipsy. Suppose I tell Blake, and let him decide for himself?"

"Yes; that will be best."

Later that morning, Blake received a summons to Mr. Kidd's study, and he made his way there uneasily.

"Come in, Blake," said Mr. Kidd, in a tone so genial that Blake's uneasiness vanished at once. "You may sit down."

Blake sat down.

"It is about the missing boy D'Arcy."

"Have you had news, sir?" asked Blake eagerly.

"Yes. I am speaking to you in confidence, Blake."

"Yes, sir," said Blake wonderingly.

"D'Arcy has been taken away by a ruffian, as we suspected, whom we believe to be Barengro, the gipsy," resumed Mr. Kidd. "This wretch demands a ransom for his release." The housemaster was far from guessing that the junior knew almost as much about that as he did himself. "He demands that the money be taken to the steps leading down into the vaults under the old castle, and left there by a boy."

Blake understood now why he had been sent for.

"The money is to be taken, Blake; but only as a bait to catch the kidnapper. There is not, so far as I am aware, any danger in the matter. Would you like to go? If you would rather not, say so plainly, and I will make another arrangement."

"I should be glad to be of use, sir."

"Good! The money has been sent for from the bank. You will take the packet containing it, and leave it on the steps of

the vault. That is all you have to do. You will then leave the spot immediately. The rest is in the hands of the police."

"Yes, sir."

"You will mention to no one what I have said."

"Certainly not, sir."

Blake left the housemaster in a thoughtful mood. When he rejoined his chums they questioned him.

"Private business," said Blake with a wave of the hand. "Private business between Mr. Kidd and myself."

Herries and Digby gasped.

"He's off his rocker," said Digby. "Spout it out instantly, you bounder, or we'll scrag you."

The two chums looked warlike. Blake backed away.

"Pax!" he exclaimed. "It's just as I tell you. I've promised Kidlets. I can't say anything."

So they let him go. The chums went out of Blake's view to hold a discussion.

"There's something up," said Herries sagely. "What the dickens does he mean by trying to keep us in the dark, Dig?"

"He's up to something," said Dig, after some reflection. "He thinks he can carry it out, whatever it is, without our assistance."

"He can't, of course."

"We'll keep an eye on him - shadow the bounder - and see what he does and where he goes."

They carried it out. Their shadowing, perhaps, was not exactly so skilful as that of a Sexton Blake or a Martin Stern, but it was thorough.

Blake went into the gymnasium, and he was not surprised a couple of minutes later to see Herries looking in at one door and Digby at the other. He grinned to himself. His chums, resenting his secrecy, were shadowing him. It was very funny so far, but it would be a bother as soon as the time came for him to start for the old castle.

But Blake was seldom at a loss. Figgins & Co. were in the gymnasium, and Blake stopped and spoke to the New House leader.

"I say, Figgy, will you do me a favour?"

"Millions of 'em!" said Figgy, with great liberality. "What do you want? Anything to do with poor old Aubrey Adolphus?"

"Well, yes, in a way."

"Then I'm your man. Go ahead!"

"I've had a difference of opinion with Herries and Dig --"

Figgins whistled.

"You don't mean to say you've had a row?"

"Oh, no," said Blake hastily. "We never row in Study No. 6. They're on my track, and they're going to follow me like bloodhounds when I go out. I want you to stop them."

Figgins grinned hugely.

"I'll do it, Blake. All right, mum's the word!"

A little later Blake made his way to the housemaster's study. He was satisfied that Figgins would keep his word.

Mr. Kidd was ready. He handed Blake a small parcel, fastened with sealing-wax and string. His face was

serious.

"You fully understand what you are to do, Blake?"

"Yes, sir. Go to the ruined castle, and shove this packet on the steps leading down to the vaults, and then bunk."

The Housemaster coughed.

"You will be careful to come away directly you have placed it there. If you see any signs of men watching the ruins, you will take no notice. Inspector Skeet and his men will be there."

"I will be careful, sir."

And Blake departed with the packet in his possession. As he left the gates of St. Jim's, Herries and Digby came hurriedly across the quadrangle. They passed out into the road and stared after Blake's retreating figure.

Blake turned his head. The two chums dived into the cover of a roadside tree, but not before Blake had seen them. He observed something else, too. Figgins & Co. had just come out of the gates. A moment more, and Herries and Digby were on their backs in the road, with Figgins & Co. sprawling over them.

Blake laughed. Leaving his rebellious followers to the tender mercies of Figgins & Co., Blake went on his way, still chuckling.

(Blake has had luck
in next month's
instalment of this
70-years old story.)

REVIEW"TOM MERRY'S SCHOOLDAYS"Martin Clifford
(Howard Baker: £10)

When the halfpenny Gem came modestly over the horizon in far-off 1907, its publishers obviously intended it to be a minor brother to the successful paper, Pluck. Like Pluck, the Gem was to cater mainly for boys who loved stories of adventures, with the interpolation of a school story from time to time, to give a little bit of variety.

So the first two stories in the new paper dealt with adventure in distant lands. Then, in the third week of issue, came the introduction of Tom Merry at a little school named Clavering, and it was thought that Tom Merry might add that little bit of extra interest to the Gem, just as Jack Blake had done in Pluck. There was no intention, in all probability, that the tales of Tom Merry should be anything but a short-run series for a limited period.

So, with Nos. 4, 6, 8 and 10, the adventure story was back as king of the castle.

But something happened which the publishers had not foreseen. Tom Merry was a stunning success. For some reason or other, this ideal hero captured the imagination of British boyhood in 1907.

So, after No. 10, the adventure story was out of the Gem, Tom Merry went to St. Jim's which replaced Clavering in the Gem - and Tom Merry took over the Gem for all time.

I am glad to see the 6 adventure stories included in this volume, for they are part of Gem history. The four little tales of Tom Merry at Clavering are rare treasures, and Tom Merry's transfer to St. Jim's is an event which probably changed the trend of boys' papers.

School stories do not date, but these little tales of Clavering and the early St. Jim's are really glorious little museum pieces. Even in 1907 it was unbelievable that a fifteen-years old boy would be sent to a public school in attire reminiscent of Little Lord Fauntleroy. But, mainly, it is the topical references, as always, which date those gorgeous early Gems - for instance the mention of long-forgotten cricketers and the likening of Tom Merry to Sir Charles Gradison who featured in a novel by Richardson at least a hundred years before Tom

Merry came on the scene, and who, I would guess, was but little known of even in 1907. That sort of thing spreads the perfume of old lavender over Tom Merry's Schooldays, and the fragrance makes it precious. In passing, I am so glad that this book has the heartwarming, old-world title of "Tom Merry's Schooldays". Anything else would have given a frosty nip to the lavender.

The earlier tales are illustrated by Clarke, who was always quaintly old-fashioned, and the later ones by the youthful Shields, who was giving promise even then.

One rarity of these issues is that Mr. Kidd and Mr. Railton are introduced at the same school, though the former disappeared very soon after. The final tale in the book "The St. Jim's Curate" is novel owing to the fact that it was, for some reason, only reprinted once - in the very early Penny Popular. All the same, it is a lilting little cricket story, and introduces the Rev. Dodds, who was to feature in blue Gems for the next few years. It also introduced a Greyfriars cricket eleven whose captain was Yorke and whose star player was Ponsonby.

Superbly bound, in the normal style of these "specials", this book will give grace and breeding to the self-respecting bookcase of the connoisseur. Such luxurious binding and aristocratic finish obviously bumps up the price, but, in this case of the first Gems, one can welcome it. A lovely book - a gem in a worthy setting.

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BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 27. BING CROSBY, GRACIE FIELDS & WIMPOLE STREET

Our opening feature for the new term came from Warner Bros. It was Verree Teasdale (what a name! I wonder whether it was male or female!) in "The Firebird". Next, from Universal, Edmund Lowe and Gloria Stuart in "Gift of Gab".

Then one of the loveliest romances ever on the silver screen - from M. G. M. "The Barretts of Wimpole Street". An entrancing story, perfectly played by a superb cast: Charles Laughton, Norma

Shearer, Fredric March, Maureen O'Sullivan, and the unforgettable Una O'Connor. Years later, M. G. M. reissued the film, and we played it again and liked it more than ever. And years still further on, the picture was re-made in a film which was hopelessly inferior to the magnificent one of the thirties. (It is said that Randolph Hearst bought the story for M. G. M. with the intention that the part of Elizabeth Barrett should

be played by Marion Davies. When Norma Shearer got the part, Miss Davies left M. G. M. and went to Warner Bros.)

Then, from M. G. M., William Powell and Myrna Loy in "Evelyn Prentice". I seem to recall this as a fine drama with a tense court-room climax. Next, from Universal, Chester Morris in "I've Been Around". Followed by Clark Gable, Joan Crawford, and Robert Montgomery in "Forsaking All Others", from M. G. M. Then, also from M. G. M., a technicolor musical, Robert Young in "The Band Plays On".

After that came another musical, this time from Warner Bros. - Dick Powell and Joan Blondell in "Dames", another of those striking Busby Berkeley productions, full of marvellous tunes and dance routines. Next, from M. G. M., came one of the full-length Laurel & Hardy features, "Babes in Toyland". This one probably had its moments, but it was purely a film for children, and it was far away from the usual run of the comedians' films. It fell flat in the small cinema.

Then, from Warner's, Barbara Stanwyck in "Courageous", followed by, from M. G. M., a magnificent film named "Sequoia". Jean Parker was billed as the star, but the real stars of a lovely production were the trees.

Now, a double-feature programme, both films from Universal: Henry Hull in the Dickens' story "Great Expectations" plus Tom Tyler in "The Silver Bullet". Next, from M. G. M., Robert Montgomery and Ann Harding in "The Biography of a Bachelor Girl".

And now another double-feature programme, both films this time from

Paramount: Bing Crosby in "She Loves Me Not" (a delightful musical) plus Randolph Scott in "Rocky Mountain Mystery". These were, I think, our first Paramount films since we installed sound. Though Paramount was a lovely firm to deal with, it was really not good policy to run programmes from so many different renters. Obviously it was conceit to see all the different famous trade-marks coming up on our screen, but spreading our business over so many renters lessened the value of that business to individual renters.

Then, from Warner Bros., James Cagney in his latest release, "A Perfect Week-End", followed by, from M. G. M., Ramon Novarro and Evelyn Laye in "The Night is Young". Next, from Universal, Gordon Harker in "The Lad". Next, another double-feature show, both from Universal: Claudette Colbert and Warren William in "Imitation of Life" plus Fay Wray in "Cheating Cheaters".

Now another double-feature programme: from M. G. M., Robert Montgomery and Helen Hayes in "Vanessa", plus, from A. B. F. D., "Soul of a Nation". A. B. F. D. was another new renter to our screen (and one who worked a block-booking system, by which they let you have one or two bookings you wanted on the understanding that you took two or three more which you didn't want.) But I wanted "Soul of a Nation" which was a very charming and inspiring feature to mark the Silver Jubilee of King George the Fifth and Queen Mary. It covered the 25 years of the great King's reign.

Next from Warner Bros., Pat O'Brien in "I Sell Everything", followed by, also

from Warner's, the superb Paul Muni in "Bordertown".

Then another double-feature programme comprising, from A. B. F. D., Frankie Darrow in "Little Men", a truly lovely film from the famous story by Louisisa Alcott, plus, from M. G. M., Ricardo Cortez in "Shadow of Doubt".

Next, from A. B. F. D., Gracie Fields in "Sing As We Go". This film was popular, and Gracie Fields was also immensely popular with my own boys and girls, many of whom met her in person. When Gracie was working in London, she resided with a very old friend who was also the mother of

three of my girls, at Hinchley Wood. Gracie came to one of our own school musical comedies.

In the supporting programme to "Sing As We Go", we played the Laurel & Hardy two-reeler "The Midnight Patrol".

Final show of the term was a double-feature programme, both films from A. B. F. D.: William Haines in "The Marines are Coming" plus Clyde Beatty in "The Lost Jungle".

(ANOTHER ARTICLE IN

THIS SERIES SOON)

* * * * *

DUDLEY WATKINS - D. C. THOMSON'S

GREATEST ARTIST

by W. O. G. Lofts

Many generations of readers now recall such comic characters as Desperate Dan, Lord Snooty and his Pals, The Broons, and Oor Wullie. The first appeared in the comic Dandy in the opening number in 1937, when Desperate Dan was a tough gun-carrying cowboy who munched cow-pie, slept on barbed wire, shaved with an axe or blow-lamp, could lift a tram high in the air, but lived in fear of his Aunt Aggie! Lord Snooty who appeared in the Beano in 1938, lived at Bunkerton Castle, wore an Eton collar, top hat, and would have been more at place in The Gem - except that he was fond of fighting the Gas-Works gang, and sitting down to fried-up teas. The latter two characters appeared in the comic supplement in the Scottish Sunday Post. The Broons being a large Scottish family living off Glebe Street, and always quarrelling, were greatly loved by millions of Scottish readers. Likewise was Oor Wullie, a spiked hair Scots boy in dungarees and large boots, who spent most of his time sitting on an upturned bucket. Both the Broons and Oor Wullie spoke in a very broad Scots accent, and so popular were they, that Annuals have appeared of their Sunday adventures (reprints) since the last war.

All the above characters were created by the Dundee firm of

D. C. Thomson Ltd., who produced such best selling boys' papers as The Wizard, Rover, Adventure, Skipper and Hotspur. From the offset and almost until his death, all the characters were drawn by the greatest of D. C. Thomson comic artists, Dudley Watkins - who was for some reason unexplained, allowed to sign his name to the strips.

Dudley Watkins was not a Scotsman, but was born at Prestwick near Manchester, on the 28th February, 1907. His father likewise was an artist - a lithographic artist to the trade, who had a passion for painting copies of Victorian sentimental art. Our Watkins showed remarkable artistic skill from even the age of three - and readers of The Children's Newspaper for 1918 would have seen a photograph of him, an owlish-looking little boy with a solemn expression and about this time he was described by the local educational authority as 'an artistic genius for his age'. After school he attended Art school, but could not take up a scholarship because his family could not afford to lose his wages. In 1925, and when only 18, he joined the firm of Thomson-Leng (now known as D. C. Thomson Ltd.) and worked in the art department, where for many years he was one of the large band of anonymous artists pouring out work for their many publications. Extremely hard-working, he was also reserved, and never spoke much unless the conversation turned to religion. Brought up in the Baptist faith, he was a religious man, and a good talker on the subject. Illustrating The Broons was his turning point to fame - and by 1940 he had easily become their star author. Such was the fame and appeal of Watkins that the Amalgamated Press made approaches to get his services, but his loyalty, and better rates of pay made him stop with the Dundee firm. He worked at his large house in Broughty Ferry on a big leather topped Victorian desk, with a little plaster cast of Oor Wullie, next to a more dignified bust of Beethoven. As mentioned he was deeply religious, and drew a series of strip cartoons for 'The Young Warrior' - a comic paper published by the Worldwide Evangelisation Crusade Movement - showing a boy like Oor Wullie who struck out against sin. Watkins also had great ambitions to produce an illustrated version of the Bible, but alas, shortly before his intended retirement he died suddenly of a coronary on the morning of 20th August, 1969. Dudley Watkins was an exceptional comic-artist with robust humour and a remarkable amount of detail in

every frame, and must rank with Tom Browne, Bert Brown and R. W. Wilson as one of the great British comic geniuses of all time.

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The Postman Called

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

D. SWIFT (Leeds): In answer to the Rev. Hobson, I can confirm that Bunter Villa was once again described as in Reigate, Surrey, in at least one of the Bunter books. It appears on page 160 of "Lord Billy Bunter".

M. KUTNER (London): I agree with your remarks in April C.D. concerning the "very distorted views" of historians.

I call to mind a certain political would-be Leader whose autobiography gave a version of his activities in the East End of London during the 1930's that does not agree with my experiences at that time and place. Historians of the future, basing their findings on such evidence, must necessarily err in their judgments.

Faith in historians must be weakened when we realize that so little is known of our great national bard, Shakespeare, creating down the years conjecture and controversy as to the real identity of the writer of those plays.

Certain aspects of Charles Hamilton's private life are still not perfectly known to those among us who claim some acquaintance with him. Even less would a future historian know of the man and his works when confronted with data based on guess-work and misconceptions gleaned from various collectors' magazines which have accumulated over the years.

Also, the evidence taken from unknowledgeable journalists of our national newspapers with their twitterings equating Magnets with "comics", etc., and giving examples of Charles Hamilton's literary standard with such words as yarrooh! and leggo! etc., might lead such an "historian" to dig up another Francis Bacon and query, as in the case of Shakespeare, whether Charles Hamilton did write those beloved tales.

Or, even worse, whether he existed at all!

E. KADISH (Hendon): I have been dipping into "You're a Brick, Angela!"

and what a very readable book it is! I'm afraid that, outside the Amalgamated Press girls' papers of the 'thirties, I was not particularly keen on girls' fiction. Angela Brazil (or "Brazzle") or Elsie J. Oxenham, for instance, left me cold, although I do remember that the opening chapters of "What Katy Did" by Susan Coolidge were found to be surprisingly entertaining.

I am glad that Mrs. Cadogan and Patricia Craig have devoted some space in their book to Valerie Drew, "the eighteen year old girl detective" and Flash, "her sagacious alsatian assistant". She was an interesting character with a definite personality, much more so than, say, male counterparts like Colwyn Dane in the "Champion".

Incidentally, the authors say that Ronald Fleming was the only writer to use a male pseudonym, "Peter Langley", in the girls' periodicals. There was in fact a second pen-name, "Clive Bancroft", who "wrote" two serials for the "Schoolgirls' Weekly" - but perhaps this was a second pseudonym for Mr. Fleming.

* * * * *

News of the Clubs

CAMBRIDGE

The Club met at 99 Shelford Road on Sunday, 9th May, with Bill Lofts in the chair. Arrangements were made for the June visit of the Club to the home of Neville Wood at Sweffling. Jack Doupe produced for the admiration of members his fine eight volume set of the entire 88 numbers of the original Aldine Robin Hood Library, complete with the coloured covers. Jack Overhill produced a number of items from his collection, and also his fine typed series of diaries.

The first item on the programme was a Music Hall quiz by Edward Witten. Bill Lofts emerged winner with 30 points. Jack Overhill then dealt in his own inimitable way with the "Humble Begge" stories in the Union Jack. He described "Humble Begge" as a character, and referred to many of the incidents in the stories. He remarked that it was a treat to read Sexton Blake tales back in the old covers, with

Sexton Blake, Tinker and Pedro back in Baker Street. He circulated the copies among the company, bringing back fond memories to the older members.

Vic Hearn talked about the "Val Fox" stories which had appeared in "Puck" from around 1911 until "Puck" ceased publication. He produced an interesting series of "Pucks" of the 1930's. He explained that the "Val Fox" stories were short, usually occupying one page. He read one of the stories, as an example, and aroused much interest in his hearers. He explained that "Val Fox" was a ventriloquist detective, and had as pets, who assisted him in his work, a monkey, Mickey, and a parrot, Uncle Pat. The Secretary suggested that the name "Val Fox" might have been derived from the 19th century tale of "Valentine Vox, the ventriloquist".

The meeting closed with a warm vote of thanks to Jack and Mrs. Overhill for their hospitality.

LONDON

To most members, Twickenham means the rugby football ground and the Kneller Hall Military Music College. However, Millicent Lyle, a local resident, gave a good treatise about Twickenham's painters and literary personalities to an excellent attendance at Sam and Babs' residence on the occasion of the May meeting.

Ray Hopkins gave a fine reading of the first two chapters of Leslie Rowley's version of the non published Magnet story, "The Battle of the Beaks".

Roger Jenkins' Rhyming Synonyms competition was won by Eric Lawrence and Norman Wright. Roger then obliged by winning Michael Perry's 32 Question Quiz.

Winifred Morss spoke of the possibility of the Walthamstow Library putting on a Hamilton Centenary exhibition.

Excellent catering by the hosts for which they were suitably thanked plus congenial company helped to ensure a jolly and happy time.

Next meeting at Greyfriars, Hollybush Ride, Wokingham, Berks.
Telephone 034 46 4626.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

SPECIAL NOTICE: There will be no Hamilton Library held at the Wokingham Meeting in June.

NORTHERNSaturday, 8th May, 1976

Chairman Geoffrey Wilde welcomed members to the first meeting of the cricket season and after business and correspondence Tom Roach presented his recording of a Hubert Gregg broadcast.

Gregg spoke about the days of the old 2LO broadcasting and the subsequent move to Broadcasting House - the days when announcers wore dinner-jackets in the evenings! He tells us in the programme that he became a part-time announcer for four pounds a week. Without any disrespect to announcers, he said, he had become an announcer in order to eat!

There followed a quiz by Harry Blower concerned with the Hamilton schools. Really quite simple - once one knew the answers! 'Norah was his pride' was rather puzzling - unless one remembered the old song, 'Norah, the Pride of Kildare'!

After refreshments Geoffrey Good read to us the last two chapters of Magnet 1251 (from the Flip series) in which Bunter poses as a philanthropist and stages a form collection to buy a few 'home comforts' for Quelch in 'sanny'. Just how much Quelch would have benefited the reader can obviously guess!

Bunter, however, is delighted at the magnificent response of the Remove, that is, until he opens the box! For the contents would not have bought one grape for poor old Quelch. Among the pile of buttons and broken pen-nibs the only coin was a bad halfpenny!

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WANTED: Magnets 1017, 1081, 1082, 1092, 1094 to 1097, 1101, 1103, 1105, 1107, 1200, Gems 701, 782, and 784. Will purchase at your price or exchange for Hamiltonia, including Magnets 427, 886 to 889, 1119 to 1124 and others, S. O. L's and Penny Populars.

JOHN BECK, 29 MILL RD., LEWES, EAST SUSSEX, BN7 2RU.

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WANTED: N. I. L's (o/s) up to No. 92. U. J's; S. B. L's; early Champions. Items for sale.

H. W. VERNON, 5 GILLMAN ST., CHELTENHAM, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA 3192

WANTED: Bullseye 41, 89; Surprise No. 3; Film Fun 571, "The Boys' Magazine" with complete story "Werewolf/Blackstone Hall", Magnet 1400, 1403; Buy/Exchange (state wants).

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

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FOR SALE: Annuals - Funny Wonders 1939, £3.50; 1935 (rough) £2; Champion 1933, £2.50; Skipper 1934, £2.50; Hotspurs 1938-1940, £2 each; Teddy Tails, £1.50; Girls' Own Annual (Flora Flikman) 1920, £2; Boys' Own Annual 1925, £2. 70 Magnets (1493-1683) below standard copies, 20p each. Magnets 1386-1387-1405-1495-1587, 20 Gems (783-1226) good copies, 50p each. Postage extra.

G. HARDIMAN, 16 FAIR VIEW, WITTON GILBERT, CO. DURHAM.

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ANNUALS WANTED TO COMPLETE COLLECTION: Chums, Vol. 1 (1892/3) - 3, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25 (1916/17). Little Folks, 53/61, inclusive, 66, 68, 71, 73, 77/89 inclusive. Also bound 'Strand' - Pearsons - Cassell's - Windsor - London - Magazines. 1906/7 to 1926/7 (not earlier).

LEN HAWKEY, 3 SEAVIEW RD., LEIGH-ON-SEA, ESSEX.

'Phone 0702/79579

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MUSEUM MUSINGS

by Len Wormull

As a reader of long standing at the British Museum, I was interested in Roger Jenkins' reference to the Library's missing Magnets (see Annual). Some months ago I raised this matter with a senior official, who said the losses were probably due to theft and enemy action. There was vagueness about Number 1 - either it was stolen or not delivered to them in the first place, I was told. No such mystery surrounds "Tom Merry's Schooldays", which still holds residence there. Gem Number 1, "Scuttled!", is a separately bound photographic copy made by Fleetway in 1963. Covers are in black and white, with a protective plastic covering for each page. It seems that Roger was unlucky in not finding the 1917 Magnets - I viewed the complete year only recently, taking in the Judge Jeffrey's series. Only the first volume of 1929 Magnets is available. The second volume, comprising numbers 1118 to 1141, was, I am told, destroyed in the war. Which is odd to say the least, as copies of Magnet and Gem were not bound until about 1954.

To my knowledge, this is the longest missing run, the rest being odd copies here and there. Considering the Magnet's long exposure to the public, the overall collection is still very much to be admired.

The elusive No. 1 mystified me way back in the spring of 1939. It was my first visit to the Reading Room, and I had gone expressly to look over early Magnets. The occasion was rather in the nature of a farewell (!!) tribute. Schooldays were behind me, the Magnet of the day no longer appealed to me even though I still took it, and all my instincts told me it was time to leave Greyfriars. One of the happiest relationships I had known was not to be dismissed lightly, however. Here I was, excited as ever and not a little over-awed by it all, searching out the first four years of a period I knew almost nothing about. As I remember them, they were good single copies, each year wrapped in brown paper. Apart from the missing first number, the most vivid memory of that visit was reading the death of Bulstrode minor, a tale which moved a youth to tears.

When next I saw these Magnets, some twenty years later, they had been invested with good quality binding. Sadly, the 1908 copies (2 Vols.) had taken a turn for the worse, being now 'supplied in a photographic copy made by Fleetway Publications'. Preservation has given them a blurred and faded look, with stiffened pages. Seemingly they are the original copies, as each bears the issuing Museum date stamp. "The Taming of Harry", previously a good copy, had undergone restoration. Gem Vol. Number One is similarly described and treated, though more easily readable.

Few visitors to the archives can boast of a visit to the vaults in search of books. This rare treat was granted me after some difficulty in supplying early copies of the Boys' Friend Library. I was taken down a spiral staircase and through a maze of passages to their resting place, where I was left to sort out those required. Rows upon rows of shelf-laden B. F. L's met my gaze, while all around were bookshelves lined with mint-edition hardbacks of juvenile literature from the Victorian age. A brief encounter, but a truly wonderful sight.

Lack of space has meant the transfer of many periodicals to the Colindale Library. Among those on the list are most of the Sports' papers, Boys' Friend Weekly, Boys' Herald, School & Sport, Sexton

Blake Library, and most film magazines. Skipper is also there, isolated from its more famous companions. The great bulk of papers and comics is still at Bloomsbury, not forgetting all the well-known Girls' papers. The Union Jack is not catalogued, but I was told they have it. On my last visit I left an official solving the mystery of the missing file. The Nelson Lee is the odd one out. This is not stored at Woolwich, three days' notice being required for its removal.

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FOR SALE: Young England 54th vol.: £2.25; "Captain" vol. XXV 1911: £3; Billy Bunter's Own No. 3: £2. Gems Nos. 1559 to 1561, 1567: £1.25 each; also Magnets, S.O.L's, Public School stories, cloth bound, £1.25 each. List sent. WANTED: Greyfriars Holiday Annuals, Monsters, Chums vols, Boys' Own Annuals, Captain vols.

JAMES GALL, 49 ANDERSON AVENUE, ABERDEEN, SCOTLAND.

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HAMILTON & ALDINE DIAMOND LIBRARY

W. O. G. Lofts writes:

It was Roger Jenkins who first wrote about the school of St. John's in the Aldine Diamond Library, when he compared the leading character with D'Arcy of St. Jim's who was his double. A few months later in 1958 I replied giving more data, and although agreeing that the style was identical to Mr. Hamilton's, I had heard that he denied writing the stories. Through the years however, with further research and more details coming to light, it does seem fairly conclusive that Roger was right. The whole affair is so complex and detailed that I may write the Aldine Charles Hamilton writings for a future C. D. Annual.

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COMING SOON; THE PEARL JUBILEE - the 30th
Birthday - of COLLECTORS' DIGEST