STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS DIGEST

VOLUME 30, NUMBER 358 OCTOBER 1976

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STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS DIGEST

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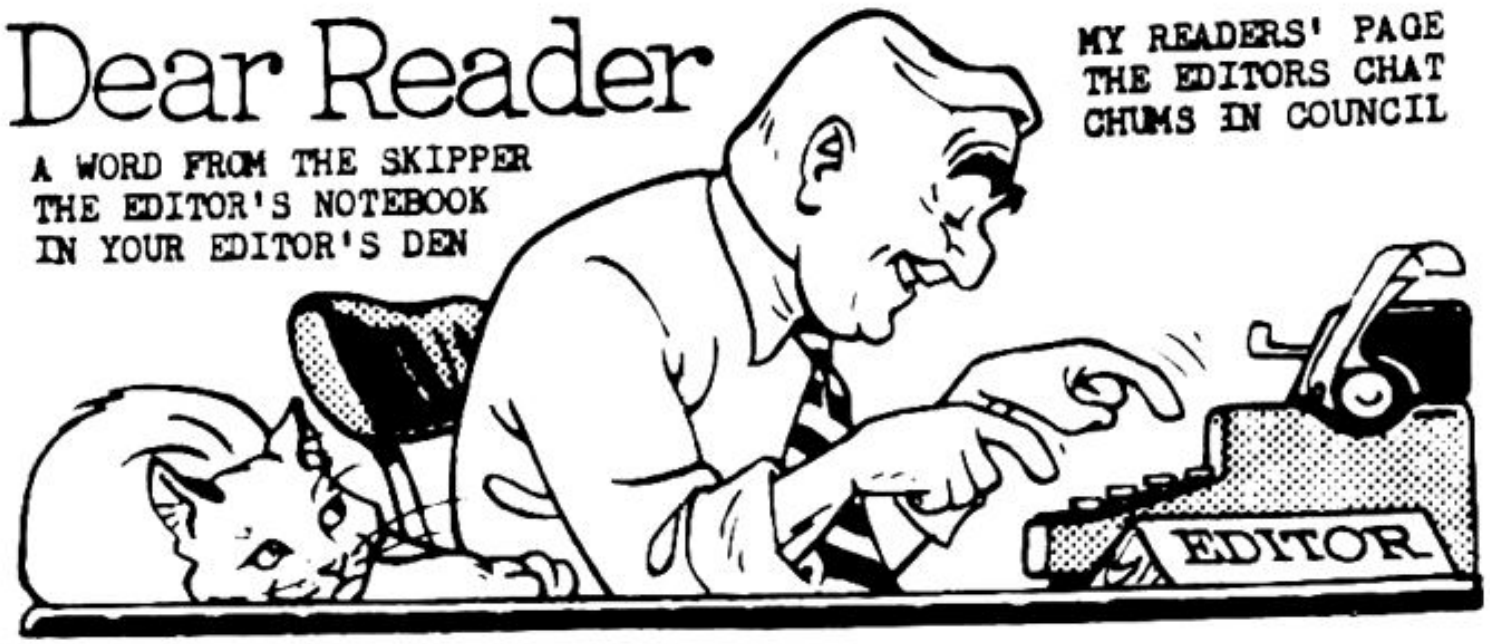

THE ASSISTANTS

In the early days, the curious factor was that so many of the detective stories written for publication in boys' papers provided the detective with his boy assistant. So Sexton Blake had his Tinker, Nelson Lee had his Nipper, and, for a while, Ferrers Locke had his Jack Drake. The latter does not count here, but it is fairly clear that, later on, some writers found Tinker and Nipper a problem.

Sexton Blake, at least, was never written for children. Like most of the tales in such papers as the Girls' Friend, he was aimed, in

all probability, at the adolescent and the younger adult. It has always been a puzzle as to why boy assistants were provided, for, in all truth, they were most unlikely right hands for great tecs.

Tinker, of course, became dearly loved by readers, with the passing of time. Eventually, with two or three wars behind him, they decided that he had to be given a proper name and be made older. I never saw myself why this was necessary - he could as easily have been introduced to a new acquaintance as Mr. Tinker as Mr. Carter, and I usually found the Tinker of the twenties and thirties more to my taste than the Tinker of swinging London. But authority can always find and express good reasons for a change of any sort.

I wonder whether the same factors would apply to Nipper. That was clearly far more of a nickname than Tinker. Mr. Brooks had a ready-made difficulty when Nelson Lee and Nipper were turned over to him exclusively, and sent to school. Was Nipper ever really particularly popular with St. Frank's fans? I myself liked him, but I have never been well acquainted with the St. Frank's tales. It appears that Lee and Nipper were dropped entirely from at least one series after Nipper was, rather unsatisfactorily, given a name more in keeping with his dignity. Whether the name was also more in keeping with the tastes of readers, however, is a moot point. Perhaps St. Frank's fans could let in a little more light on the subject.

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

"Good morning, Mr. Phelps! Your task is to start a monthly amateur magazine which will be devoted to keeping alive the affection felt for certain old periodicals, for certain old writers, and certain old characters. You will never allow yourself to suffer from writer's cramp, Mr. Phelps; you will never get tired of addressing many thousands of envelopes every year and licking countless thousands of stamps. Under no circumstance must you ever allow your steam-pipe to grow cold or your boiler to lose pressure. I have not yet mentioned it, Mr. Phelps, but you must never, under any circumstances miss an issue - if you get a cold you will just blow your nose and take a Beecham's powder. And the magazine must still be going strong in thirty years time. Good-morning, Mr. Phelps!"

Which is a lot of nonsense adding up to the fact that next month Collectors' Digest reaches its 30th birthday, and, all being well, we shall celebrate our Pearl Jubilee with a special Grand Double Number (as they used to say in Old England as it once was).

Collectors' Digest has lasted longer than all but a few of the papers which it perpetuates. Today it is going as strongly or even stronger than ever, though it has never on any occasion sought publicity, but has been happy to bloom like a violet in the pathless woods.

In all its thirty years the Digest has never missed an issue, so if we pause to pat ourselves on our back next month, you must smile tolerantly and forgive us.

Recent years have often been difficult and worrying owing to ever-rising costs of production and distribution, and that is one reason why we paused and thought long and hard before deciding on next month's Double Number. For our readers' pockets are as hard hit as our own, and it is a problem enough to live without going in for luxuries.

Still, it's a special Occasion, with a capital 'O', so we are taking the risk. Next month a Grand Double Number marks our Pearl Jubilee - thirty years of C.D.

As on the few previous occasions when we have sent out a Double Number, the matter will be dealt with by putting back by one issue the number of a subscriber's expiry date. That is to say, if your subscription would normally expire with No. 360, it will be put back to No. 359. If you feel that the Double Number is too extravagant for you, please notify us at Excelsior House at once. We shall then make sure that this particular issue does not come to you, and your subscription expiry date will be extended by one issue.

FURTHER ADVENTURES OF MR. SOFTEE

This item is, of course, for pet-lovers only. Last month I mentioned, in reply to kind enquiries from many readers, that Mr. Softee has kept in bouncing good health throughout the summer. Unhappily, before our last issue reached you, he was in the pet's hospital having an operation for the removal of a skin tumour which had suddenly grown rapidly on the back of his neck.

It was pretty awful, as pet-lovers will guess, to see Mr. Softee

being taken away by the vet about ten o'clock one morning. I could not imagine a cat having an operation. I felt sure he would scratch at the wound and it would never heal. Every time the phone rang that day, we thought it would be the vet to say that Softee had died under the anaesthetic.

About seven that evening, they brought him back. The job was beautifully done. A narrow band of fur had been shaved off across his neck. He had a cut about two inches in length, neatly held together with twelve stitches. Softee is, of course, all white, and there was not the slightest sign of any smear of blood on his fur.

I sat in the garden with him. He moved around, staggering a little. He didn't know what had hit him. He kept looking up at me with absolute bewilderment in his eyes. I felt pretty awful. I kept asking myself whether we had any right to do that to an animal - whether it was right to let it go away for an operation.

But my conscience is clear now. A fortnight later the vet called to remove the stitches, but Softee had long recovered.

Now he is lively as a kitten again, rolling over on his back with his legs waving in the air. Mr. Softee is himself again.

TAILPIECE

This year's Collectors' Digest Annual - the Pearl Jubilee edition - which will be with you in mid-December, all being well, is now in the closing stages of preparation, editorially. Like a Christmas stocking in the old days, it will be packed with good things, with contributions from all our favourite writers who have excelled themselves this year in honour of the jubilee. Next month I hope I may have the space to list some of those items, to whet your appetites.

In the meantime, have you ordered your Annual yet?

THE EDITOR

* *

Danny's Diary

OCTOBER 1926

Summer Time ended on 3rd October, the clocks went back, and we are in winter again, with logs burning on the fire, and mists in the air, and the smell of bloaters cooking if you take a short cut through the back streets. I like the summer, of course, and the cricket - but the winter months are awfully nice, too.

The first Magnet of the month is "Chums - Through Thick and Thin". It's a sentimental title, and it's a sentimental story. I like sentimental tales, but not quite so syrupy as this one. The Bounder is treading the road to ruin, so Redwing takes up smoking and playing the fool in the same way, in order to bring Smithy to his senses. Not a bad plot, in a way. I remember a good Gem tale once with a similar plot about Gussy and the Levison brothers. But this Redwing-Smithy one was too itchy by half.

The next one was "Asking for Trouble", and it starred Hazeldene in his well-known role of being a nuisance to his sister. The next one "The Suspected Form-Master" was awful. Mr. Algernon Capper, the form-master, was arrested for burglary, and appeared in court. But the real burglar was somebody who looked like him.

Then started a new series, the first tale being "The Swot" and the star is Bob Cherry. Bob has been getting bad reports, so his father, Major Cherry, says that Bob must pass an examination or be in trouble with him. So Bob starts swotting and giving up sport. Next in the series is "The Ishmael of the Form" in which Bob goes on swotting, and falls out with his pals who think he is letting down them and his form. And Bob doesn't tell them why he is neglecting sports. A lot of misunderstandings all round, and I always think that stories of misunderstandings are a bit tiresome and not likely to happen in real life. This series continues next month.

Two good tales in the Schoolboys' Own Library. One is "The Outsider of Greyfriars" in which a boy named Langley is an enemy of Harry Wharton's. The other tale is "One of the Best" about Grimes,

the grocer's boy, a great friend of Lumley-Lumley's and how Grimes comes into the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. And there is a new issue of the St. Frank's Monster Library with a tale entitled "The Mystery Master".

The Daily Graphic has amalgamated with the Daily Sketch, though it really means that the Graphic has closed down. I'm sorry about it, for they once had some pictures of my school in the Daily Graphic. It was a nice picture paper, but I suppose its circulation was not big enough.

At the pictures this month we have seen Laura La Plante and Pat O'Malley in "The Midnight Sun"; Betty Bronson in "The Golden Princess"; Mae Murray in "The Masked Bride", Douglas Fairbanks in "Don Q - Son of Zorro", Larry Semon in "The Perfect Clown", and Betty Balfour in "Reveille".

In the Nelson Lee Library the series has continued with Handforth as skipper of the Remove. In "Lord of the Remove" he throws his weight about with a vengeance. The next tale was "Handforth's Flag Day", in which he thought it a good idea to help the hospitals. Next was "Handforth's Iron Rule" in which the form wished they had never elected Handforth as their captain. Final of the series is "Knocked Off His Perch" in which Handy is kicked out of the captaincy. Rather a slap-stick series, I thought, though it knocked your funny-bone now and then.

Finally, the start of a new series "St. Frank's on Its Honour". An American educationalist persuades the Head of St. Frank's to make the school a free and easy place without any rules. What larks!

The Nelson Lee is giving away stand-up cut-out figures of film stars, the first being Harold Lloyd.

The Angelo Lee series has gone on in the Gem, and I have liked it much better than I thought I was going to. It kind of grew on me. Opening tale of the month was "The Scapegrace of St. Jim's". Angelo wants to be expelled from St. Jim's so that he can become an airman - but everybody knows it. When Angelo biffs a football at Mr. Ratcliff, he is not expelled, as the Head knows he wants to be, but is turned over to Ratty's tender mercies. In "Looking After Angelo", several well-meaning fellows decide to keep an eye on Angelo. In fact, Lee is actually sacked when Gussy turns up with a newspaper cutting to show

that Angelo saved an airman's life - so Angelo Lee is not sacked after all. And he shows his thanks by punching Gussy on the nose. The series ended with "The Schoolboy Airman" in which Angelo eventually gets what he wants, and leaves St. Jim's to become an airman.

"The Champion of St. Jim's" which came next is one of those dull affairs about a sports contest - boxing, this time - in which they all go to Aldershot, Gussy gets in with some army manoeuvres, and finally wins the boxing tournament for St. Jim's. Very weak affair, I thought.

Last of the month was a pleasant little tale "Skimpole's Telescope", in which Skimpole takes up astronomy, and buys a big telescope on H. P. And Gussy, looking at the moon, sees Racke ragging Figgins' study, for which Racke means Tom Merry to be blamed. Nothing much, but nice reading.

There has been a court case concerning the film named "London" which Dorothy Gish has just finished making in England. Something to do with the copyright of a story from which the film is made, I think. The people who have made the film have been told that it must not be released. A shame. I like Dorothy Gish very much. Her previous film, also made in England, was the one which opened the new Plaza Cinema at Piccadilly in London. And speaking of new cinemas, a big new one is being built in Charing Cross Road in London. It will not be finished until after Christmas, and it will be named the Astoria.

In the Popular, which I have every week, the Rookwood series is running about Mr. Wilmot, the football coach, whom Jimmy Silver seems to recognize as Dandy Jim, the crook whom the Fistical Four met during their summer holidays with the horse, Trotsky.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 37, "The Outsider of Greyfriars" comprised three consecutive red Magnets from the autumn of 1908. All but the third story were heavily pruned. The series concerned the early Greyfriars version of Levison, the name being changed to Langley in the S.O.L. No. 38, "One of the Best" comprised two consecutive blue Gems of just about Christmas time in 1912. These two fitted snugly into the S.O.L. and made a delightful, if slightly unlikely, school novel. This couple of pleasant stories was probably the final appearance in the Gem of Lumley-Lumley, who had developed into an excellent piece of characterisation, and the abandonment of Lumley-Lumley by his creator is one of the mysteries of St. Jim's. Danny's comment on the court case concerning the film "London" is interesting. I have a feeling that the film was never released, though I may be wrong.)

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

I am so sorry to start this preamble with a moan, but to date I only have one article on our dearly beloved Sexton Blake for the Collectors' Digest Annual. Maybe the heatwave has made us all sleepy and unable to think up something for an article but time is getting on, as usual, and our Editor will be needing the copy as soon as possible, by the end of this month definitely.

I hope you will all enjoy the current Blakiana, it's so nice to delve into the past and relive our enjoyment of Blake's adventures.

TAKE FOUR

by Raymond Cure

Take four! well that's what I have done, after all, I wouldn't ask you to do anything I wouldn't do myself. "But, you may well ask, Four of what?" In this case four copies of the Union Jack, with the pink covers, and the following titles: "Libel and Slander", "Bankrupt", "Art Smuggler" and "The Missing Missionary".

I have these pink Blakes before me and in case you thought I said Pink Panther - I repeat Pink Blakes. To take a full review of each would be too long and too boring. Not that I mean the stories are boring, far from it, so I intend to swiftly blend them. The curtain will rise on "Libel and Slander" U.J. No. 251, and when you've done clapping we will proceed.

Mrs. Sexton Blake! I thought that would make my reader look again, wondering if the old optics were really coping with the scene. Mrs. Sexton Blake! I've heard of Father Christmas and Mary Christmas and of TV 'tec Colombo and Mrs. Colombo, but of James Bond and Mrs. Bond or Sherlock Holmes and Mrs. Holmes - never. It's almost like saying Father Brown of G. K. Chesterton fame and Mrs. Father Brown, always excusing your Reverence. I said never, that is until I read "Libel and Slander". It appears that all and sundry knew that Blake was married. Mrs. Bardell, the landlady, knew, the police knew, the friends at Blake's select club knew, infact everybody knew

except Blake himself. A nice little piece she was too, about 25 years old, a good figure, fresh complexion and a mass of golden hair. She was extremely good-looking in a flamboyant way; by name of Marian Ray. I must say Sexton Blake knew how to pick one. However, all is not what it seems. All these people may think our Sexton Blake is married, but Blake thinks he is not and says so in no uncertain manner.

A recent TV item invited doubles of film and TV stars to come along and in some cases the likenesses were uncanny. A number of times I have been approached and asked what I was doing at such and such a place on a certain day and time, when I could prove I was elsewhere. "It must be your double" they say. It is uncanny, I don't like it.

Now this is what happened to Blake. There had been a frame-up and a double used, in fact a double double for Sexton Blake and Tinker had been at the marriage to Marian Ray, or at least had been seen there, though they had proof that they had been out of England at the time. So Sexton Blake is landed with a wife he does not want. Being the man he is he immediately sets to work to get rid of her and rightly so, who ever heard of a Mrs. Sexton Blake. With a plot like this you have a good tale. The illustrations were by E. E. Briscoe.

"Bankrupt" is U. J. No. 247, and if you want to know what it feels like to be bankrupt take a look at the illustrated pink cover, artist H. M. Lewis depicts the soul-shaking experience. Mind you, bankrupt in those days meant bankrupt. It was the end and no mistake, though in some cases today bankrupt means big business, it can put you on your feet again. However, I would not wish it on anybody. Not to worry, Sexton Blake helps out our cover boy.

"Art Smuggler" is U. J. No. 410, another worth-while tale and illustrated by T. W. Holmes.

Of the four tales I have taken the first one, No. 251, stood out and the one I mention now "The Missing Missionary", No. 426. Maybe I am biased, but I have been interested in mission work these past forty years. The tale is illustrated by H. M. Lewis. The plot is excellent.

A young Vicar, son of a wealthy father, finds out by mishap that

Pa's wealth consists mainly of ill-gotten gains. He cuts his father and his ill-gotten cash out of his life, his high society girl friend gives him the bullet, she did not want to be saddled with a penniless vicar. Our friend goes to China as a missionary. Trouble is our Chinese friends are having troubles of their own. Add to this the arrival of Sexton Blake, Tinker and Pedro, on Chinese soil and heads begin to roll and I mean roll. Like the time Sexton Blake bursts into a courtyard in a last minute attempt to prevent an execution - too late - as he enters the victim's head rolls at his feet.

Not to worry, all ends well. The young missionary finds a fellow worker in China, his scoundrel of a father dies and his son is able to give money back to several victims. He marries his lady missionary friend and they return to China. I almost forgot, it must be the heat of all my excitement in China, but Pedro very nearly gets killed and the villains intended to eat him. Oh boy! I wonder if "Hot Dogs" were invented in China?

THE FATHER AND SON AUTHORS

by Don Harkness and Josie Packman

The Union Jack Library and the Sexton Blake Library had the unique distinction of having a father and son writing for them at the same time, not as a team but as individual authors. An interesting point is that they were Americans who migrated to England yet their writing was purely English. They were also very distinctive in their style of writing. The father wrote in the somewhat sentimental style of the late Victorian period about missing heirs and wronged sons, etc., but the son was more modern. In fact his works can be read now as easily as the modern stories of today's authors. The father was William Murray Graydon who wrote for many American publications before leaving to settle in England with his wife and two children, a son and daughter. The son, Robert Murray Graydon, inherited his father's talent and began writing at an early age. Although they both wrote for various publications on many different subjects it is gratifying to know that they also wrote for schoolboy papers and especially that the Union Jack and Sexton Blake Library were the recipients of their first-class efforts. At one time it would seem that William Murray Graydon practically

kept the Union Jack going with only one other good author to help him. This was about 1911/12 before the advent of G. H. Teed and other authors who were to become very popular. His first story appeared in U.J. No. 73 in 1905, and the last in 1922 U.J. No. 1003. His Sexton Blake Library output was as prolific, 119 stories to the Union Jacks 120.

The most famous character he created was of course Pedro who was the "star" of the first Sexton Blake play in 1908. Inspector Widgeon was his Scotland Yard detective and he also created two crooks who were well-known during the period 1914 to 1922, i.e. Laban Creed and Basil Wicketshaw. Blake had many an adventure with these two crooks. Two other famous characters were Cavendish Doyle, British Secret Service man and Fenlock Fawn the American detective friends of Sexton Blake.

The son, writing under the name of Robert Murray, had his first story of Sexton Blake published in Union Jack No. 675 in 1916. After all the research of recent years there is still no trace of any earlier tales by him in the Union Jack. No. 675 introduced Dirk Dolland, the Bat who was to become as famous as Robert Murrays' detective Inspector Coutts of Scotland Yard, both of whom were to aid Blake in his fight against the infamous Criminals Confederation. Robert Murray's last story in the Union Jack was No. 1512 in 1932 called The Four Guests Mystery.

For all his prolific writings Robert Murray, oddly enough, only wrote three novels for the Sexton Blake Library. These were two in the first series - No. 41 and No. 85 and one in the second series, No. 235. He died in 1940 some years before his famous father, thereby depriving Sexton Blake readers of many an entertaining story that might have been written.

(For fuller details of these two authors I recommend readers to Walter Webb's wonderful long running work in the Collectors' Digest called "The Century Makers". There were 18 instalments which appeared from May 1959 to September 1960. There were also two stories by Robert Murray in The Detective Weekly Nos. 123 and 127. J.P.)

* *

Nelson Lee Column

A FORGOTTEN DETECTIVE by S. Gordon Swan

The Nelson Lee Saga differs from the Sexton Blake Saga in that, whereas a number of authors described the adventures of the Baker Street detective, one man, practically unaided, related the exploits of Nelson Lee until the advent of the Nelson Lee Library in 1915.

Maxwell Scott created Nelson Lee in 1894 and recorded his activities for twenty years in complete stories and serials for the old papers. One or two other writers may have had a brief finger in the pie -- such as Melton Whyte, for instance -- but in the main it seems to have been a solo effort on the part of the doctor from Sheffield.

He also wrote of other detectives -- Vernon Read, Kenyon Ford and Martin Dale. The adventures of the last-named appeared serially in Chums and were later reprinted in The Boys' Friend Library. It is with Kenyon Ford that this article deals, however.

Many years ago someone extracted a number of pages from The Big Budget -- a Pearson's publication -- and carefully bound them in one volume. These pages contained seven long complete stories and all the instalments of a serial -- each of them a Kenyon Ford yarn. The serial was called "The Seven Stars".

This volume came into my possession in 1975 and provided many hours of enjoyable reading. Particularly interesting was one of the complete stories, "The Severed Arm". This dealt with a schooner anchored outside Whitby Harbour; when the anchor was hauled up the crew were horrified to find a human arm impaled on one of the flukes.

Two of the crew handed their find over to the police, who were inclined to treat the matter as of no importance. The superintendent's theory was that the arm belonged to an unfortunate sailor who had been drowned, or buried at sea, his body being dismembered by the action of the waves. A clergyman friend of the superintendent was not satisfied with this solution, and asked permission to send for Kenyon Ford, who was at the beginning of his career.

Kenyon Ford arrived and made some astounding deductions in the manner of Austin Freeman's Dr. John Thorndyke. His conclusions

were these:

"The person to whom this arm belonged was a young man of the working class between eighteen and twenty years of age. He was not a very strong or a very healthy young man, but was afflicted with what doctors call a "strumous constitution'. In addition to this he suffered from a disease which is known as chronic lead-poisoning, and either six or seven days ago he was vaccinated. His death took place within the past forty-eight hours, and was due to an overdose of strychnine. After his death his body was cut up and thrown into the sea by somebody who had no knowledge whatever of anatomy."

Kenyon Ford postulated these as certainties and went on to state what he described as near-certainties: that the owner of the arm was probably about five feet six, with a big and clumsy head, large red ears, thick lips, broad nose, and sandy hair. He was very likely a file-cutter by trade and had lived in Sheffield for the greater part of his life, and was there six days before.

Ford deduced that the arm was the right arm of a working man. The muscles, especially those on the back of the forearm, were in that wasted condition which one finds in cases of chronic lead-poisoning; while every single muscle was in that state of abnormal contraction which is caused by strychnine.

Only the very earliest signs of decomposition were present, so that it was clear that the man had not been dead for very long, not more than 48 hours. Moreover, the vaccination marks were five or six days old at the time of his death. Currently an epidemic of smallpox was raging in Sheffield; in addition to this, lead-poisoning was common in Sheffield, caused by drinking impure water or by one of several trades. Ford eliminated certain trades and arrived at the conclusion that the deceased was a file-cutter by the impression of a leather strap worn round the wrist. He arrived at his age by an examination of the bones -- too elaborate to detail here -- at his height from the same source, and at his appearance from his 'strumous' or scrofulous constitution.

No one was better qualifed to write of this smallpox epidemic in Sheffield than Dr. John William Staniforth, better known as Maxwell Scott. Reference to Messrs. Lofts and Adley's book, "The Men Behind

Boys' Fiction", tells us that Dr. Staniforth was temporary medical officer in charge of a fever hospital at the time of the outbreak of small-pox in Sheffield.

Notwithstanding this brilliant tour-de-force of reasoning, Kenyon Ford faded into obscurity. It was Maxwell Scott's earlier creation that survived -- Nelson Lee, whose fame rivalled that of Sexton Blake.

On reading this long-forgotten story of the early years of the twentieth century, one is prompted to wish that some enterprising publisher would reprint it together with some of the best of the Sexton Blake short stories in The Penny Pictorial and a few Nelson Lee adventures. It is not an impossible dream, in view of the publication of Sexton Blake's Early Cases.

* *

DO YOU REMEMBER? by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 137 - Schoolboys' Own Library No. 42 - "The Boy From Nowhere"

Charles Hamilton was perpetually fascinated by the old Romantic theme of the lost heir, the young boy who had been kidnapped by gipsies or held prisoner by rogues. In the Magnet the theme was used so many times it is difficult to remember them all, and the Gem had its fair share as well, but the Rookwood story, about the boy was rescued by the Fistical Four and who had lost his memory as a result of a blow on the head, has special claims to attention. The newcomer bore a striking resemblance to Smythe, who indignantly disclaimed all knowledge of the tramp who confronted him.

The Rookwood stage was a comparatively small one, and this makes the development of the character of Adolphus Smythe even more remarkable, since he was in the Shell, not the Fourth form which was the focus of attention. Elegant, dandified, unscrupulous, the great chief of the Giddy Goats as he was called, he exerted an influence that spread far beyond the confines of his own form. We were told that the Smythes had not always been wealthy and that they had relatives "in trade" who did not even spell their names with a Y. This was the special withering sarcasm that Charles Hamilton reserved for the class of people he particularly detested - the social climbers, the upstarts,

and the nouveaux riches (especially those who had made their money profiteering during the war).

Mr. Smythe visited Rookwood and had tea with his son. He told him about his grandfather's will, bequeathing a legacy of ten thousand pounds to be divided equally between Adolphus and his cousin Charles Clare, when each attained the age of twenty-one. Smythe's immediate reaction was to ask his father if he could borrow on the strength of his expectations, which brought a pretty sharp rejoinder, but when his father went on to talk of Clare's mysterious disappearance, Smythe decided to say nothing about the newcomer. Unfortunately, Tubby Muffin was hiding under the table, and the classic blackmailing situation had begun.

The story is of special interest in that it displayed a new facet of Smythe's character, a vein of rascality which surprised even Smythe himself. Of all the missing heir themes, this version is the one that brings out the worst qualities in the relative most closely affected, and for that reason it lingers longest in the memory of the reader.

* *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 209. THE HEAVIEST STONE

It was Hazlitt, in one of his Essays, who observed that "a nickname is the heaviest stone that the devil can throw at a man". There is a good deal of truth in the observation, but much depends on the nickname.

I prefer a comment made by somebody else, and I cannot recall offhand who it was, that "the most valuable prize a boy can earn at school is a nickname which is not offensive".

Boys are often shrewdly cruel in their bestowal of nicknames, and, for a sensitive lad, a mocking nickname can be an anchor round his neck for the whole of his schooldays. A lot depends on the personality of the lad.

When I was a youngster, a great friend of mine was a Maurice Holland. We were not at the same school, but we were members of the same cricket club. His friends all called him "Molly" Holland. This was not due to any streak of effeminacy, but was probably a combination of his initial with part of his surname. "Molly" Holland was immensely

popular - nicknames are a sign of popularity, or dislike, or mere contempt - and he was a fine sportsman. I am sure that he never resented his ladylike nickname. Had he done so he was fully capable of dealing drastically with the offender.

Origins of nicknames are fascinating. Plenty must be lost in the mists of time. My Headmaster over a goodly number of years was a brilliant Oxford man named Gutteridge. Everyone at school, from the least to the greatest, called him "Gussy". Very old boys told me that he had always been "Gussy", going back many years. And his father before him, (so I learned from elderly people), who had also been a venerable Headmaster, was also called "Gussy". I find it hard to fathom how a Gutteridge became "Gussy".

Charles Hamilton's most famous nickname was, in all likelihood, "Gussy". Here the derivation is obvious for Arthur Augustus. In fact, in the very early St. Jim's tales Gussy was often called Augustus.

Was Hamilton good on nicknames? For they are important. Generally speaking, I think he was. He did not slip into the cheapness of too much adding of the 'y' to the surname or part of it. We had Smithy, and Mauly and Morny, but, wisely, Hamilton pretty well left it at that. It was the substitute writers, or, at least, one of them, who lowered the tone with the horrible Bolsy, Skinny, Snoopey, and Bunty continuously. Hamilton was too restrained a writer to do so.

It was Hamilton, in a weak moment, who produced "Baggy" Trimble, but it was a sub who made Cardew produce the facetious "Baggibus". Cardew was clever and witty in the hands of his creator; in the hands of the subs, and of Pentelow in particular, Cardew was facetious, and facetiousness can become irritating.

A "try-to-be-clever" schoolboy often is facetious in real life, but not the really clever one. And Hamilton's Cardew was clever, and gifted with repartee. As a youngster, I greatly enjoyed the school stories of Wodehouse, thinking his boys so very clever. As an adult, I have long known that the Wodehouse schoolboys are too facetious, though I have always loved the stories.

A good nickname is short and snappy. For this reason, "The Creeper and Crawler" was a description of Mr. Smedley but not a nickname. Vernon-Smith was known as "The Bounder" from his very

beginning, but this, like "The Outsider" for Lumley-Lumley, was more of a description than a nickname. "The Caterpillar" has always struck one as good, though it is hardly a nickname in the strictest sense. Just why De Courcy was named thus is an interesting poser.

"Squiff" for Samson Quincey Iffley Field always seemed to me to be very weak indeed, being blatantly contrived. His introduction, in fact, served no purpose apart from the contrivance of his nickname for he was never a character study of any consequence.

"Don Pomposo" or "Old Pompous", shortened to "Pompey" inevitably and naturally, was one of the best for Greely, later transferred to Prout. Extremely good, too, I always thought was "Cabby" for Hansom of the Fifth. Perhaps Rookwood comes out on top for really good nicknames.

"Inky" for Hurree Singh is one of the most loved, though I feel it would have been a trifle unlikely in real life. It seems to me that fellows like the Famous Five would feel self-conscious at calling a friend "Inky" because he was black. I see no harm in it at all, but I just think it improbable.

The later Magnets produced "The Acid Drop" for Hacker, which was excellent for descriptive purposes, but possibly "Quelchy" was a mild devaluation of Greyfriars.

Beauclerc of Cedar Creek was "The Cherub" for reasons quite unknown and with no indication that he was cherubic. "The Rio Kid" had been going strong for a considerable time before we learned that his name was Carfax.

The majority of the well-loved nicknames at the Hamilton schools were hardly nicknames at all, though we love them no less for that. "Ratty" and "Skimmy" were inevitable, and one is forced to the conclusion that St. Jim's was the worst served for nicknames.

* *

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* *

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NEARING THE END. Our serial from 70 years ago.

MISSING

"He's a pig and no mistake," said Blake. "He's been getting a ransom for you, kid. The doctor sent a packet full of tin to pay for your release, and I came to put it on the steps of the vaults. Then I spotted Barengro, and followed him. It's pretty certain he won't keep his word and release you. The money was only sent as a trap, but he has collared it, and Inspector Skeet won't catch him if he goes on trying till his whiskers turn grey. Barengro's too many for him. But we're going to get out of this before long, my son."

"I tell you I have twied, and I cannot find the door."

"Very likely; but then, you see, you are a donkey, and I'm not. You must admit that that makes a difference."

"I am sure that you won't be able to find the door."

"Well, if we can't, we'll go for the gipsy when he comes to bring us grub. He won't let us starve; he dare not. Have you any matches?"

"No; I stwuck them all in looking for the door long ago."

"Well, I have a box, so we'll have another hunt."

Blake had a box full of wax-vestas in his pocket. He pulled it out and struck a vesta. In the light he looked curiously at D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's was a pitiable object to look at. His face was white and worn, and he was dirty and muddy. He had donned, for the sake of warmth, the old coat the gipsy had flung to him, and it hung round D'Arcy in folds. He had a blanket round his head and shoulders for warmth also. Altogether, his aspect was as comical as it was miserable, and Blake broke into an involuntary chuckle.

"My hat, D'Arcy; anybody who saw you wouldn't take you for such a howling swell," he exclaimed. "You don't really look respectable enough to be chucked on any-well-brought-up dust-heap."

"I feel howwidly dirty and dishevelled," moaned Arthur Augustus. "I feel as if I shall nevah get clean again as long as I live."

"You'll make a sensation when we get back to school. The New House will turn out to the last man to have a look at you."

D'Arcy shuddered.

"But the thing is to get out just now," said Blake, striking another match. "I wonder where that door is. There seems to be no sign of it."

He made a careful examination of the cell. It was a small apartment, with floor and walls and roof of solid stone, and a chill in it as of the grave.

In the days long past it had probably been used as a punishment-cell. In the wall was a rusty iron ring, and fragments of rusty chain were still on the stone flags. Long centuries ago prisoners had been immured there in darkness and despair.

The boys were not quite so badly off

as those old-time prisoners. They had their limbs free, and they had nothing to fear but incarceration till the gipsy should be captured. Still, their lot was an unenviable one.

The walls showed no trace of an opening. Here and there the cracks were deep and wide between the huge square stones of the wall, and Blake was certain that one of these great stones formed the door; but from the inside it was impossible to discover which. He pressed and twisted at each in turn, but there was no sign of yielding.

His last match flickered out, and he had to confess himself beaten.

"Have you found it, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, with just a little spice of malice in his lisping voice.

Blake gave a growl.

"No; I suppose it doesn't open from inside. When you come to think of it, of course, it wouldn't. I wish I had noticed which way I came in. Never mind; the brute must come sooner or later. How often does he bring you grub?"

"He has been here three times in all."

"Hum! Have you any tommy left?"

"No; it has all been gone a long time. I am vewy hungwy now."

Blake brightened up.

"Then it must be getting near time for him to come and feed the animals."

"I hope so. I could weally eat stale bwead without any buttah with welish," said D'Arcy plaintively.

"Never mind the grub," said Blake. "It's our liberty we want. When he comes, we're going to tackle him. Understand?"

"He's a vewy big, stwong bwute," said D'Arcy dubiously.

"I don't care. We're going to get out of this somehow. When he comes in with the grub we've got to go for him. That's the programme."

"But he doesn't come in. He just shoves it in, and does it so quickly --"

"Then we must be on the watch, and collar him before he can close the door," said Blake, with decision. "Wish I had a cricket-stump with me. Have you any kind of a weapon?"

"There's the jug he bwought water in; it's empty."

"Give it to me."

D'Arcy groped for the jug and found it, and handed it to Blake. It was a big, heavy one, of coarse earthenware.

"Good!" said Blake with satisfaction. "If I smash this on his napper, it is almost certain to hurt him. Mind you collar him when I do."

"I'll do my vewy best, Blake."

"Mind you do. I wish he'd come."

The time dragged by heavily. Blake exercised to keep himself warm in the chilly cell, but D'Arcy was too weak from confinement to have the necessary energy. He kept himself wrapped in the coat and blanket.

Blake told him of the search that had been made for him. He was still speaking when a slight sound came from the darkness.

Blake quickly squeezed D'Arcy's arm as a sign to keep quiet. He gripped the heavy jug by the handle in his right hand.

He knew that it was dangerous to

attack the ruffian. He knew that the attempt might end very badly for himself. But he was resolved.

Still and silent, the two boys listened.

There was a low creak, as of rusty iron moving stiffly. The secret door was opening. Not a gleam of light broke the gloom.

But the sound guided Blake. He stole on tiptoe in the direction of it. He heard a faint thud, as of a soft object falling in the cell. Then a growling voice was audible.

"There's your food, you whelps. It's all you'll get. Gimme the jug if you want any more water. I --"

The gipsy broke off suddenly. Blake had sprung like a tiger in the dark. Right at the ruffian he went, striking out desperately with the heavy jug.

Crash! The jug flew to pieces. It had broken on the gipsy's head, and the concussion must have been terrible.

Barengro gave a gasping yell and fell to the ground. In an instant Blake was upon him.

"Help, D'Arcy!" he panted.

Now was his chance. Blake knew it would not recur if it was lost now. It was now or never.

He gripped the gipsy fast as he scrambled over him in the blackness. The ruffian was too dazed to struggle for a few moments. D'Arcy, gathering all his courage, came to Blake's help, and his grip also fastened on the prostrate ruffian. But it was only for a few seconds that they had matters their own way. Barengro began to struggle fiercely.

"Give it him!" hissed Blake. "Give him beans!"

He rained fierce blows on the gipsy's upturned face. Barengro was uttering wild imprecations. He struck out savagely, and D'Arcy went reeling away from a drive that caught him on the chest. He staggered across the cell, and fell in a heap on the floor.

Blake felt himself gripped in arms that seemed like iron bands. He fought desperately, striving to keep the gipsy down. But the struggle was too unequal, a boy against a man, and, in spite of his initial advantage, Blake slowly but surely got the worst of it.

"Help, D'Arcy!" he gasped.

D'Arcy was dazed by his fall, but he came pluckily to his chum's aid. But the gipsy was now on his feet. Blake still clung to him desperately. But Barengro, exerting his strength, tore him loose from his hold and hurled him away. He crashed against D'Arcy, and they fell to the ground together.

"Oh, oh!" gasped Arthur Augustus, and he lay on the stone floor with all the wind knocked out of his body.

But Blake was up in a flash. He heard the voice of the gipsy snarling out curses. But suddenly the sound ceased; shut off, as it were, into abrupt silence. Only a faint creak was heard. Blake snapped his teeth savagely. The gipsy had gone; the secret door was closed.

The bid for liberty had failed. Barengro was gone, and the boys were still shut up in the cell, and they knew full well that the gipsy would never give them another such chance. Blake had been hurt in the struggle. But it was not that; it was the bitter disappointment

that made the tears start to his eyes.

(Another Instalment of this Old, Old Story Next Month)

* *

HAMILTON EXHIBITION AT EALING

Reported by Maurice Hall

With reference to the report of the London O.B.B.C. meeting in C.D. (Sept. '76) I would like to clear up a few points.

The date of the Ealing Centenary exhibition for Charles Hamilton was given in an article in the Evening News titled "Yarroo. It's Billy Bunter", Friday, 16th July and was also quoted on Radio 4 both on Friday morning the 6th August and repeated again on the Saturday morning. I also understand that Bill Lofts had been in contact with Ealing Library and as I had dropped him a line suggesting that he may wish to offer material for the exhibition I feel that the information was fairly well available.

I am delighted to report that Charles Hamilton and "Billy Bunter" were honoured with a very good public turn-out, a number of our visitors coming from long distances.

The Mayor of Ealing, Councillor John Wood, and his library staff were most helpful and kind to my son Jonathan (age 10½) and myself as Jenny and I had left home at 7 a.m. to get to Ealing and set up the exhibition to open at 9 a.m. when people started to come in a steady stream.

Our exhibits contained mint volumes of the four periods of the "Magnet", Reds - Blue White - Orange Blue and the Salmon Pinks. I was also delighted to observe that a number of ladies said that in their youth they had read their brother's copies of the Magnet and Gem which was so much better than their own girls' papers. We also had "Gems", "Modern Boys", "Schoolboys Owns", SPC's, C.D's and Facsimile editions, plus the original artwork submitted to the G.P.O. for a set of Hamilton Commemorative stamps which we hoped would be issued this year.

After two and half years of trying to get a stamp issued we had to accept that the G.P.O. did not consider Hamilton important enough to be included in their 1976 programme. We then tried Jersey, Guernsey and lastly Australia.

We decided to go it alone rather than let Hamilton and "Billy" go unsung by a timorous society unwilling to stand up and be counted when they were needed.

How sad Charles Hamilton would have been with bureaucracy for he never undervalued his work for the youngsters of England, for did he not say "that there wasn't anything better!" But how delighted he would have been to stand by my shoulder this morning as I opened a letter from the Queen's secretary in which she wrote that:-

"I am commanded by The Queen to thank you for the first day cover and stamps commemorating the Centenary of Charles Hamilton, creator of "Billy Bunter".

Her Majesty is very pleased to accept these for the Royal Philatelic Collection."

Her Majesty's gracious acceptance of the Hamilton F.D.C. and stamps has put right some of the omissions of the past, the most recent being that of Sir William Ryland of the

G. P. O.

Copies of the Hamilton F. D. C. and 'Billy Bunter" stamps can be obtained from myself or Pilgrim Philatelics of Canterbury at 50p and £1 respectively. The issue of these items have been kept to a small quantity owing to cost, etc.

* *

BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 31. MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY

We opened the new term with Pat O'Brien in "Stars Over Broadway" from Warner Bros. Sounds like a musical. Next came James Cagney in "G. Men", also from Warner's. There was a time when this was considered the best Cagney gangster drama, though it seems to be forgotten today.

Next, from M. G. M., one of the truly greatest films of all time: Charles Laughton, Clark Gable, and Franchot Tone in "Mutiny on the Bounty". I always feel that it dragged just slightly after the mutineers reached the island, but that was a minor detail. It was one of my top ten of the talking screen. Years later, after the war, M. G. M. re-issued it, and we gave it a return visit, and enjoyed it more than ever. And years later still, they made a new version of it which, in spite of being in colour, was infinitely inferior.

Next, from Warner's, James Cagney in "'Frisco Kid", followed by Leslie Howard, Bette Davis, and Humphrey Bogart in "The Petrified Forest". This was considered a masterpiece, and it was the production which made a name for Bogart. It was his first big part, I believe, and he made a frightening villain. I always felt the film was rather static. It was, of course, made from a stage play of the same name. Certainly it was full of suspense. This was from Warner Bros.

After this, something lighter. A charming musical from Warner's: Dick Powell and Ruby Keeler in "Colleen", followed by, from M. G. M., James Stewart in "Speed".

Then another great semi-documentary drama: Paul Muni in "The Story of Louis Pasteur", from Warner's, followed by a British film "The Man Behind the Mask" with Hugh Williams and Jane Baxter, released by M. G. M.

Then, yet again, James Cagney was back, this time in "Ceiling Zero", another suspense drama from Warner's, followed by, from the same firm, Ross Alexander in "Boulder Dam".

Now, from M. G. M., came "The Unguarded Hour" starring Franchot Tone and Loretta Young, followed by, from the same firm, Clark Gable, Myrna Loy and Jean Harlow in "Wife versus Secretary". Next, from M. G. M., Robert Montgomery and Myrna Loy in "Petticoat Fever".

Many of this term's films had been well over average length, so that our supporting programmes mainly comprised a Hal Roach comedy and the Universal News.

Now from M. G. M. came Robert Taylor and Janet Gaynor in "Small Town Girl". The supporting Hal Roach comedy

to this one was the inimitable Charley Chase in "The Chases of Pimple Street" and one does not have to think very hard to decide from whence the title came.

To end the term we screened, from M. G. M., Robert Montgomery in "The Suicide Club" which sounds intriguing all these years later.

(ANOTHER ARTICLE IN THIS SERIES SOON)

* *

THE ALLY-SLOPER COMIC PARTY

by W. O. G. Lofts

The Launching Party of the first British Comic Magazine was held all aboard the paddle steamer 'Tattershal Castle' on the Victoria Embankment on Wednesday afternoon, 1st September. Hosts were the editor Denis Clifford and Publisher Alan Class, who by providing lavish 'eats' and drinks, would have made our old comic heroes Weary Willie & Tired Tim proud. Original art-work was on show, and many famous comic artists were present including Frank (Dan Dare) Hampson, Walter (Casey's Court) Bell, and Terry (Laurel & Hardy) Wakefield. Special guest star, was that warm-hearted famous comedian, Ted Ray, who gave a very witty and nostalgic speech. Many photographs were taken, and a very good time was held by all. Both the editor and publisher deserve the greatest success in this promotion, in a genuine attempt to present the best of the old and new material in the monthly Ally Sloper.

* *

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* *

The Postman Called

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

EDWARD MURCH (Yelverton): I am writing to thank you for recommending that I read The Old Bus series. I thought it was simply splendid, and incomparably better than its Greyfriars counterpart Six Boys In A Boat. It was so much more succinct. I found it so easy to get into whereas, I must confess, I found the Six Boys difficult to read at times - dare I say tiresome? - partly due I think to unnecessary tautology.

It was good to meet Tom Merry and Co. (or I suppose I should say The Terrible Three) again, and Arthur Augustus et al. What a pity this could not be put into a real hard covered book - as opposed to the facsimile - since I think that this is the only way that Charles Hamilton can really be preserved for posterity in the long run. (Sounds a bit Irish, but I think you will get my drift.)

D. SWIFT (Leeds): I was interested to read in the September issue of "Collectors' Digest" the article "String of Pearls" by Ernest Holman and would agree with him that, as far as I know, a total of 23 St. Jim's stories in various forms were published after the war.

I would, however, like to make the following observations: the first five Tom Merry books published by Mandeville Publications, were all printed in Great Britain and not Czechoslovakia as suggested. When Spring Books took over the publishing, the first five (but I know of only four - as far as I know "Rallying Round Gussy" was not re-published as the original five, although Spring Books included "The Rivals of

Rookwood") were all printed by Dragon Press of Luton. Further titles to be published by Spring Books consisted of five printed in Czechoslovakia and the final two printed by Cox & Wyman.

Mr. Holman is not quite correst when he says that all the titles published by Spring Books were credited to Frank Richards although I admit that all their original stories did bear this name. When Spring Books took over the publishing, the first editions as originally published by Mandeville, were credited to Martin Clifford.

L. ROWLEY (Truro): Messrs. Gayle (Exmouth) and Swift (Leeds) have a point when they aver that there is more to Hamilton's work than memory-evoking yarns for 'elderly schoolboys'. I am sure, though, that Roger Jenkins and your goodself have given ample analytical criticism of the kind they crave without too heavy a tinge of nostalgia ... and yet both of you presumably read the stories in your youth.

I must confess, though, that I absolutely wallow in the nostalgia that the yarns engender. They were an important part of my life and I am sure that I do not wallow alone but that is far from saying that my sympathisers and I do not appreciate Hamilton's work for its true worth. If it wasn't for the 'memory-evoked elderly schoolboys' I am equally sure that his work would have disappeared into the Ewigkeit and that would have been a sad and undeserved fate for a valued style of literature.

One can, of course, overdo the nostalgia. One's own reminiscences can so easily bore and take over from the true point of a discussion. Yet who can explain the magic of one's favourite author without linking that magic with the past? I think that nostalgia (or what is erroneously supposed to be nostalgia) has been responsible for the interests that we mutually share through the medium of the 'Digest' and the OBBC. The measure of our debt to Hamilton - and to all those wonderful storytellers of yore - is that they made their work worth remembering even if we are tempted to link the fiction with the fact in our past.

L. HAWKEY (Leigh-on-Sea): A few lines a propos Mr. Lofts' article on "Gloops".

This and mention of other childhood "strips" in newspapers, revived happy memories, especially of my own favourite, which was, in

fact, Uncle Oojah (not Oojar), and his companions in the "Daily Sketch". I hardly think that dear old "Flip-Flap", as he was also called, could be termed an ugly animal. He was as cuddly and endearing as a big, pyjama-clad elephant could be - his two friends were a little boy - Don (rather a "pretty" child of the "Fauntleroy" type, but a good deal more mischievous) - and "Snooker", a black cat, who always wore bedsocks. Other main characters were Jerrywangle, a naughty young elephant, Lord Lion (Prime-Minister of Oojahland) and his family, and a magician who frequently visited the country, Professor Foozle.

With Uncle Oojah, the Daily Sketch in fact started the 20's and 30's cult of a children's section in daily newspapers - they were the first to include a complete supplement every Saturday (1921) and in 1922 issued the "Oojah Annual", which continued up to the 1950's, except for the War Years. The stories were by Flo. Lancaster, a well-known children's writer of the period, and the illustrations were created by Thomas Maybank, an outstanding artist, whose works graced many issues of the "STRAND", "PUNCH", and other leading magazines and many children's books from the 1890's until his death in the late '20's. Many may remember his naughty "Imps" on the endpapers of the various "Wonder" Books issued by Ward Lock & Co.

I am fortunate in possessing the first five issues of "Oojah Annual" - 1922 to 1926. They were excellent value, at, I think, only 3/6d at the time, but with Maybanks demise, they declined in format and popularity. They went over to the thick, cardboard-like paper favoured by so many publishers in the late '20's and '30's. Can anyone tell us why this was? I thought it was horrible, and never considered the Holiday Annual half as good once they adopted that thick insensitive paper. H. M. Talintyre, who drew a lot in various boys and children's papers in that era, took over "Uncle Oojah". He was good, but lacked that "vital spark" - the spark that to my mind set Chapman above Shields (excellent artist tho' Leonard was) - set Warwick Reynolds above MacDonald - and Wakefield streets above Kenneth Brooks or Savile Lumley.

How eagerly as a child just after the 1914/18 war I tried to get first peep at the Daily Sketch, before my parents requisitioned it. Now, of course, the Sketch is gone, Oojahland, with its fine palace, its

Gorilla Guards, and its "wide Wetwater River" is gone. The "Donjaroo Club", of which I was once a member, is long disbanded. As Mr. Lofts says, only the, to me, mysterious "Gloops", and the eternal Rupert Bear, soldier on. But it is nice to have memories prompted, occasionally.

C. LOWDER (London): A brief point concerning the September issue, and G. L. Dennington's piece in 'Blakiana'. Although the AP did cut the SBL down to 64 pages, the amount of actual wordage in the books wasn't slashed by half as much. Pre-War length of each SBL was approximately 60,000 words, which was rather better than the average hardbound commercial thriller of the time. With only 64 pages, Editor Pratt still used to cram a good 50,000 words (or slightly more) in -- simply by using a smaller type-face. Thus, writers didn't have to squeeze their plots up too much. In any case, Pratt dropped those 10,000 or so words long before the page-count was cut, as alert readers might have suspected when, quite suddenly in April, 1946 (Nos. 117 and 118), they found themselves reading right across the page instead of down two columns. This cut-back of pages was due, of course, to the post-War paper shortage. The trouble was, when paper became more readily available in the early '50's, sales of the SBL were already dropping, and the AP found it much more economic to keep to the 64-page format -- and, indeed, use it for all their other Libraries (Thriller Comics Library, Super Detective Library, and so on).

J. A. C. BRIDGWATER (Swanage): May I say how much I enjoy the Mr. Buddle stories and the "Let's Be Controversial" articles. "The Biography of a Small Cinema" brings back many happy memories. Do, please, keep a place in the Digest for St. Jim's serials from time to time. They are splendid.

* *

News of the Clubs

NORTHERN

Sunday, 8th August, 1976

A gathering of aficionados in Staincliffe Vicarage to celebrate the centenary of the maestro. With us were the editor of Yorkshire Life, journalist Hazel Wheeler and two

photographers. We chatted, listened to the record 'Floreat Greyfriars', drank a toast to Frank Richards and finished off with a buffet supper in the dining room.

There were photographs in the study, in the drawing room and on the lawn. Local newspapers, including the Yorkshire Post, have published their efforts and the Batley News has included a photograph. Hazel's article and more photographs appear in the September number of Yorkshire Life.

It was an enjoyable - and memorable - evening for us all.

Saturday, 14th August, 1976

Our Club meeting was a continuation of our centenary celebrations, and we all arrived replete with various foodstuffs and interesting bottles. One remembers how Frank Richards said, "I'm a teetotaller except for whisky, brandy and various sorts of wine!!"

So once again we drank a toast to Frank Richards (teetotallers all!) regaled ourselves with Mrs. Mimble's tarts and finished off with the birthday cake made by Myra for the occasion.

A table was set aside by Mollie for a display of some of the interesting and rarer items from the library.

Other fare for the evening included a paper on 'The Packsaddle Bunch' presented by Ron Hodgson and the presentation of a 'reminiscent survey' of the Magnet by Geoffrey Wilde.

Geoffrey began his talk by playing a record of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3 and reminded us that it was composed in 1908. Still alive in that year were Florence Nightingale, Degas, Lord Lister, W. G. Grace, Buffalo Bill. The English language did not contain the words 'television', 'vitamin', 'Fascist', 'apartheid', 'blitz'. And 'pop' was a fizzy drink! In that year were born Donald Bradman, Lyndon Baines Johnson, Ian Fleming. In 1909 Bleriot flew the Channel and Selfridges opened (was Chunkleys a localized version?).

Geoffrey linked the Magnet with its historical setting throughout the years up to the grim days of 1940, in the May of which year we learned that it would be published no more.

A quiz followed by Ron Rhodes. A callous instruction to a guillotine operator and also a Fourth Form Rookwood junior was rather a teaser for some of us. The Secretary wondered if there might have been a Russian boy named Chopitoff. Alas, no, that answer wouldn't do! It was, of course, Topham.

Saturday, 11th September, 1976

A SHORT report of this meeting to make up for our treble dose of reporting this month!

Features of the evening were two three-part readings by Jack, Annie and Mollie of Alonzo Todd stories from Magnets 132 and 1458. Jack asked us to notice that although in time the two stories were twenty-five years apart yet in style and characterization they were remarkably similar. Whereas characters such as Vernon-Smith and Bunter had developed over the years it would seem that Alonzo had remained his own inimitable self!

CAMBRIDGE

The club met at 5 All Saints Passage, on 12 September, Bill Lofts presiding.

Items of news and correspondence included the Secretary's report that he had given information about the club to the Eastern Area Arts Association for inclusion in a list of regional literary societies; Jack Overhill's report of an enquiry from an American visitor to Cambridge who had come to England to see the birthplace of G. A. Henty.

Bill Lofts read notes from an article he, in collaboration with Derek Adley, was preparing for publication, dealing with film and T.V. presentations of characters from Boys magazines and papers. Members were astonished at the range of chracters which had been

filmed. Generally speaking, those who had read the books before seeing the films were disappointed because the film character did not fit in with their mental picture of it, or the well-known artists drawings they knew, but those who saw the film before reading the book appreciated the films more. As an example of successful films Bill suggested Basil Rathbone Sherlock Holmes films, as failures Bulldog Drummond and Dick Barton; at the latter films the audiences had rioted and demanded their money back. Roger Moore had been successful as The Saint but not as successful as a successor to Sean Connery as 007. Sexton Blake was one of the great detectives of fiction, but in general the films, Bill listed a large number from 1909 to 1958, had not been so successful as American thrillers. In the 1930's a projected Greyfriars film was not made. He believed the Repton Film Society had produced a film "Heroes of St. Jim's" as a private venture, but this had not been a general release. Bill then gave a long list of "comic" characters about whom films had been made including "Weary Willie and Tired Tim" in 1897 and "Ally Sloper" in 1898. Among many other such films he mentioned a 1912 production of Paul Sleuth and Dirk the Dog Detective. He had been unable to trace a Nelson Lee film and had been told by an old A.P. Editor that at one time Paul Sleuth had been more popular than Nelson Lee. In 1919 a film had been made of Jack, Sam & Pete. Bill expressed surprise that a film had not been made of them earlier when they were among the A.P's most famous and popular characters. Among other films he mentioned the various Sweeney Todd films, including the 1936 film featuring the great Tod Slaughter. Bill also commented on the failure of the Thomson papers' well-known characters to be made into films; possibly the well-known Thomson secretcy was the reason. Members look forward with eagerness to the publication of the projected article, to which Bill could not give full justice in the time available.

Next meeting will be at the home of Vic Hearn, when it is hoped that Mary Cadogan will be a visitor, and the November meeting will be hosted by Jack Overhill.

LONDON

Three eminent St. Frank's scholars at the Leytonstone meeting, Reuben Godsave, Bob Blythe and Jim Cook, the latter here on a visit from New Zealand. Thus it was appropriate that Bob Blythe should give a humorous reading about Trackett Grimm which was supposed to have been written by both Handforth and Glenthorne.

A B.B.C. tape recording of an interview between Mary Cadogan and Gordon Clough was played over and the general opinion was that it was the finest one ever on Greyfriars and Charles Hamilton. Also on the tape was the Amy Johnson recording that swept the country in 1930. Winifred Morss read two more chapters of Les Rowley's Battle of the Beaks and Bob Blythe read a nostalgic newsletter of September 1959. A fine reading was Mary Cadogan's of her three years with the B.B.C. just after the war.

Brian Doyle showed the Ealing exhibition first-day covers and Bob Acraman had some of the current issues of the Howard Baker facsimiles. An excellent repast was served and photographs were taken in the garden. Eric Fayne and Madam were present and a large gathering suitably thanked the hosts, Reuben and Phyllis Godsave.

Next meeting at 27 Archdale Road, London, S.E. 22. Kindly let Josie Packman know if intending to be present. Sunday, 17th October.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

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