

STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS DIGEST

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WILL**



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I hope to see you soon

A

W O R D

F R O M

T H E

S K I P P E R

OUR HEADING

Our editorial heading this month consists of a postcard from the turn of the century. It was sent to me by a correspondent, and I thought you might like it for its simple charm, though we cannot reproduce it in its original colours. The card was addressed to someone in a little place called Earls Barton in Northampton, and the green halfpenny stamp is

postmarked Camberley, June 1904.

LITERARY MANNERISMS

It is generally agreed that "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd" was the novel which brought fame to Agatha Christie. I turned to it again recently after a very long gap of time. If, indeed, it was the story which brought the authoress fame, it must have been for the plotting, but it strikes me as not being particularly well-written. It is clotted with adverbs, usually the indication of an inexperienced writer.

The over-use of the adverb was a mannerism which Christie soon outgrew. One mannerism, however, remained with her down the years, and that was the referring to elderly ladies as "old pussies". I never came on that one elsewhere.

A substitute writer who wrote a number of Rookwood serials for the Gem had the propensity of using the adverb "coolly". It became irritating, as all literary mannerisms tend to do.

The late Tom Hopperton once wrote for C.D. a very amusing, if slightly cruel, piece of satire on that old Greyfriars Herald serial "The Pride of the Ring", circa 1916. In passing, that serial was so awful that it could be entertaining, as Mr. Hopperton pointed out. He drew attention to the absolute glut of exclamation marks used in the course of the tale. It is just possible that the writer of "Pride of the Ring" was less to blame than the A.P. printers who always seemed to scatter exclamation marks indiscriminately.

In an addition which I once wrote for "The Autobiography of Frank Richards" I commented that Hamilton was largely free from literary mannerisms, and this is true. He slightly overused the adverb "quietly" through most of his career and the use of certain odd words to denote exclamations of discomfort - for instance, "grooh" and "ooh", not to mention the "Ha, ha, ha's" - which remained with him all his days, could become tedious. And in his later life, when he more easily was influenced by the comments of critics, he was mindful of the acclaim he had won for his classical illusions of his earlier career and made the mistake of introducing far too many of them as old age took over. Also, he overlooked the fact, as he became an old man, that a rare spoonerism can be **screamingly** funny, but a glut of them for Bunter became a bore.

But those are minor criticisms of a superb writer for boys. His impeccable grammar throughout his career, plus his smooth style in telling a good story, is to be found in very few of his contemporaries, in any branch of story telling.

AFTER MANY DAYS

No, dear friends, that is not the title of a Union Jack story of the melodramatic period before 1916. Though, to be accurate, I believe there actually was a Union Jack of that title at some time or other.

In this case, however, I am referring to the London theatre, the Victoria Palace, to which I recently returned for the first time since I was there for one of the Bunter plays.

I am not sure when the Victoria Palace was built; probably in Edwardian days, I should think; but it is still a delightful theatre which has changed but little as the years have swept by.

In the late twenties, Gracie Fields, Archie Pitt, Tommy Fields, and Edward Chapman were there in a revue, "The Show's The Thing". And I think it was in the late thirties that Lupino Lane was there in a show called "Me and My Girl", teaching us all how to do the Lambeth Walk.

But I, myself, was last there with Billy Bunter - it must have been about twenty years ago - and, apart from some later Bunter shows, I have not been to a London theatre since.

Of course, some things had altered since the Bunter show graced the boards. (On that occasion, my small twin nieces presented a big cake, specially made and iced by Madam with good wishes to Bunter from the O.B.B.C. It makes me feel ancient to confess that my small twin nieces of those days are now both happily married, bless their hearts. But back to the Victoria Palace ...)

To get there at all, the railway fare is now five times what it was. The cost of a seat is eight times what it was at that time. A programme - still the same size and limitations - is ten times what it was in Bunter's day. When we left the theatre, alas, there was no Lyons to welcome us to what was always a splendid cup of tea for two or three coppers. But we were extravagant. We had a cup of tea. It cost 13 pence, which, dear friends, is over half-a-crown.

But it's a lovely show. It's called "Annie" - based apparently on a comic strip named Little Orphan Annie. The amplification is excessive - what isn't excessive, these days? - but we enjoyed every minute of it. Watching the marvellous scenery change before your eyes without scene-shifters is a joyful experience in itself, but nearly everything about "Annie" is a glorious experience.

Owing to the regulations which govern the appearance on stage of children of school age, they have several teams of "orphans". The names of those appearing at a particular performance are posted up in the foyer. We were lucky enough to be there when the little 7-year-old Basingstoke girl was one of the orphans. She stole the show. And that takes some doing with a mighty fine all-round show like "Annie".

A JOB FOR RESEARCHERS

A correspondent has written me concerning a mirror which has been in his family for nearly 100 years. It is of about the size of a foolscap sheet, and bears the words: NORTHERN WEEKLY LEADER. POPULAR PENNY WEEKLY OF THE NORTH.

I imagine that the mirror itself was something given to newsagents of the day for advertising, but that is only a guess. But I do not recall hearing previously about the periodical, and I wonder what it was and who published it and where and when. Has anyone a clue?

* * * * *

DANNY'S DIARY

JULY 1928

At the New Gallery Cinema in Regent Street, London, they have installed Movietone which enables them to screen some short talking pictures. This is the first cinema in Europe to be so equipped. So far, the Prince of Wales and Gertrude Lawrence, among other famous people have been seen and heard on the screen of the New Gallery.

In the Modern Boy there have been a couple of pairs - sounds Irish - in the new King of the Islands series. The first pair are "The Man Who Fled" and "Brought to Book" in which a trader cheats Ken King

and plenty others out of a lot of money and then clears off. Ken chases him and brings him to book.

The second pair are "Shanghaied" and "The Upper Hand". Ken King is shanghaied by the skipper of an American ship whose crew have deserted. Kit Hudson takes up the chase and rescues Ken.

There is a new series in Modern Boy about Lawrence of Arabia.

Croydon Airport is one of the most up-to-date in the world. They have now installed a tower with a radio beam to add to the safety of passenger aircraft.

The Nelson Lee Library has continued the story of Chambers of the Fifth who was demoted to the Remove. The opening tale is "Handforth's Return". Handy comes back to the old school just in time to help Nipper in his fight against the bully. Next came "The Remove Election". Who is to be captain? Nipper, Handforth, or the ex-Fifth Form bully Chambers, who is backed up by the wily Vivian Travers? The next tale is "The Split in the Remove". There is no harmony of opinion - some want Nipper, some want Chambers, and others want no skipper at all.

The series - and the month - ended with "Tamed by the Fags". Chambers is demoted still further by being put in the Third. The Third tame him, he repents, works harder, and goes back to the Fifth. Original, far-fetched, but good fun.

July has been a very hot month. In fact, it is the hottest summer for many years, according to the weather experts. The nights have been unusually hot, which has made it uncomfortable. On the 12th it was 84 in the shade, and by the 15th it had reached 91 in London. A stately home - Ingmire Hall near Sedbergh - was totally destroyed by fire, and the dry, hot weather might be to blame.

It has been too hot for going to the pictures, but we have seen Ken Maynard in "The Overland Stage", John Barrymore in "Don Juan", Hoot Gibson in "Gallop Fury", and Harry Langdon in "Long Pants". I liked them all.

Two excellent "early adventure" stories of Greyfriars and St. Jim's respectively in the Schoolboys' Own Library this month. They are "Schoolboys Abroad" in which the Famous Four (Johnny Bull had not turned up yet in the Magnet, I think) and Bunter and Hazeldene go to Switzerland with Colonel Wharton, and "D'Arcy's Cricket Week" which

takes place at Eastwood House.

On the 28th of the month the Olympic Games opened in Amsterdam.

The Rio Kid continues to be splendid in the Popular. A single story entitled "The Bootlegger" found the Kid in Nevada, where he captured a bootlegger and handed him over to the sheriff. Then came a lovely 3-story series in which the Kid helped Kent Loring against the Sparshott family who have a blood feud with Loring in Montana. In the end, the Kid finances Loring's new ranch to "raise beef" though Loring does not know who his benefactor really is. Gorgeous western tales.

Now running in the Popular are two old holiday series - the Rookwood chums rambling, with Lovell on a motor-scooter, while the Seven Schoolboys of St. Jim's are rambling with Solomon, a donkey.

A pretty awful month in the Gem. "The Schoolboy Journalist" was Gussy, writing an article for a clothing magazine. Next, two Cardew stories. A fellow named Wrayson comes to St. Jim's, and he once saved Cardew's life, so Cardew feels under an obligation, though Wrayson is a young scoundrel. But Wrayson has actually assumed the name and guise of his brother. Original, and with plenty of plot. These two are "The Impostor" and "Cardew's Burden".

Last of the month is "In Honour Bound", a D'Arcy story in which Mellish doctors Cutts's lemonade.

My brother Doug, in kindly mood - I fag tennis balls for him - has given me the Union Jack twice this month. "Hands Up, London!" was the title of the first. Dr. Ferraro has the means of holding up London - the terrible chemical Nihilite. But Sexton Blake knew the secret of countering the chemical. Exciting detective tale. The next week brought "The Legion of the Lost", with Sexton Blake and Tinker in the French Foreign Legion. This one is illustrated by Eric R. Parker.

There has been a big real-life murder trial going on in the courts. Mrs. Beatrice Pace was accused of poisoning her husband with arsenic. After five days, her counsel, Mr. Norman Birkett, submitted that there was no case to go to the jury, and the judge agreed with him. The public went wild with joy, and Mrs. Pace was given a great deal of cheering and celebration.

The lovely series about the Eurasian, Da Costa, has gone on through the month in the Magnet, and ended with the last issue of the

month. "Playing the Game" is the title of the first tale in July. The spirit of Greyfriars is having its effect on Da Costa, and he is now a different fellow from the little rat who went to Greyfriars to disgrace Harry Wharton. In "Tried and True", Da Costa makes his mark on the cricket field, and Captain Marker and Mr. Gedge have now to find someone else to do their dirty work for them. Next week it is Billy Bunter who is "In Borrowed Plumes". Bunter is wearing Wharton's hat, and Captain Marker sees the name in the hat - and wastes a lot of money on Bunter.

The final of this great series is "A Fortune at Stake", and Da Costa risks his life for the sake of his new chum - Harry Wharton.

Maybe this is the best series ever to appear in any boys' paper. I have loved every line of it, and I'm sorry that it has had to end at last.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: The S.O.L's for June 1928 may have been unique in that both stories were originally published in their respective papers at exactly the same time. No. 79 "Schoolboys Abroad" comprised two consecutive red Magnets of June 1910. The theme of the schoolboy (Hazeldene in this case) stealing to gamble at the casino, was to be repeated many times as years passed on. This pair are a bit melodramatic, but have much real charm. It was rare indeed for Switzerland to be the setting for a Hamilton tale. S.O.L. No. 80, "D'Arcy's Cricket Week" comprised a pair of stories from the blue Gem, also of June 1910. A demon bowler - a Raffles type - in this pair was named Lovell. It was, of course, some years before Rookwood.

The Beatrice Pace trial seems to have been a 'cause celebre' in its day. The public was apparently gleeful at the result. The husband seems to have been a real brute, though, naturally, he was not able to put forward his side of the story.)

* * * * *

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

"What's New" the article by J.E.M. in this month's Blakiana brings to mind that old saying "There is nothing new under the Sun". I have just been reading a Sexton Blake Library called "The Human Mole". This is No. 91 of the 2nd series dated 1927. Nearly 40 years later an engine called The Mole was one of the marvellous creations shown in the Thunderbird puppet series, a very clever TV series about International Rescue and their wonderful machines. I am sure most people will have seen some of this series which included the use of the Mole. So once again we find old ideas brought to life in modern times. Also the International Rescue family lived on an island somewhere in the Pacific. Shades of the Criminal

Confederation except that the Tracy Family were not criminals, only out to help people. And now, another request for you good people to get out your pens or typewriters and start writing something for the Annual. The material is needed by September so make this your summer holiday task.

WAS HE ANOTHER SEXTON BLAKE FAN?

by C. H. Churchill

I have just finished reading a book I obtained from the local library. It is a John Meredith thriller by Francis Gerard, entitled "Fatal Friday". It was first published in 1937 but this edition was issued in 1972 by Tom Stacey Reprints Ltd. It was quite a good story although I guessed who was the murderer pretty early on. What particularly aroused my interest was a remark made by the detective - Chief Inspector Meredith and recorded on page 268. When addressing the murderer he said, amongst other things - "I've another piece of evidence connecting you with the person of the blackmailer, and that is a blood-stained banknote. Sounds rather like something out of the Sexton Blake Library doesn't it, Lord Colchester?"

This item leads one to think that Francis Gerard might have been a reader of the SBL at one time.

Some months ago I discovered something similar in a story by Dorothy Sayers. I raised the matter in an article in the C.D. in April last year and queried whether she had been a reader of the Magnet at one time. In May C.D. last year Brian Doyle in a most interesting reply to my article confirmed that this was so.

I now wonder about Francis Gerard.

WHAT'S NEW?

by J. E. M.

How many of our old story-paper heroes were true originals? Certainly we Blakians must admit that our particular hero was not the first fictional detective with hawk-like features and a Baker Street address. And Sexton Blake was probably not the only character from his own great saga to have been inspired by earlier writing.

Take, for instance, those two old favorites Lobangu and 'Spots' Losely, Blake's allies in the African stories. As hobbyist W. T. Thurbon has pointed out, they originally bore a remarkable likeness to Rider Haggard's creations Umslopogaas and Sir Henry Curtis, later evolving

under the influence of Edgar Wallace stories to resemble Bosambo and Sanders of the River!

Other Blakian characters offer themselves as similar targets and, in CD 299, I had a shot at one or two of them myself. Among other things, I suggested that Criminals' Confederation boss, Reece (both the professor and the plain mister), might well have owed a debt to Conan Doyle's Professor Moriarty and I also found Mesdemoiselles Yvonne and Roxane somewhat derivative types. Fair comment or not I leave to others to judge. However, I was probably misguided in at least one direction and should like to make amends.

I argued that G. H. Teed's famous creation Prince Wu Ling bore a suspicious likeness to Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu. Significantly - or so it seemed - both had first appeared about the same time, the latter in a hard-cover novel, the former in the Union Jack. I found it all too tempting to conclude that Teed might just have cribbed his Chinese villain from Sax Rohmer. Apart from being a bit of literary snobbishness on my part, the assumption now seems totally groundless anyway.

According to William Vivian Butler's excellent book, The Durable Desperadoes, which I have read only recently, the Union Jack almost certainly featured Wu Ling before the first Fu Manchu novel came out. Unless Rohmer's creation had already appeared in some periodical or story-paper - and there is no record of this - Wu Ling can clearly owe nothing to Fu Manchu. This fact does not, of course, make even Wu Ling especially original. The sinister Oriental in fiction dates much further back to Britain's nineteenth century colonial adventures in China and the rise of the "Yellow Peril" myth.

The real point about the Wu Ling - Fu Manchu question is the trap it lays for anyone who assumes that paperbacked fiction always trails imitatively behind the more expensive, more "respectable", hardbacked novel. It was a trap I undoubtedly fell into. Anyway, from me, abject apologies to the shade of G. H. Teed.

Turning to other examples of the 'who-was-first' question, Mr. Butler's book suggests that the Sexton Blake saga might well have produced one of the most original figures in modern crime fiction - Rupert Waldo the Wonder Man, E. S. Brooks' celebrated creation. Waldo, Mr. Butler implies, could well have been the inspiration for the

whole 'Robin Hood' school of buccaneering outlaw-heroes in our century - Blackshirt, the Saint, the Toff and a great many others.

Waldo, who first appeared in 1918, pre-dates them all and anticipates most of their main characteristics. Perhaps even Bulldog Drummond, who also came after Waldo, could have owed something to the Wonder Man. For, though Drummond is not exactly a criminal, he doesn't hesitate to operate outside the law and has many of Waldo's other attributes.

Inspired by Mr. Butler's The Durable Desperadoes, we can see that a good deal of more recent fiction also conveys a sense of the familiar and second-hand. I have been looking at one or two of Ian Fleming's famous James Bond stories, for example. Bond's Chinese adversary Dr. No, in the novel of that name, adds little to the classic Oriental villain. Apart from steel claws in the place of hands - making him a kind of Chinese Captain Hook - what has he got that, say, Prince Wu Ling hadn't got?

Another Bond story, You Only Live Twice, has an international gang of criminals with headquarters in the crater of a supposedly extinct volcano. When I read this novel, I was taken back irresistibly to a Criminals' Confederation story first published in the Union Jack in 1918 and reissued in 1932 under the title, Volcano Island. The fate of the volcanoes and their criminal occupants was the same in both the UJ yarns and the very much later James Bond story. (The Bond novel also has its hero climbing insect-like up walls with the aid of suckers on hands and knees. A character called the Human Fly was operating in exactly this way in one of the D. C. Thomson story papers back in the twenties or early thirties!)

We could fill endless issues of CD with speculations about who "borrowed" what from whom and when. One thing, though, is pretty certain. Not all the fictional heroes of our "cheap" reading were cribbed from loftier or more famous sources. Indeed, the penny, twopenny and fourpenny story papers of our youth produced a multitude of characters and story-lines which have been rehashed and presented to a modern generation as the last word in novelty. Some of that original treasure is still to be found in the saga of Sexton Blake.

NELSON LEE COLUMN

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS!

by Len Wormull

With the passing of Fleetway House, I am reminded of the time when, in the mid-thirties, I took up the call to come into the Magnet office. My first letter was a query on film camera tricks, of which I recall only one: How was it possible to photograph an actor looking into a mirror without the camera being seen? The explanation was given in detail, though I still couldn't tell you! A question ideally suited to the Editor's page, but one that somehow went astray. Next came a string of Greyfriars limericks, none of which, alas, saw light of publication. But how hopefully I waited for one to turn up. Noting the ingenuity of some, I must say there were some clever lads among the readership. Then I suggested a series around Johnny Bull, the least "spotlighted" member of the "Co." The reply was most favourable, but nothing came of this either. Suggestions! How they must have driven those poor editors up the wall (even C.D. gets its share, I note). 'Will see what can be done' and 'Will pass on your suggestion to Frank Richards' were stock answers. Did Frank receive or heed them? I wonder. I suppose it was the price of fame - rather like today's youngsters (and oldies) besieging disc jockeys with requests. Incidentally, did you know that confidential letters to the Magnet were destroyed when answered? See No. 1259, "The Swot of the Remove". A reader asked for the address of another who had sought advice: 'This reader asks me to break one of my cast-iron rules. I am very sorry, but I cannot oblige. When a reader writes to me in confidence, I destroy his letter after I have answered it, and do not keep a record of his address.' Fair enough.

Over now to the Nelson Lee office, and here I can only comment on the scene, the paper going out soon after I came in. Unquestionably, the most cordial relations were struck when E. S. Brooks hosted his own chat show, *Between Ourselves*. It was such a success that the editor hardly got a look in, a state of affairs later to be reversed. After a good run relations suddenly became strained. And what upset the applecart? You're right - suggestions! They became so conflicting that readers

were told, in effect, what to do with them, and to belt up (for full report see Bob Blythe's Annual article). The declaration thus made, I felt sorry for the girl reader who innocently suggested a series starring McClure (N.S. No. 159):

'What has McClure ever done to warrant such an honour? He's one of Handforth's chums, I know, but I think he would be a bit disappointing in a star role. Besides, what would happen afterwards, when he was compelled to go back into the comparative obscurity of being just a member of Handforth's "Co." Personally, I think the main interest in Church and McClure is that they are Handforth's keeper, as it were.'

What an astonishing reply and admission - surely an author's job was NOT to make it disappointing. And how contradictory, considering the limelight bestowed on Church in the earlier "death" series. But I digress. In fairness to E.S.B., pressures were being put on him, culminating in the loss of his popular showcase weeks later. Rather ironic, I thought, was his explanation for its demise: 'This was Editorial policy, and entirely against my wishes. The Editor of that time probably thought I was getting too much limelight.'

Thanks to Bill Lofts, we know some of the things that went on backstage at Fleetway House. Obviously, a great deal of spoof went into the process of keeping readers happy, not that we would have cared had we known. It was the goods that mattered, not the politics behind them. On a more personal note, dear reader, were you lucky enough to have a wish fulfilled, a successful trip to that hallowed domain? I'm sure it would make interesting reading. Only a suggestion, of course!

ST. FRANK'S WAS A VAST SCHOOL

writes Bert Holmes

I was interested in an article in C.D. a few weeks ago when the writer queried whether E. S. Brooks could have carried on longer with St. Frank's school tales. I think yes!

Look at the scope he had, and how he had created so many characters. With his writing potential, he could have kept on for many years more.

I've never read of any other fictitious school with five Houses. St. Frank's was so vast that it had its own telephone exchange in the School House, "manned" by two lady operators, namely Ethel Winter and

Chrissie Brandon. There was also a staff doctor and a chaplain.

Brooks was a prolific writer, and a man like him with 21 pen-names to his credit, could surely have gone on with St. Frank's for years longer than he did.

FROM WITHIN

by R. J. Godsave

Every author has a wide choice of human virtues and vices with which to endow his or her characters. This, in itself, can create difficulties, as too much virtue can easily make a character a prig as too much vice a villain.

E. S. Brooks was faced with the task of introducing Nipper as a carefree schoolboy after his having been a responsible assistant to Nelson Lee in many detective adventures. The introduction of Nipper to St. Frank's in o. s. 112 of the Nelson Lee Library came very near to Brooks introducing an over-virtuous character to the famous college. Fortunately, as the Lee Library grew older Nipper became a more human and modest character with the qualities of leadership which endeared him to the readers.

On the other hand, a virtuous character with a sprinkling of vice is more admired because he or she is very much akin to the human counterpart. Such a character was Vivian Travers who was introduced rather late in the life of the Nelson Lee Library. Had there been a popularity vote poll of the St. Frank's juniors at that time I am quite sure that Travers would have been well up in the list.

One of the leading characters of the early St. Frank's Lees was Walter Starke, a prefect and a bully. He committed the sin of swearing that Nipper had savagely assaulted him, whereas he had been knocked unconscious by a passing motor car. Starke had his full share of vice without much virtue.

Generally, an author saw to it that a character who performed a discreditable action was re-instated by a heroic action which wiped out his past faults. Starke's action was evil in the extreme, and under no circumstances could he be permitted to remain at St. Frank's after being exposed by Nelson Lee as a wicked and revengeful liar.

Whether an author can afford to drop a leading character for the sake of writing a thrilling story is very much open to question. Somehow

a returned character never quite rings true and does not follow his previous existence as though a break had never occurred.

* * * * *

DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 150 - Gem No. 804 - "Grundy's Game"

Grundy was modelled on the same lines as Coker, but he was never such an amusing character, partly because he was the same age as the heroes of the stories and partly because he was just a truculent nuisance without the unconscious humour of Coker. Occasionally he made remarks about the importance of his position in the House, and occasionally Wilkins and Gunn enjoyed the lavish spreads provided by Uncle Grundy while turning a deaf ear to Grundy himself, but these were the only touches that lightened the rather heavy humour of the Grundy saga.

In Gem 804 Grundy had confiscated a list of numbers from Racke: these were the winning numbers from a sequence of games of Boule at a French casino. Racke studied them and then Grundy himself pondered over them, both trying to concoct a betting system from them. Whilst Racke had hoped to enrich himself, Grundy intended to punish the Casino by winning a lot of money that he would then donate to a local hospital. Meanwhile, Gussy had suggested a non-passport day trip from Folkestone to Boulogne, and of course Grundy's trip co-incided with theirs.

The disappointing feature of the story was that Grundy never entered the Casino, and so we were deprived of one of those fascinating glimpses of high-class gambling that Charles Hamilton used to revel in. Although he undoubtedly enjoyed this sort of gambling himself, his stories always possessed a strong moral tone when he underlined the foolish and vicious elements of gambling. In these lax days when practically any kind of behaviour is acceptable, this attitude of his would probably be considered hypocritical, but Charles Hamilton was truly Victorian in the way in which he separated private and public morality and he never attempted to excuse his own weakness.

"Grundy's Game" was published in July 1923, supposedly one of the palmy periods of the Gem, yet the St. Jim's story occupied less than half the issue, and it was further reduced by the equivalent of two and a

half pages of inside illustrations by Macdonald. There were three serials as well as other oddments to use the majority of the space, and perhaps this all tends to account for the slightly defective nature of this St. Jim's story, which is all too brief and episodic to be very satisfactory. The Greyfriars stories in the Magnet were never restricted in this fashion, and it is intriguing to wonder whether this accounts for Charles Hamilton's switch of interest to the Magnet in the middle 'twenties.

* * * * *

HARRY WHARTON v TOM MERRY

by Maurice Hall

In my opinion, the Magnet was more successful than the Gem because Harry Wharton was at Greyfriars and Tom Merry was at St. Jim's.

Tom Merry arrived at Clavering College and later at St. Jim's, in the charge of his Aunt Priscilla Fawcett who was cast in the style of Charlie's Aunt. Aunt Priscilla did all she could to make sure that Tom was protected from all ills by bringing his chest protector and hot water bottle to school and informing his teachers that Tom was a delicate boy! Tom survived the first few weeks surprisingly well - the boys soon accepted him into their midst and he soon proved that he could thrash a bully as well as the best of his form-mates. The chest protector and water bottle syndrome was soon disposed of and forgotten and soon Tom established himself as leader of the Terrible Three and Captain of the Shell.

Tom was a good tempered lad, true, honest to a fault, keeping his temper when many others would have lost their heads. The tales featuring him were, perforce, of a nature that, although he knows himself to be in the right, he must grit his teeth and bear any punishment handed out to him by Cutts or Knox! He must not tell tales, never, but never, must he set a trap for the villain to be caught in, although the villain can perform any foul scheme against Tom to his heart's delight - it is only the fact that the Angels are looking after him that saves him time and time again.

The inter-form ragging carried out by Tom Merry and his pals against Figgins and Co. was the usual friendly affair so beloved by Charles Hamilton, no better and no worse than the Greyfriars equivalent

of Remove v Fourth.

To sum up - Tom Merry was a thoroughly good guy, without a trace of malice in his heart. He was a sunny tempered, bright and totally good natured boy to whom a bad thought never crossed his mind, except perhaps during the Silverston series in the last weeks of the Gem.

Harry Wharton however, did not want to go to school and even less to go to Greyfriars. He went however, in the charge of Mr. Quelch, being allowed to go by himself after giving his word to Colonel Wharton that he would arrive there but he offered no promise to remain there. Colonel Wharton was a different type of person to Aunt Fawcett. He was determined that Wharton would have a taste of discipline, just as much as Harry decided he would not submit quietly.

Harry Wharton fought all the way at first. He cheeked the Masters and Prefects not by being rude as such, but by considering each order as a direct threat to his freedom. Harry also made it clear that he would get away from Greyfriars at the earliest opportunity. In his efforts to achieve this, he not only found himself against organised authority but also at odds with his schoolboy form-mates. His only real friend in these early days (excluding Bunter) was Frank Nugent who Harry had saved from possible death on his way to Greyfriars. Nugent bore with Wharton, rather than Wharton encouraged his friendship and it was only the constant turning of Nugent's cheek that enabled the pair to keep together, though at a respectful distance and with many disagreements.

Wharton was portrayed as a boy with more pride than was good for him. Pride and stubbornness can sometimes be mistaken for firmness, regrettably, this is not always true and in Wharton it was developed to a high degree. Wharton's temper had a low flash-point. He was prepared to harden his heart against any amount of discussion on the disputed topic and seldom did he let it sway his mind. Once he had his mind made up, we had the prospect of an eight part series, before he would finally come off his high horse.

Saving graces were of course present. Harry was not a coward, he would not tell a lie to get himself out of trouble, and never, of course, would he hit a man when he was down. Wharton had such a streak of rebellious nature, that, had he pursued a similar path as Vernon-Smith, he could have **taken** on the whole of Masters and Prefects and given them

all a good run for their money. The battles that he did have against Mr. Quelch, were, in all honesty, full of fire and unpredictability and Quelch's hands were more than full, owing to the fact that he could see that Wharton was more sinned against than sinning.

In other words, Harry Wharton was really never allowed to let himself go. Always regret lay just around the corner. Even in a number of Magnets when all seemed about to be coming right, Harry would not declare his real feelings to the wronged party (Mauleverer in the 2nd Wharton Rebel series No. 1293) even when he knew himself to be at fault, and we all knew that it would happen in good time, albeit in a week or two's time.

As a youngster, I was able to identify myself more with Wharton than Merry. As an adult, I can clearly see that Wharton is more real because people do act in this fashion and are capable of loss of temper or being unable to say "I'm sorry" as and when required by the circumstances. Because Wharton loses his temper every now and again, Loder can bait him, where a less interesting character would not feel the necessity to respond.

How often in life is the villainous part the best to act in a play? To start with there is Fagin - marvellous changes of slyness, fear, bullying, wheedling and cajoling to name but a few of his moods. Then there is Bill Sykes, Uriah Heap, Squeers, all marvellous characters with built in defects. Only Fagin was allowed to show the possibility of a change of heart, it never actually did happen. These characters all come from the writings of Charles Dickens but you have only to examine the works of other major authors to see the same result. The wicked character must be a better designed creation than the good character, for without faults in our nature we are less complex and therefore (in the main) less interesting. If you are a good character, you don't need reforming but a bad person is open to all the persuasion that can be levelled at him from the Church, Salvation Army and Society at large.

In spite of the Substitute stories in the Magnet, the copies were never repeated in the same fashion as the Gem during the famous 1931-39 period. I think that it would have been better to use substitute stories in the Gem rather than repeat great numbers of early copies, many of which were so badly edited as to almost destroy the original story.

Would the Gem have achieved the same level of nostalgia if Tom Merry had had a few of the faults of Harry Wharton, as the Magnet did? Would the Gem have held as high a circulation as the Magnet on average over the thirty odd years, had Hamilton been encouraged to write more for the Gem, rather than the Modern Boy, Boys' Friend and other boys' magazines?

If it had not been for the War, would the Magnet and Gem still be published today? I think not. It was and still is, too advanced for many of the children of today who find it hard work reading the stories which are constructed on an adult level, with many words not in general use today.

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REVIEW

THE BOUNDER OF GREYFRIARS

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker: £12)

This is one of the Howard Baker "specials", superbly bound, additionally protected with a fitting box, and presented with the very best taste. A joy for the collecting connoisseur.

The volume contains nine consecutive red Magnets from the summer of 1910. The opening story "Wun Lung Minor", introducing Hop Hi for the first time, is one of the very few Magnets illustrated by R. J. Macdonald. These were the years when new characters were frequently coming on the scene, and, in the nine weeks covered by this book, there are three newcomers who are to be permanent: Hop Hi, Vernon-Smith and Alonzo Todd.

The rest of the tales are delightfully illustrated by Arthur Clarke, whose pictures were deliciously old-fashioned even in 1910. Nearly seventy years later, his drawings bring a warm glow to the heart, even though his cricket match seems to be played on a ploughed field rather than on the playing fields of a public school.

"The Remove's Challenge" introduces Gordon Gay to the Magnet for the first time, no doubt to advertise the Rylcombe Grammar School series then running in the Empire Library. Gay seems to have been the creation of C. M. Down, though Hamilton adopted him wholeheartedly. Gordon Gay was an actor, with an unbelievable flair for impersonation, a talent which the author abandoned as the years passed.

This story is followed by a series of four which start off by introducing Vernon-Smith, the Bounder, for the first time. Often referred to as just "Smith" at this period, he must have reminded the early readers who were also St. Jim's fans, of Lumley-Lumley of that school. Like Lumley, the Bounder of Greyfriars was un-expellable - the father having the Head in his power. It may have been the similarity in the characters which caused the otherwise inexplicable dropping of Lumley from the St. Jim's scene later on.

Mr. Vernon-Smith, referred to at this time as the "Cotton King", is presented as a

thoroughly unpleasant character. In these early tales, the Bounder's influence on Marjorie Hazeldene's brother is powerfully described.

Two more stories "Study No. 1 on Tour" and "The Thief" were reprinted in the S. O. L. exactly fifty years ago under the title "Schoolboys Abroad", and Danny mentions this one in the extract from his famous Diary which we publish this month.

Finally, the last story in this lovely book is "The Duffer of Greyfriars", which introduces Alonzo Todd for the first time. Alonzo was the first of the Todd cousins to arrive on the scene. Peter was to come along later.

This tale is incredible but joyously amusing, and it contains many a warm chuckle for the real Greyfriars fan. Alonzo's career at Greyfriars was of the stop-go variety. There were long periods of time when he was away from the school, which suggests that he was not universally popular with the fans. Undoubtedly he was an acquired taste, but he is a winner in this volume.

A book which cannot be faulted. A joy from beginning to end, and, when not being read, an aristocratic addition to any self-respecting book-shelf.

* * * * *

NEW MAGNETS FOR OLD - A GUIDE TO RESTORATION

by Duncan Langford

Much has been written on the various literary aspects of collecting old boys' papers, but little on the practical side. This short article is intended to point out a few of the simpler techniques for restoring and improving the old papers.

It is an unfortunate fact of life that all too often the long search for a missing copy ends in a 'rough' issue; there must be a dozen or more poor condition copies for each 'mint' issue. You can't produce a mint copy from tatters, but it is surprising just how much a poor copy can be improved.

We will assume that we have found a longed-for magazine - say an early Magnet - but the copy is torn, patched with old, yellowed sticky tape, and rusty staples; it is dirty, and has a grease stain on the cover. Don't assume that it has to be a 'reading' copy!

The first thing to do is to determine the extent of the damage, and the easiest way to do this is to separate the Magnet into its component sheets. Using cutters, carefully remove any staples. If the sheets have been sticky taped together (and some collectors seem to use sticky tape instead of sense) carefully soak a pad of cotton wool in Carbon tetrachloride (20p from Boots). Put the Magnet onto a thick pad of clean white blotting

paper, and slowly dab at the tape (or grease stain). Don't worry if your Magnet suddenly becomes transparent - it will return to normal when dry. As the tape pulls away, constantly refresh your cotton wool pad. Don't work in an unventilated room, and take great care with coloured covers, as on red Magnets; the colour runs if you use too much solution.

When free of all sticky tape and staples, try cleaning your Magnet. A soft rubber, used gently, will really transform a grubby copy. Don't rub too hard, and watch out for tears in the paper. After cleaning, repair any tears with the new invisible tape (for example, the latest Scotch 'magic' tape) working from the inside. That is, if repairing the front cover, put the tape on the inside front, so that from outside it really is invisible. Press the tape down hard to remove all air bubbles. If there is actually a piece missing from your copy, consider cannibalizing another, worse, copy for a patch. Again, work from inside, and make sure that colours and aged paper match. If you must, trim the outside edges of the magazine to remove frayed edges, but this isn't really a good idea. If you intend binding your copies there is no need to refix the sheets together; otherwise, try using white thread tied through the spine - don't pull it too tight. Don't use staples; they rust, and a collector in another sixty years won't thank you!

Make haste slowly, taking each stage methodically, and you may well find, as I do, that restoration becomes a fascinating part of collecting.

* * * * *

FAREWELL TO AN "OLD BOY"

It is with deep sadness that we record the death, on 5th June, of Mr. Bernard Richard Leese. Mr. Leese, who was 73 years old, had been a loyal supporter of this magazine for many years, and he had a great love for the old papers.

Recently we commenced a series of autobiographical articles written by Mr. Leese, under the title "An Old Boy's Reminiscences", and we are happy that he completed the series before his death. The articles will continue to feature at intervals in C.D.

We express our very sincere sympathy to his widow, Mrs. Gertrude Leese.

BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 52. MACDONALD & EDDY

We opened the term with an extremely attractive film from M. G. M. : Walter Pidgeon and Greer Garson in "Madame Curie". In the supporting bill was a coloured cartoon "The Screwball Squirrel".

Next week, from M. G. M. came another of the Andy Hardy films: Micky Rooney in "Andy Hardy's Blonde Trouble". In all there were, I believe, about 16 Andy Hardy films in the series, though we only played a few of them towards the end of the series. I never cared a lot for them, but they were nice, clean little tales of family life and calf-love, and I daresay that I would like them better today, when cinemas offer but little that is decent, so that a non-smutty tale would be more than welcome. They were always popular with our older boys. In the same show was a coloured cartoon "War Dogs", and a Fitzpatrick Traveltalk in colour entitled "Modern Mexico City".

Next from M. G. M. , a delightful technicolour Musical: "Broadway Rhythm", which starred the very pleasant and talented George Murphy. In the same bill was a coloured Tweetie Pie cartoon "The Early Bird Dood It".

Next, from M. G. M. , a famous Musical, re-issued about this time. We had not played it before. This was the ever popular "Rose Marie", with Jeanette Macdonald and Nelson Eddy. The story is theatrical, I fancy, but the songs and the singers were gorgeous. In the supporting bill was a coloured Traveltalk "Niagara Falls" and a coloured cartoon "Dumb

Hounded".

After that, from M. G. M. , came Charles Boyer, Ingrid Bergman, and Angela Lansbury in "The Murder in Thornton Square". This was the film of the famous British play "Gaslight", but the two biggest stars were miscast, I thought, and the film was not so good as the stage play. In the same bill was "Tree Triumphant", a charming "Secrets of Life" item, and a coloured cartoon "The Stork's Holiday".

Next, the truly charming "Little Nellie Kelly", starring Judy Garland and George Murphy, from M. G. M. A big supporting bill included a Secrets of Life item "Paws and Claws", a coloured Traveltalk "Land of Orizaba", and a coloured cartoon "Bah Wilderness".

The following week brought, from M. G. M. , Charles Laughton, Margaret O'Brien, and Robert Young in "The Canterville Ghost". I have a feeling that the stars were better than the story, but my memory may be playing tricks. In the same bill was a Secrets of Life item "Heads, Tongues, and Tails" and a coloured cartoon "Wild Honey". Most of our programmes this term included a Hal Roach comedy. This week it was Our Gang in "Family Troubles".

Next, from M. G. M. , Bud Abbott and Lou Costello in "Lost in a Harem". In the bill was a Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon "Baby Puss" and a Secrets of Life item "Memories".

And now M. G. M. reissued the lovely musical "Maytime", with Jeanette

Macdonald and Nelson Eddy. Originally the film was in sepia, but the re-issue was in black and white. Some lovely songs and singing, and plenty of salt tears for the tender-hearted in the audience. With a coloured cartoon "Innertube Antics".

Next a double-feature programme from Warner Bros.: Ronald Reagan in "Secret Enemies" plus Wayne Morris in "Three Sons o' Guns", not to mention a coloured cartoon "A Day at the Zoo".

Then another double feature show, both from Warner's: Irene Manning (whoever she was) in "Spy Ship" and Jane Wyman in "Crime by Night". Plus a coloured cartoon "Land of the Midnight Fun".

Next, from Warner's, Anne Crawford in "The £100 Window", which was, I think, a British film. A Secrets of Life item was "Kew and Me", a coloured

Traveltalk was "Motoring in Mexico", and a coloured cartoon was "The Bug Parade".

The last programme of the term was from Warner's, and brought Errol Flynn and Ronald Reagan in "Desperate Journey", which, like practically all Flynn's Warner films, was tip-top. "Polly All Alone" was the Secrets of Life item (how superb these British nature studies were!); "On the Road to Monterey" was a coloured Traveltalk, and "Hare-um Scare-um" was a Bugs Bunny coloured cartoon.

And, at long last, the war was in its closing stages.

(ANOTHER ARTICLE
IN THIS SERIES
NEXT MONTH)

* * * * *

News of the Clubs

MIDLAND

Although the June meeting was supposed to be the A.G.M., such is the easy informality of our club these days only the Treasurer's report by Ivan Webster was heard, the rest of the time being turned over to discussion and the usual reading. The report showed the club to be in a very healthy state financially, largely owing to the generosity of our members, particularly the president and vice-president. As to those who occupy any official capacity with the club, it was assumed the status quo would continue without wasting time on enquiry.

The usual features, Anniversary Number and Collectors' Item were on view. These were Magnet 1475 published on 23rd May, 1936, "Ordered to Quit" of the Putnam Van Duck Series and 42 years old to the day (Anniversary Number) and a bound volume of Nelson Lee's No. 40 to

52 of 1916 vintage. Tom Porter as usual brought these from his massive collection.

An interesting letter had been received from Stan Knight, our vice-president, informing the club he was selling off much of his collection. His books were kept at the shop where he works in Cheltenham and retirement was getting near. He could not keep them at home for personal reasons.

Discussion of Charles Hamilton's remarkable knowledge of languages took up a considerable part of the time. It was observed that he seemed to love studying languages for their own sake, although he used his knowledge extensively in his work. His library at "Rose Lawn" contained books in many languages with expressions underscored for use in his stories.

The reading was taken from Magnet No. 1, 170, from the famous Brander Rebellion series, Chapter 11 of the second Magnet "Tale Bearer in Chief" and the dramatic episode where Wingate loses his position as head prefect to Otto Van Tromp and where the narrow-minded tyrant Brander shows his hand with a vengeance. The Brander Series is a great favourite with your correspondent.

Charles Hamilton knew the psychology of tyranny only too well. This is fiction, but its appeal lies in the fact of many parallels in real life.

The usual study supper of hot coffee and jam doughnuts added to our enjoyment. Ivan Webster was the founder of the feast.

JACK BELLFIELD - Correspondent.

CAMBRIDGE

The Club wound up its 1977-78 season with a visit to Ruth and Neville Wood at their lovely home at Swefling. The Club were very happy to again have the privilege of meeting Ruth and Neville, and to enjoy a glorious summer day in such pleasant surroundings.

The only thing that marred the complete enjoyment of the day was the absence of Vic. Hearn, the victim of a foot injury that prevented him from joining the party at the last minute.

After enjoying a very pleasant lunch in the sunshine, the club adjourned to Neville's drawing room and were entertained with a tape of

a B.B.C. talk on A. J. Allan, which was cleverly built up around one of his inimitable stories.

The rest of the day was spent browsing in Neville's library, and admiring his fine collection of such items as long runs of The Captain, Chums, The Boys' Own Paper, many of the modern volumes of reprints, and in particular once again exploring Neville's extensive collection of Detective stories, ranging from Sexton Blake and Sherlock Holmes to the moderns, and including practically all major and many minor writers of crime novels from the early years of the century until today.

Much enjoyment was also found among Neville's fine collection of records and tapes.

There was a general discussion of articles Neville is writing for an American Detective Story magazine on a locked room mystery which took place in a Cambridge College in March 1931, when Neville was in residence at Cambridge. Bill Lofts and Bill Thurbon promised to do some more research for Neville on this.

After tea, the members departed with memories of a wonderful day of happy companionship, after expressing many and hearty thanks to our host and hostess for their hospitality.

The next meeting will take place on 1st October.

LONDON

A fine summer day for the Greyfriars, Kingsmere, Wokingham meeting or should it have been Cliff House, Morcove or Moorview as the ladies present outnumbered the gentlemen.

Mary Cadogan read the letters from Frank Richards to Joseph Wark. I conducted a literary quiz and Winifred Morss was the winner. A Cryptic Quiz conducted by Eric Lawrence taxed all the contestants' brains and the eventual result was a tie between Ann Clarke and Bob Blythe. Bob read passages from the June 1961 newsletter and one of the items was my selection of Desert Island Companions. Bob followed this reading with one of the Tracket Grim's stories.

Tea was enjoyed in the garden with a good chorus from the song-birds. Photographs were taken and Betty and Eric Lawrence were suitably thanked for good hospitality.

Next meeting will be held at 47 Evelyn Avenue, Kingsbury,

London, NW9 0JF. Phone 205 0732, Sunday, 9th July. Hosts Bob and Louise Blythe. Thus after four country meetings, it is a return to the Great Metropolis.

BENJAMIN WHITER

NORTHERN

Saturday, 10 June, 1978

Chairman Geoffrey Wilde opened the Meeting by remarking that in his school (Greyfriars?) staff room there had been a sweep stake on the Derby and he had drawn Sexton Blake. Everybody knows Sexton Blake is a winner, said Geoffrey - the trouble is that no-one had told the horse!

And emerging from his staff room to his form room, so to speak, Geoffrey then presented us with extracts from 'Lonzy's Little Letters' and asked us to construe. A letter was to be read once only, after which we were to put briefly and concisely just what Alonzo meant!

Jack Allison came top, Nigel Shepley was next, and then Harry Blowers.

Mollie had been looking back in nostalgic mood and singled out an article which she had written twenty years ago this month and which was then published in C.D. Mollie had wanted to re-write it, but it had been suggested to her that she present it unaltered - as a 'period piece'.

She had entitled the article, 'Which Greyfriars boy would make the best husband?'

After examining the claims of Harry Wharton and the rest of the Famous Five, Vernon-Smith, Mauly - and even Skinner - and dismissing them and the rest of the Remove as 'too ordinary' she singled out - wait for it - Horace James Coker!

We understand that Horace is taking Mollie home to meet Aunt Judy during the vac!

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FOR SALE: Bound volume of original Magnets 1374 - 1389, beautiful condition. Also, Howard Baker out of print items; Magnet volumes 21, 23 (The Joker of Greyfriars) 24 and G.H.A. for 1974. All in mint condition. Write, in first instant to:

DARRELL SWIFT

22 WOODNOOK CLOSE, LEEDS, LS16 6PQ.

The Postman Called

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

D. HARKNESS (Bondi Junction): One of your correspondents was puzzled as to who Rosetta Towne was. Well, her first name was spelt wrongly. She was ROSELLA Towne, and she made at least nine films for Warner Bros. in the late thirties. She starred in "The Adventures of Jane Arden", based on an American comic strip about a girl reporter.

BEN WHITER (London): There must be a misapprehension about the Fleetway House. It was still there when I was waiting at a bus stop opposite to it a few nights ago. Seeing reports of its demolition, I have been waiting for someone to put the matter right. The premises are up for sale, and I suppose the building will eventually be demolished.

N. GAYLE (Devon): C.D. continues to delight; I find myself enjoying it more and more, and becoming quite peeved when it does not appear on the doorstep on the day I predict and expect it! Still, I suppose anticipation is part of the pleasure.

Mrs. W. MORSS (Walthamstow): If my memory serves me, the film, "Mission to Moscow" was the story of Ambassador Davies' trip to Moscow, before the last war, to find out for President Roosevelt "whether they would fight". Ambassador Davies, (Walter Huston), came back and said "Yes - they would", and the rest is history.

The "Keeper of the Flame", was I think, about hero worship, and idolatry, and the wisdom of caring for all men, and women, but none too much . . . It was very topical when one realised how Hitler had been built up into a God like figure worshipped by the youth of the day and to remember how it all ended.

They were both very fine films. Three cheers for the Small Cinema.

H. HOLMES (Barrow-in-Furness): It's really astounding that, after 32 years, material is still being found to keep C.D. thriving. Let's hope it lasts many more years. I would like to see more in C.D. about those old hardback public school stories. Some fine tales were published. I have accumulated about 150 different authors, and it gives me great pleasure to compare the varying styles of those writers with that of Frank Richards.

L. WORMULL (Romford): C.D. continues to be a monthly tonic, and I still marvel how you manage to keep up the good work without a break. The months have flown since Christmas, but must say how much I enjoyed the festive fare, the drawings by H. Webb were also up to their high standard. I note that Let's Be Controversial has reached No. 223, a truly remarkable achievement. It remains my favourite feature. There cannot be many aspects of the hobby you have not touched upon, though it is to be hoped there are still unexplored reservoirs. Having once been a keen cinemagoer - today's cinema interests me no more - I follow the Biography with interest.

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FOR SALE or exchange for Nelson Lees only:- Magnets (false covers) 149, 152, 160, 167, 275, 276, 280, 376, 378, 384 - £1.65 each. Gems 54 (£3.50), 103 (£1.00), 1624 (40p). Schoolgirl 172 (60p). S.O.L's 218, 264, 281, 287, 293, 320, 332, 393, 326, 343, 346, 349 - 60p each. Magnets 1383 - 1389 (85p each). 569 - 570 £1.10 each), 1560 (35p). Baker's 'Blake from UNION JACK' - £1.50. Tom Merry's Own No. 2 - £1. Write -

NIC GAYLE, 4 QUEEN STREET

BUDLEIGH, SALTERTON, DEVON.

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AN "OLD BOY'S" REMINISCENCES (II) by B. R. Leese

The "Editor's Chat" in each of the Companion papers always interested me. I was most indignant with the folk who wrote to Editor Hinton about the bad effect such literature he edited had upon the rising generation. I was one who wrote protestingly against these attacks. (Was this a gimmic of Hinton's to arouse further interest?)

The "Back Numbers Column" really fascinated me. How often was "Bob Cherry's Barring Out", "Britains Never Shall Be Slaves", "When Johnny Comes Marching Home", "Figgins Fig Pudding", "Race to the Tuck Shop", "Billy Bunter's Postal Order" requested. I understand several of these titles never existed for St. Jim's and Greyfriars yarns.

I wrote twice to the late Mr. Hinton suggesting all the old tales be published again in monthly books, but he replied - very nicely - they were far too busy with current matter. Yet the early adventures of Tom Merry were appearing in the old Penny Pop. However, the early stories

of Greyfriars began in the same periodical, and later still "Schoolboys' Own" made its appearance.

For some reason or other I was never thrilled with the "Boys' Realm" or the "Marvel", just as a few years later the "Boys' Magazine" and "Modern Boy" had little appeal for me. They were, however, all very good papers of their class. Neither was I a "Boys' Cinema" fan, even though I was a keen Cinema goer, following avidly each week "The Broken Coin", "Diamond from the Sky", "Exploits of Elaine", "Shielding Shadow" and many others: and I managed all this reading and cinema attending on four pence per week pocket money for quite a period. I remember the original half-penny "Greyfriars Herald" and entered the tuck hamper competition regularly during the short period the paper was published, but alas, I never won a tuck hamper!

It was during late 1917 when that notorious and later very controversial story "A very Gallant Gentleman" was published in the "Magnet". I never dreamed of substitute writers at the time, and I thought this yarn very good indeed, I think I shed a few tears, even though I was pretty well hardened. If I read it today my opinion may be different. Strange that a substitute story should cause such argument and criticism over sixty years later.

During the same year the "Boys' Friend" issued a free print of Jackie Cornwall, the V.C. hero of Jutland and I suggested to my teacher that the print be framed and fixed on the classroom wall. He turned down the suggestion and told me to refrain from reading such trashy "blood and thunder" and concentrate on "Tom Brown's Schooldays" and "Ivanhoe", etc. I did read them, and enjoyed them - but I still continued with my beloved boys' weeklies.

I think I probably inherited my passion for reading and my "itching feet" from my Father. He had two years in Canada before the first World War and wanted to go to Australia later, but old England was good enough for my Mother and we stayed at home, much to my dismay at the time. As a young man my Dad read "Jack Harkaway" yarns, the original Dick Turpin and Claud Duval libraries, each issue containing a wonderful coloured plate, depicting either Dick Turpin or Claude Duval holding up a stagecoach or some similar exploit. Unfortunately he loaned the books to various friends and they were never returned, but he had retained the

coloured plates, and I remember how my eyes goggled when I saw them, and sighed to think what a feast I had missed. Several years later I read Ainsworth's "Rookwood" and "Jack Shepherd", but they did not fill the gap.

(to be continued)

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EXTRACT FROM "AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF

HOWARD SPRING" (Author of "Shabby Tiger",

"Fame in the Spur", and "My Son, My Son")

From W. Lister

"Do not reprove the reader of "twopenny trash", but rather encourage him. From the "Magnet" it is no great step to G. A. Henty, Ballantyne, Kingston and the rest, from then to "Treasure Island" and "Robinson Crusoe".

You are then ripe for Scott and Dumas, and then there is nothing less than the infinite to step into.

In any given week I could read one of those penny magazines for boys, that had such names as "The Gem" and "The Magnet" and a novel by Henty and Meredith and what is more, enjoy all equally.

Equally, but differently. That is the point."

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THEY DON'T WRITE 'EM LIKE THIS

ANY MORE!

by John Geal

All styles of writing represent the age in which the author penned the item, but times and fashions change. So much so, that many early writers, eminent in their day, have become virtually unreadable by present day standards.

Victorian times were no exception. Apart from Charles Dickens, whose superb characterisation and excellent plots carry the reader through the more verbose sections of the story, the vast majority of the authors have faded into oblivion, because their styles have become so dated.

This is also true of the Boys' Magazine writers of the late Victorian Period. Avidly read by the boys (and Adults) during the hey-days of the magazines concerned, most of these authors, with perhaps the exception of Talbot Baines Reed, are now forgotten. However, some of them re-read today could come back into favour by acting as a tonic

in a unconsciously humorous way. Jules Verne, a most revered author of the period, wrote regularly for the "Boys' Own Paper" from 1880 to 1900, and to show how his style reads so hilariously now although it was seriously written at the time, I would like to quote from one of his Serials to give an example -

"The Clipper Of The Clouds" by Jules Verne

Chapter Six

"A bandage over the eyes, a gag in the mouth, a cord round the wrists, unable to see, to speak, or to move, Uncle Prudent, Phil Evans, and Frycollin were anything but pleased with their position. Knowing not who had seized them, nor in what they had been thrown like parcels in a goods wagon, nor what was reserved for them - it was enough to exasperate even the most patient of the ovine race".

(Then we have a few lines explaining part of the plot) then "One thing was evident, that Phil Evans and he would find it difficult to attend the club, next evening".

(Eventually, one of the heroes manages to work free from the bonds tying his wrists) -

"A vigorous rubbing restored the circulation. A moment after he had slipped off the bandage which bound his eyes, taken the gag out of his mouth, and cut the cords round his ankles with his knife. An American who has not a Bowie knife in his pocket is no longer an American."

(Some pocket! A Bowie knife is over TWELVE inches long by a TWO AND A QUARTER inch blade, PLUS the sheath!)

This is only a small sample but I think it would be great to read the Story in its entirety - can anyone help? If the rest reads as good, we should think seriously about a reprint in the "C.D."

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FOR SALE: Magnets 1611, 1645, 1646, 1649, 1650, 1660, 1670, 1671: quite nice copies 25p each; Girls' Crystal 392, 565 (war-time issues) 25p each; 36-page Marvels (1904), Nos. 25, 29; 30p each. Postage extra.

Write: ERIC FAYNE (no reply if items already sold)

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