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**COLLECTORS DIGEST**

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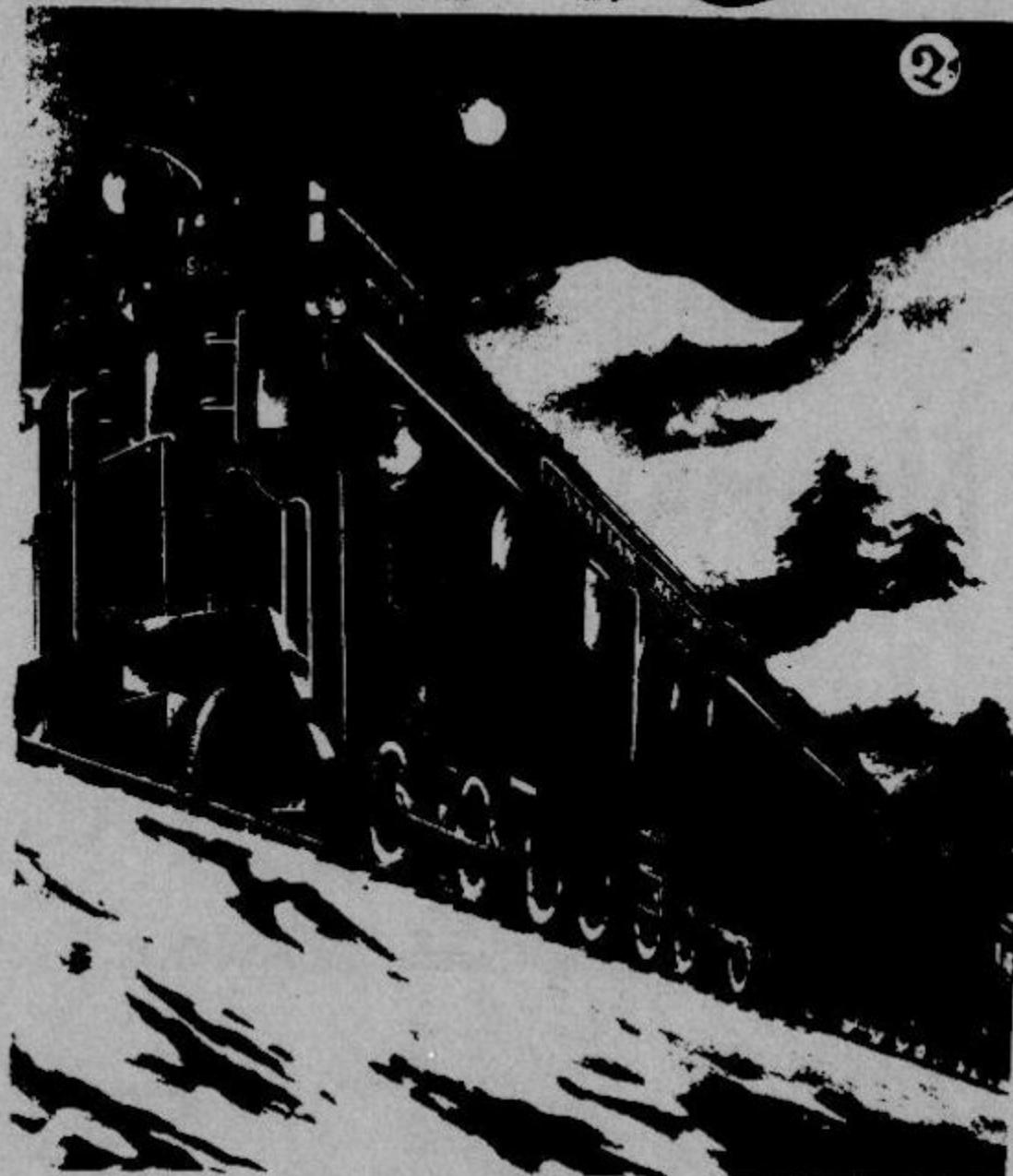
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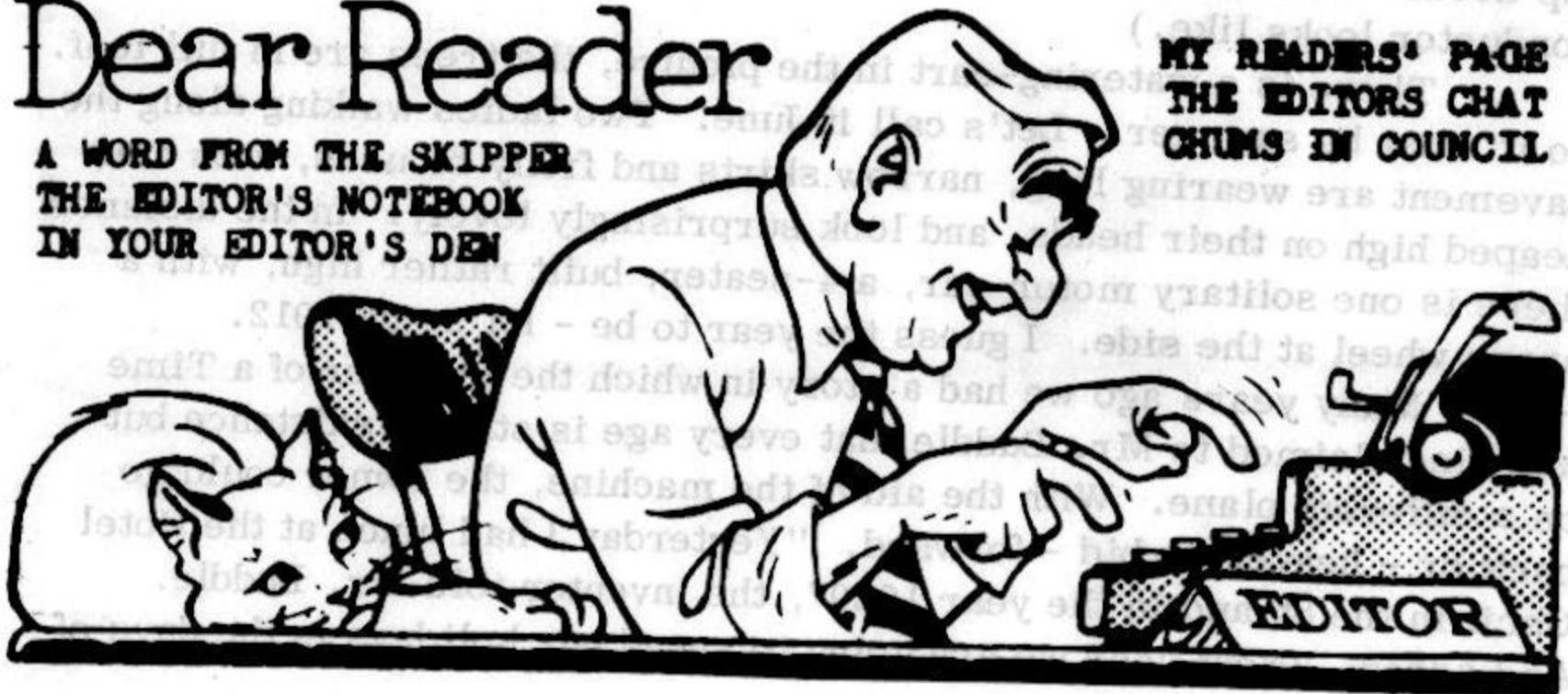
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## Dear Reader

A WORD FROM THE SKIPPER  
THE EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK  
IN YOUR EDITOR'S DEN

MY READERS' PAGE  
THE EDITORS CHAT  
CHUMS IN COUNCIL



### THE TRAM

Beside me, as I write, I have a picture, in full colour, of a street in a quiet Kentish town. Today, of course, there is no such thing as a quiet Kentish town. So, clearly, it is a very old card, though the colours are splendid.

In the centre of the picture is a tram. It is an open-topped tram, a Dick Kerr car, for those who know anything about such things, with reversed stairs leading to the top deck. The livery is dark red and cream. The number 14, in gold leaf, with loving shading to make the

figures stand out, gleams on the dash. The hand-brake control is of polished brass. There are no garish advertisements on the car to disfigure it.

The driver, his hands on the controls, looks magnificent in uniform - peaked cap with shining brass badge - the badge is a wheel in a magnet - coat and trousers in blue serge; the coat is double-breasted with brass buttons.

The conductor, on the top deck, wears uniform only slightly less fine. He has a whistle round his neck, for use when he is on the top deck. (It must be countless years ago that tram conductors blew whistles on top decks. In fact, in most areas we have almost forgotten what a conductor looks like.)

There is a watering-cart in the picture, the trees are in full leaf. So it must be summer. Let's call it June. Two ladies walking along the pavement are wearing long, narrow skirts and frilly blouses, with hair heaped high on their heads, and look surprisingly lovely. In the distance there is one solitary motor-car, a 4-seater, built rather high, with a spare wheel at the side. I guess the year to be - let's say 1912.

Many years ago we had a story in which the inventor of a Time Machine claimed to Mr. Buddle that every age is still in existence but on a different plane. With the aid of the machine, the owner could go back or - heaven forbid - forward. "Yesterday I had lunch at the Hotel Cecil in the Strand in the year 1920", the inventor told Mr. Buddle. And added: "Next year we are going to spend our holidays in the days of Queen Anne."

Wouldn't it be nice if we could go back, for a holiday, to that June day in 1912 which we have conjured up from the old picture? For everything in that picture is fixed for ever - nothing will grow old, or littered, or faded, or scruffy. We could board that tram and travel for a while. We could go in the newsagent's on the right-hand side.

On the counter we should find the Gem - "The Limit", perhaps, where a Miss Ponsonby (they called her Miss Pon) took charge of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's; the Magnet - "The Stolen Schoolboys", possibly, with the Famous Five shanghaied by Capt. Hobbs and taken off on the steamship Pomerania; the Union Jack, of course: "The Brotherhood of Twelve", maybe; a Plummer story; they had any

amount of Plummer stories in the U.J. of 1912.

Also on the counter, two new papers: The Dreadnought, just out as a sister paper to "Fun & Fiction", which would also be on display. Also another new one - "Cheer, Boys, Cheer" - which is really Hamilton Edwards' old "Boys' Herald" in disguise under the new quaint name, and cut down from Boys' Friend size to Gem size. "Cheer, Boys, Cheer" wouldn't last long. In fact, Edwards' reign as editor was running out, in 1912.

We might drop in at the local theatre, for every self-respecting town of any size had its own theatre in 1912. Who was on the bill? Well, what about Gertie Gitana, Little Tich, Tom Costello, Victoria Monks?

There would be at least one cinema, too; possibly more. Who would be on the bill? Bronco Billy Anderson, Flora Finch, Florence Turner, John Bunny, Max Linder, Helen Holmes, Asta Neilsen, the Pathe Gazette, with Latest Paris Fashions in pathecolor, and a Keystone comedy - Ford Sterling, Mabel Normand, and Fatty Arbuckle.

While I think of it, you might pop back to that newsagents and get a copy of "Police Gazette". It contains an account of the Sidney Street siege. But make sure you don't miss the Time Machine back.

### PACKAGE HOLIDAYS

One of our reviews this month concerns the re-issue of the Magnet's famous Kenya series of 1931, when the chums spent harrowing times in Kenya, Uganda, the Congo, and other places in Central Africa. The Kenya series was first published nearly fifty years ago, and it has lost none of its charm, but the places themselves must have changed enormously. Do tourists from package tours swarm over the spot where Bunter was being fattened up for a cannibal feast? Do the products of British Leyland tear down a huge motorway which has been cut through the dense forest where Kikolobo tracked down the schoolboys who had been carried away to be slaves?

An intriguing thought. Was Central Africa quite so primitive in 1931 as it appeared in the series? Or was Hamilton thinking of adventure tales he had read in his own boyhood?

THE ANNUAL

All being well, the 32nd Edition of Collectors' Digest Annual will be dropping through your letter-box in mid-December. Our famous contributors are hard at work, making this year's edition well up to the standard of past years.

This month we send you the order form as usual. It will help at this end if you can order fairly early, and it will also avoid the possibility of disappointment, for not many copies can be printed to cater for latecomers.

On the order form is space for an announcement or an advertisement, if you so desire. It will enable you to send your seasonal good wishes to your friends and acquaintances in the hobby, and will also help to keep the wheels turning in these problematic times.

Next month I hope to find space to let you know of some of the attractions in C.D. Annual 1978.

THE EDITOR

\* \* \* \* \*

# Danny's Diary

SEPTEMBER 1928

It has been a lovely summer for cricket. The season has ended with Lancashire at the top of the County Championship table for the third year running. Kent are second, and Notts are third. D. R. Jardine is at the top of the batting averages, and S. F. Barnes is top of the bowling averages.

All the month in Modern Boy we have had the continuation of the series about Dandy Peter Parsons. In "The Treasure of Lalaio", Ken saves Parsons from death by torture, but the treasure the Dandy was seeking turns out to be a myth. Next week, Ken and Kit Hudson, in "The Floating Island", found themselves on one of these things. In "The Haunted Isle", the two floating chums are menaced by something unknown. In "Abandoned", a mad convict makes things exciting for the castaways on the floating island. And, finally, in "Saved From The

Sea", Dandy Peters is the cause of the rescue of King and his chum from that remarkable island. A good adventure series.

There has been a most terrible hurricane over Florida and the West Indies, and hundreds of people have lost their lives.

In the Nelson Lee the series has continued about the holiday party in India. First tale of the month, "The Tyrant of Rishnir", found the St. Frank's party fighting for life in a grim fortress guarding the Kypur Pass. The final tale of the series is "The Peril of the Kypur Pass" with rescue coming just in time to save them all from the vicious Ameer. Another good adventure series.

Next week, back at St. Frank's, brought "The River House Raiders", with war declared between St. Frank's and the River House School. The rivalry continues in "Monkey Business at St. Frank's", and the final tale of the month has the odd title of "My Only Sainted Aunt". St. Frank's has been winning, but, when Auntie looks in, things look up for Hal Brewster & Co. Some good chuckles in this rivalry series which continues next month.

Two exceptionally good Schoolboys' Own Libraries this month. They are "The Fool of the School", a Greyfriars tale with Alonzo Todd starring, and "Chums on Tramp" about the Fistical Four touring with a horse and trap, and the various people they meet and adventures they have.

A train crashed into the buffers at Charing Cross, and 44 people were slightly hurt. But a much more serious accident has happened at a place in Co. Durham with the weird name of Lumley Thicks. A motor-bus ran over a bank in fog, and caught fire. A woman was killed and twenty-six people were badly injured.

In the Gem the Victor Cleeve series ended with "Righted at Last" when Cleeve was cleared of the suspicion of theft and was able to return to his old school at Barcroft, but not before he made his mark, playing cricket for Tom Merry's eleven. A lovely series, but all too short.

So the real Martin, after just the one series, has gone back into the shadows again. In the next series, starting with "Who Shall Be Captain?" Tom Merry resigns from the junior captaincy, and Mr. Railton makes the extraordinary decision - unless he is a mental case - to have Grundy, Gussy, Skimpole, Mellish, Tompkins, and Fatty Wynn

each being captain for a week in turn, to see which one is the best. What a tripey idea! "No Good as Captain" is the Grundy story, "Captain Gussy" is the D'Arcy story, and "Captain and Freak" is the Skimpole tale. The series will limp on next month.

At the pictures this month we have seen Thunder, the wonder dog in "The Silent Avenger", Milton Sills in "The Silent Lover", Lillian Gish in "Annie Laurie", Joseph Schildkraut in "His Dog", Colleen Moore in "Orchids and Ermine", and Laura La Plante in "Silk Stockings".

Before I went back to school, Doug took me to Penge Empire, a lovely theatre, and we saw Jimmy Jewell in a revue called "Pop In".

As always, the Popular has been fine all the month. A four-story series of the Rio Kid comprised "The Tenderfoot", "The Marshal of Hard Tack", "The Tenderfoot's Secret", and "The Surprise of His Life". The Kid befriends a helpless little Mexican against the Hard Tack crowd who believe the tenderfoot is the son of old Escobedo, who found a gold mine and was shot up. The boy denies he is Escobedo's son. In the end, it turns out that the tenderfoot is Escobedo's daughter. Lovely series.

Then "The Mysterious Trail" in which the Kid discovers that a man with a limp was running off cows from the Carson ranch. And Steve Carson, the rancher's nephew, has a limp. The start of what is clearly going to be another fine Kid series.

Also in the Pop is the Cardew Cup series, while, at old St. Frank's, a new boy, Jack Mason, has come on the scene.

In London, the Charlot Revue has started at the Vaudeville, Jack Buchanan and Elsie Randolph are in "That's a Good Girl" at the Hippodrome. Early in the month, Dad took us all to the Carlton Theatre to see the Musical Comedy "Good News". There are some lovely songs in it; the title song "Good News", "Lucky in Love", "The Best Things in Life are Free" and "The Varsity Drag". A magnificent college show.

In the Magnet, the gorgeous holiday series about Whiffles Circus has gone on. In "Bunter's Big Bluff", Bunter, with the aid of the rascally circus manager, Mr. Dance, continues as head of the circus, while the real Mr. Whiffles skulks in fear of Huggins. In "Bunter's Body-Guard", he hires the Famous Five to protect him, from Huggins. And the circus performs near Eastwood House, so the St. Jim's fellows

come into the picture. It all carries on, with spanking fun, in "Chums of the Circus", and then, in "The Order of the Boot", Bunter finally gets the boot from the circus. Awfully far-fetched, but quite delicious.

Last of the month is "Bunter Comes to Stay". Nobody wants Bunter back at Greyfriars - the Head has made that clear and so has Mr. Quelch. The Owl is sacked. But Bunter wants to go back, and he manages, through trapping the burglar "Slim Jim", to wangle it. Our Billy's a lick.

I had the Union Jack twice this month. The first tale was "The Law of the Gun". In New Mexico, they didn't think much of Britishers - until Sexton Blake came on the scene. This tale was written by Arthur Paterson. The other story I have had is "The Affair of the Great Seal", by Anthony Skene. The affairs of the country would come to a stop without that Seal, and Zenith, the Albino, sets out to steal it. He is foiled by Sexton Blake and Tinker.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 83, "The Fool of the School" comprised two Magnets from the autumn of 1910, the original titles being "Todd the Terrible" and "Billy Bunter's Kick-Off". S.O.L. No. 84, "Chums on Tramp" was the Rookwood holiday series of about eight stories from the summer of 1922 in the Boys' Friend.

Arthur Paterson, the Union Jack author mentioned by Danny this month, died some months later in the Spring of 1929. The Carlton Theatre was new at the time at which Danny was writing, and I fancy that "Good News" may have been the first production there. It did not operate long as a live theatre, soon turning to films. I am not sure whether it is still existing, though it ran as a cinema for many years.)

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### DEATH OF ERIC COPEMAN

We learn with regret that Australian hobbyist, Eric Copeman, died some months back, in his sleep, from a heart attack.

Mr. Copeman had many interests in the hobby field, but Sexton Blake was his first and main love. He would have been in his early sixties at the time of his death.

\* \* \* \* \*  
C.D's Nov. 1974 - Aug. 1978. 32 B.O.P's - 1885, sale or exchange for anything Hamiltonian.

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# BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

By the time you read these words we shall be approaching the Autumn when the B.B.C. will be kind enough to let us see the Sexton Blake serial which they promised us. I hope it will live up to our expectations otherwise there will be a stream of letters descending on the heads of those condescending folks at Broadcasting House. I trust you will agree with John's views on our happy schooldays, but it all depends on what type of school one attended. I can well remember my English teacher. He gave me Spenser's Faerie Queen to read, which I did all during the time they were choosing the actors for the Christmas play. Needless to say I did not get a part for which I was truly thankful. Everyone else got a part and I appeared to be the only one in the audience!

## THE BEST TIME OF YOUR LIFE

by John Bridgwater

When I was at school grown-ups used to wag their heads wisely and say "It's the best time of your life when you are at school." I did not agree then but now I couldn't agree more, provided I was at school as a grown-up.

What has all that to do with Sexton Blake, you ask? Well, I fancy he thinks the same. I am sure it is no exaggeration to say that everyone thinks of him as the great detective who from his earliest days has fought against crime the world over. It is probably not so widely known that once he was a successful schoolmaster. In fact he so enjoyed the experience he was tempted to give up detection.

It all happened back in 1920, those other days of high prices and shortages. A crooked business organisation in America was trying to gain control of our supplies of essential foodstuffs. A millionaire philanthropist named Bagley was effectively frustrating these machinations so the organisation threatened to harm his schoolboy sons unless he stopped interfering. When threats proved ineffective they arranged a fake motorcycle accident in which the youngest boy was injured. Bagley called in Blake to protect the boys. To do this without the organisation becoming aware of his presence Blake is installed as a master named Gresham at Kingsmere College where the boys are at school. Tinker becomes Hargreaves, the headmaster's secretary. It

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It is interesting to note Blake remarking to Mrs. Bardell just before he takes the case " . . . in these days of high prices one can't afford to miss a fee . . ."

So the scene is set at Kingsmere College in Yorkshire, near Whitby, for a quite long series of school/detective stories. They appeared in The Detective Library starting with 6th March issue, No. 32, and continuing right up to the last issue, No. 50, dated 10th July. The following week a new paper, The Nugget Weekly, appeared in its place. This series had practically everything a school series with a detective flavour could possibly have. Author S. G. Shaw gave his readers a real multum in parvo. A list of the ingredients is almost an outline of the series. To begin with Blake is master of the fifth form and a housemaster: the head is a clergyman, the chief form is the fourth, there is a river nearby and a fishing village not far distant. Of course there is also a girls' school close by. As to characters, there is an unpopular master, a master writing a book, a bullying "shady" prefect, a fat boy, a local "bad hat" bookmaker who, surprise! surprise! runs a confectionery shop, and the local police sergeant is fat, self-important and unintelligent. The incidents include the wrong boy being accused of striking a master with a golf club, Tinker being arrested for "mugging" the head, the arrival of a motion picture company, the making of films at the school, the escape of animals from a menagerie, a tiger hunt, an election for school captain, an abduction, a chase at sea, an attempt to disgrace the elder Bagley boy and lesser happenings such as wrongful canings and expulsions.

As the series progresses Blake becomes more the schoolmaster and less the detective. As he fades into the background Tinker increases in importance taking an active part in the doings of the fourth form from time to time. His arrest for "mugging" the head is the signal for a grand barring-out episode.

The arrival of four new boys heralds the final eclipse of the detective. From now on the boys are the major characters. Even the final overthrow of the organisation is accomplished when Blake is elsewhere, though he is brought in to clear up afterwards. But does he go back to Baker Street afterwards? Oh, dear me, no. He stays on as a master because he likes it. The last four stories deal with the exploits

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of the loutish son of a war profiteer and his father who has bought his way onto the board of school governors. Their efforts to force the school to accept the son and get their own back for the japes played upon him cause a school strike. The whole school walks out and lives under canvas. As all the masters have been sacked, including the head, the prefects take charge with Blake and Tinker pulling the strings behind the scenes. The strike turns into a lock-out with everyone's possessions locked up inside the school. Tinker saves the day by discovering a secret tunnel from the churchyard to the head's study. It all ends in a great final attack on the school and the subduing of the profiteer and his supporters. Blake and Tinker are the heroes of the hour and goodness knows how Blake could have returned to being a detective had not that been the last issue of The Detective Library. So he and Tinker leave for Baker Street very regretfully and with hopes that one day they may return to Kingsmere.

That is how Blake escaped the fate of Nelson Lee. Just as Lee was swallowed up by St. Frank's so Blake was submerged by Kingsmere. There must be a moral here, detectives should not linger too long in schools because escape soon becomes impossible and the spell works before you have noticed anything happening. But then both Lee and Blake were willing victims because they knew that it is the best time of your life when you are at school, especially as a grown-up.

Tailpiece for the energy crisis: a study scrap is in progress - "He would have hurled that coal, without doubt, priceless though such material is . . . .", and that was in 1920.

**WAS THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES MORE DEADLY THAN SEXTON BLAKE?** by J.E.M. (in controversial mood)

Nowadays, when we talk or write about the 'New Look' Blake we are usually referring to the 1950's era of the SBL. But Sexton Blake, in his time, has had more than one 'new look' and perhaps the most striking of them celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. For it was in 1928 that Blake was dramatically caught in the toils not only of crime and violence but of clinging damsels as well.

Of course there had never been a shortage of romantic interest in the saga. Mlle. Yvonne, for instance, goes back almost as far as Blake himself and, over the years, Blake had enjoyed a number of

warm-blooded encounters with other attractive females. Even Tinker had had his moments: remember the glamorous young Nirvana? But it was 1928 that really gave romance and passion a new and special role in the life of Sexton Blake.

Take the famous Union Jack series about Olga Nasmyth. Her creator Lewis Jackson dubbed her the 'Girl of Destiny', surely a label more fitting to the heroine of a romantic novelette than to a character in a detective yarn. The cover of UJ number 1269 (11 Feb., 1928) shows Blake holding this swooning beauty at the foot of a bed, two angry-looking men (one with a horsewhip!) bursting into the room. The illustration would not have been out of place on the cover of a romance by Ruby M. Ayres or Ethel M. Dell (remember them?).

The very next week's UJ cover picture finds Blake in the same bedroom, the lady revealing rather more of herself and looking - as well she might - decidedly apprehensive. Not a single sign of Blake's profession anywhere: not an automatic pistol or even a magnifying glass in sight. No Tinker or Pedro either, though perhaps this was just as well! The third week's cover reveals Blake still with the girl, who is still attired in the same negligé but is now back in his arms. It is fortunate perhaps that the amenities of the bedroom are now absent (Blake is carrying La Nasmyth through a sewer!).

All of which was surely too much of a good thing. By this time even Eric Parker's brilliant brush and pen seemed to be wilting under the tedium of depicting such a sorry situation. But there was more to come. After his torrid dalliance with the Girl of Destiny, Blake became involved in the same year with G. H. Teed's creation, the ravishing June Severance. When this latest femme fatale was not embracing the detective, she was being clutched by a swarthy Eurasian - clearly up to no good - in the presence of an exotic Hawaiian beauty (see cover and contents of UJ 1305). And this was only the beginning of the Severance affaire.

In subsequent years similar events were celebrated in the UJ; though I don't recall that Blake ever again enjoyed two such high-temperature relationships in so short a time. The 1928 campaign to sex-up our Sexton was clearly intended to widen the UJ's adult readership - and perhaps especially its female readership. After all, the ladies were, at this time, coming into their own. 1928 was the year

the so-called "flapper" got her vote at the age of 21. With the advent of the talkies, the cinema had also just given woman a voice: one soon to utter such immortal lines as "I want to be alone" or "Come up and see me some time." Novels written by - and for - the fair sex were also doing a roaring trade.

The romantic story weeklies of the time often carried soft, half-tone illustrations based on wash drawings and it is interesting that Eric Parker adopted this very same style for the Olga Nasmyth series in place of his usual, sharp black-and-white work. For his June Severance illustrations he returned to line drawings but there was now definitely more than a hint in his style of Thomas Henry in romantic vein.

Obviously, Sexton Blake's chroniclers and artists could not escape the influences of their time but, after all this, Blake himself was never quite the same again. By the end of 1928, the UJ had only just over four years' life left in it (the less said about its offspring, Detective Weekly, the better).

More recent attempts to create a 'new look' Blake, with even greater emphasis on sexual emotion, voluptuous young ladies, etc., have hardly been more successful. In an earlier CD article I hinted at some possibly deeper reasons for Blake's disappearance from any regular publication, but I'm sure that the "romantic" element did nothing to help him or stave off the decline.

Like life itself, fiction is unimaginable without the fair sex, but there are some male characters of whom it can be the ruin. That cheerful misogynist, Sherlock Holmes (we can ignore his brief encounter with Irene Adler!) is still a best-seller. Would Sexton Blake, too, have fared better without the fair? The female of the species just could have been the death of him.

\* \* \* \* \*

FOR SALE: S.B.L's 1st, 2nd, 3rd series; Union Jacks (pink only); N.L.L's; Aldine Buffalo Bills 1922, mint; S.P.C's and C.D's; Sexton Blake Annuals 2, 3, 4; "oddments".

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# Nelson Lee Column

A LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S by Jim Cook

Although the junior Cecil De Valerie is a different character today than he was when he first arrived at St. Frank's, yet he remains something of an enigma. When he entered the school for the first time he was involved in a plot to kidnap the Japanese junior Sessue Yakama.

De Valerie's previous school, Barncombe, was unsatisfactory from his pater's point of view, and St. Frank's was chosen and was to admit one of the school's most strange of new boys.

In the train on his way to Bellton, De Valerie met a man who offered the junior money to play a trick presumably on a Japanese junior at the school. De Valerie needed the money at the time and could see no harm in accepting the part he was asked to play.

But it was to lead to a strange story that had the Circle Of Terror involved and Professor Cyrus Zingrave, that old enemy, who was to cross swords many times afterwards with Nelson Lee.

In this episode that has been chronicled The Mystery Of The Moor Quarry, a scene has been described that many years later would be very familiar. It tells how De Valerie ... " as soon as lessons were over he went to his study, pulled curtains over the window ... piled cushions upon the hearth rug ... sank on them and lit a curious-smelling cigarette. For half an hour, he lolled there, smoking, gazing into the fire dreamily".

There were times when De Valerie acted very ordinary and he hardly rated a mention. But his strange make-up was very evident in the Dr. Karnak series when he came under the spell of the Egyptian curator. This story, like that of the case of the Japanese schoolboy, had its genesis a long way from St. Frank's. Then, De Valerie found a strange cat rubbing up against him in a foggy, London street.

Both these affairs have brought accusations that so much was contrived to fit in with the chronicled versions, but life itself is full of contrived circumstances. Seemingly.

The historical similarities between presidents Lincoln and Kennedy may give rise to such contrived circumstances except that

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they were in different periods. Both were elected in 1860 and 1960, both were assassinated and succeeded by a man called Johnson, the first Johnson being born 1808, the second in 1908.

Both presidents had a presentiment the day they died, both lost a son in office, the assassins of both were killed before they were brought to trial, and the killers of both assassins were both found insane.

The similarities don't end there. The death of Aldo Moro in Italy recently, is an incident in a centuries-old pattern of political violence, from the stabbing of Julius Caesar, to the shooting of Moro, in the same city twenty centuries later. (Acknowledgements to Auckland "STAR" for extracts of article.)

So much for contrived circumstances.

Although De Valerie's weakness came out very strongly under the spell of Dr. Karnak, yet a much stronger influence passed him by when the most curious of new boys arrived at St. Frank's. This was Ezra Quirke, a name that will live forever in the archives of St. Frank's history.

It was Singleton who was dominated by the mystic Quirke. Previously, the hon. Douglas Singleton had shown no inhibitions to be affected by Occult manifestations that Quirke dabbled in.

Whereas the Karnak episode had revealed no evidence of stage-managed trickery that exposed Ezra Quirke, the Egyptologist appeared to be sincere in his beliefs.

Perhaps this is where the difference between De Valerie and Singleton came out best. While Singleton wasn't affected so much with Karnak as was De Valerie, Quirke's mysterious actions left doubt and enquiry. De Valerie was the more attracted to Dr. Karnak because of a deeper trust, and even the Head was often in private discussion with the curator exchanging talks on Egyptian archaeology.

But De Valerie is still today a junior with an uncertain description. One day he appears to be as normal as any other school-boy, another day and he seems to belong to another age. Perhaps he is out of his time. But his history at St. Frank's is worth knowing, and much more can be said and written about him. Uncertain and friendly; introspective and faithful. But always mysteriously unreliable. Such is the character Cecil De Valerie.

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"ANYTHING THEY CAN DO - I CAN  
DO BETTER" (A page in the life of Edward  
Oswald Handforth) by William Lister

Cyril Rowe in a recent issue of "Collectors' Digest" drew our attention to the 'Rivals of Sexton Blake' while Josie Packman in a post-script complained that Sir Hugh Greene did not even mention Sexton Blake in that publication. She thought perhaps that this was due to either snobbishness or jealousy, because Blake was more popular. Confident that the editor of "C.D." is neither snobbish nor jealous in these matters; I wish to bring to the notice of readers a detective episode that may otherwise pass unnoticed. I refer to an occasion in which Nelson Lee himself was in danger from a rival detective who had already made a name for himself though not in the Detective Agency business. None other than Edward Oswald Handforth.

Let us hitch-hike back to the balmy days of 1929, in the month of February, when suddenly there burst upon the horizon, through the efforts of Edwy Searles Brooks, and the good wishes of the editor of "Nelson Lee" (new series 95) the information that Handforth had turned detective; enough to make Nelson Lee, Sexton Blake, Dixon Hawke, Martin Hewett, even the celebrated Sherlock Holmes, shudder, though with what kind of emotion I leave you to guess. Believe your eyes or not there it is in print - "Handforth the Detective" sub-titled "Rival Detectives" Nelson Lee v Handforth.

There is, of course, hope for all of us in Handforth; even if you are "dumb" you can still be a success. Handforth was the "dumb" detective of 1929. (You will find a 1978 "dumb" detective if you have seen Peter Sellers in the "Pink Panther" pictures.) Dumb - but still a success.

Handforth had gathered that to join this detective lark you need some equipment, if not a pipe then at least a large magnifying glass, as you will gather by the cover illustration.

After all we have a tendency to link this object with the world of detection (though I have one equally large, merely for the purpose of reading the small print) the glass itself leads Handforth to his first major blunder. A blunder only he could make. If you have a feeling that Edwy Searles Brooks stretched it a bit in making Handforth so

dumb, then forget it. The author of the Peter Sellers Pink Panther detective, leaves Handforth emerging as a four-star detective.

I don't know whether Handforth was much of a reader, or not, but I gather from remarks he makes in the course of the story in question that he had read a few crime tales, he seems to know what's needed for the detection job. Such as -

"Quite right too" said Handforth firmly. "Detectives never ought to give secrets away to their assistants" or "I don't know what to expect" retorted Handforth. "A detective never does! but its a detective's duty to be prepared for any eventuality".

Handforth brings his case to a successful conclusion, of course; he blundered on the truth.

Nelson Lee congratulated him, "A remarkable piece of work, Handforth".

People soon forgot the incident, but "Handforth talked long about it until Church and McClure were heartily sick of the subject. It was destined to be some weeks before Edward Oswald forgot his wonderful detective work, in the case of the missing Ancient House valuables.

Who could blame him? It's not everybody that's gifted to be a detective.

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DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 151 - Magnet No. 320 - "Easy Terms"

The stories about Fisher T. Fish were a useful stand-by for the occasional Greyfriars tale of a humorous type, and the deterioration in the American junior's character had not begun to take place when this Magnet was published in March 1914. Nevertheless, it was not an auspicious year, for the red Magnet had passed its peak and the stories were showing signs of tiredness.

No. 320 began promisingly enough with Fish putting up a notice with just three letters - F.E.P. This was the American system of advertising, using initial letters to arouse curiosity and interest. It eventually turned out that the letters stood for Fish's Easy Payments, and he was going to sell tuck on the instalment system, at a profit. Six-pennyworth of tuck could be purchased for one penny, with six further

weekly instalments of a penny. The profit was modest and long-postponed for Fishy, always assuming that the instalments were kept up. Once the tuck was eaten, there were certainly no goods to reclaim!

Of course, there was a complication. Bunter persuaded Coker & Co. to raid the packing case of tuck from Cripps's cart, and the four of them were enjoying a good feed when Ponsonby & Co. raided them. (Such actions would have been out of character in later Magnets, since neither Coker nor Ponsonby would have demeaned himself by raiding other people's food.) At all events, Fishy had delivered to him a packing case containing wood and he had to order another case of food before he could open his shop. After that the story seemed to fizzle out, and retribution fell on no one but Fishy, which seemed a little unjust. The twists and turns of some of the earlier Fisher T. Fish stories were completely missing on this occasion, and what had seemed like a promising story in the beginning ended up like a damp squib.

The incidental features in this Magnet were fascinating period pieces. There were advertisements for bicycles 'as ridden by royalty' with guarantees for ten or fifteen years. Two firms offered a simulation gold watch free, provided you sent a 6d. P.O. for a chain to wear with it and two penny stamps for postage. On the editorial page a reader was told that Lumley-Lumley was believed to be dead but Levison found that he was in a trance - a curious reference to a Gem series of some years earlier. Perhaps the most surprising item of all was a letter from the headmaster of New College, Clacton on Sea, recommending the Magnet and Gem for his pupils because of the sound morals and splendid healthy tone running through each tale. I wonder what he made of the raids on Fishy's packing case of tuck.

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### REVIEWS

#### BILLIONAIRING WITH BUNTER

Frank Richards  
(Howard Baker: £4.50)

The Magnet's 7-story summer holiday series of 1934, concerning the inimitable Billy Bunter in possession of untold wealth, is one of those which, for some reason, has not been given very much attention, and for that reason it is particularly welcome as one of the new volumes from the firm of Howard Baker.

Heavily contrived, on the lines of such pearls of fun as the Bunter Court series and

the Whiffles Circus series, this one, about Bunter as a billionaire, is one of those totally unbelievable romps which is such a joy for the reader who is ready to suspend belief and just sit back and enjoy himself with hours and hours of delicious entertainment.

Jarvis is a slimy and unscrupulous individual who has inherited the enormous fortune of an American billionaire, Old Man Shook, but the said Jarvis goes in fear of his life on account of the attentions of a gangster, one Tiger Bronx. Therefore Jarvis conceives the idea of turning over his wealth to Billy Bunter, to be Bunter's to use as Bunter sees fit, while Jarvis is to be employed as Bunter's valet. Thus, Jarvis keeps a finger on the wealth, while Bunter now receives the attention of the gangsters.

The story is played out mainly in France and Italy, with an exceptionally delightful sequence set in Venice, with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy on the scene, with his brother, Lord Conway. The few Hamilton yarns set in Venice down the years are among the author's most attractive tales, and this one is no exception.

The whole thing borders on farce, of course, and the author makes that just a trifle too clear, perhaps, when, at the finish, a later will is discovered in which Old Man Shook has left all his money to a home for stray cats in Chicago.

But, farce or not, it's great fun and full of incident and excitement.

To complete this joyous volume, there is a glorious single story "The Fellow Who Wouldn't Be Caned!" from the year 1928 - a yarn long-recognised as one of the funniest that Frank Richards ever wrote.

### GREYFRIARS ON SAFARI

Frank Richards

(Howard Baker: £5.50)

This is the 9-story Kenya series from 1931. The summer vac ran late that year, starting at the end of August, and carrying on into late October. This time the chums, with the ubiquitous Bunter, are the guests of Mr. Vernon-Smith and his son, the Bounder. The villain of the piece is Krantz, half-German, half-Arab, and he has leagued himself with slave traders in the heart of Congo country.

There are some fine pieces of characterisation as the series unwinds; particularly Kikolobo, the Kikuyu, and Mr. Chunder Run, an oily Baboo who kidnaps Bunter in mistake for Vernon-Smith.

This is a series where interest grows and excitement mounts as the weeks pass, and eventually the chums find themselves sold into slavery. With titles like "The Man-Tracker of Uganda" and "White Slaves of the Congo", the reader finds himself steeped in nostalgic adventure. At first, Bunter is happy when the natives insist he should eat and eat, but he grows tired of it when he realised that he is being fattened for a cannibal feast. And King Tofoloko, the savage whose mere nod meant life or death to all men in his kingdom, seems to have an uncanny link with someone we have read about in Central Africa in modern times - which are so much more civilised - or are they?

A fine book to add to the facsimile series.

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An Event. A day to be marked with a white stone, as it were. Another book from our own inimitable pair, Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig.

This time the two ladies concentrate on the impact of two world wars on the fiction of the 20th century - or, at least, on some of it. An immense subject, and one can only wonder at - and admire - the enormous amount of research and reading which must have been involved in the production of this volume.

The title is abstract, but not inapt. It is definitely a book for women, but one which those high and mighty creatures - Men - will delight to read over the shoulders of their better halves. It is not, of course, a book for children.

It ranges from early in the century, from Hamilton Edwards, who, with John Tregellis, wrote many stories warning of the danger from Germany, to Francis King and others who look back from the enlightened Seventies.

It is mainly concerned with the effect of war on the female of the species, and it covers an amazing range of writers in its absorbing progress along the years. There is mention of the Gem and the Magnet, but one has a sly feeling that Hamilton and his papers really get notice as the result of a little bit of affectionate sentiment. The same applies to Nelson Lee and Sexton Blake.

There is a large number of extracts from varying contexts, and these are, for the most part, hugely entertaining and often extremely amusing. The pictures, too, bring a warm glow to the hearts of those who remember at first hand.

The effect of war on the plays of the period is discussed at length, and the development of the short story and the long novel is handled expertly. If, on the odd occasion, the reader feels some of it is cynical, then that is probably because the writers are youthful and modern while the reader is elderly and jaded. The little bits you don't agree with add spice to the reading and the enjoyment. For instance, we are told that the last war provided a stimulus for writers like Richmal Crompton and Noel Streatfeild who turned out some of their best work then. I am unacquainted with Streatfeild, but I am quite sure that Miss Crompton's best work is found in the twenties and thirties. I am also not convinced that Lawrence, in "Lady C's Lover", as the ladies claim, tackled "without crudeness" the theme of sexual deprivation.

It is hard to do justice to a book like this in a short review, but it is good to meet up with writers who say what they think, know what they mean, and pull no punches. To sum up, it is a fine book on a novel subject, handled expertly and with originality. A "must" for everyone who has been a keen reader down the years. Which surely means us all.

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FOR SALE: Picture Posts 1938 to 1942, 20p each; Champions from 1932, Modern Boy from 1932, £1 each. Just William, Biggles; many early Annuals incl. Enid Blyton. Offers. Willing to exchange early and late Magnets.

"OLYMPUS", SANDFORD MILL RD., CHELMSFORD, ESSEX.

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BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA


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No. 54. MEET ME IN ST. LOUIS

Somewhere about this time, all the major renters began putting out all their new releases on non-flam stock. For many years experiments had been made constantly to find such a film to replace the highly-inflammable celluloid which had been the base of all cinematograph films, and had made stringent regulations necessary for all cinemas.

Many of those experiments had been successful apart from one very important factor. Non-flam films just could not be joined. Splices were impossible if a film broke, so non-flam stock never came into general use. Amyl-acetate, a bottle of which could be bought for a few pence from any chemist and which was used to join flam stock, was no use at all with non-flam. I have already recounted how, many years earlier, we had played the famous British film "Q-Ships", and the trouble I had with it because no splices could be made. It was a non-flam print. "Q-Ships" was the only non-flam print I handled up till the present time.

We were given due warning in the Kine Weekly what was going to happen, and were told that the renters had the only cement which would join non-flam stock together. Exhibitors were advised to collect this chemical from one of their renters. I picked up a bottle of it from Warner Brothers, when I was collecting films, and a small supply lasted a very long time. And it worked. At long, long last, non-flam film in cinemas was a fact.

About now, too, the renters starting sending all new features in up to 2,000 feet reels. Why it was not done earlier has always puzzled me, for I am fairly sure that every projectionist in the land used 2,000 ft. spools, and saved half the number of "changeovers" by joining two of the old-size reels together. During the whole of the time that I was screening films from the main renters, the maximum size of spools allowed by law on British projectors in British cinemas was 2,000 feet. I daresay that old law has gone now. Continental cinemas were much more lax. In the late thirties I remember going to a cinema in Bellinzona in North Italy, where they showed the whole of Chaplin's "Modern Times", without an interval, on the one projector which must have held something like 6,000 feet of film. Personally, I would have hated to handle a giant reel of that size.

At any rate, it was a big improvement to have something up to 2,000 feet in the reels from now on, and it saved an immense amount of wear and tear of the print now that it was no longer the practice to top and tail the reels of multiple-reel films.

Our opening programme this term, from M. G. M., was Robert Walker and Donna Reed in "See Here, Private Hargrove". M. G. M. made several films about Private Hargrove, and they were very pleasant, if modest, little comedies of army life. In addition there was "Trial by Trigger", one of the tip-top

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half-hour Westerns of which Warner's released a series. The exceptionally high quality of these little westerns were brought about because they used a good deal of the elaborate footage from many of the big western films which they had released from time to time. A coloured Travel Talk was "Picturesque Massachusetts" and a coloured cartoon was "Thugs With Dirty Mugs".

Next week, from M. G. M., a delightful musical: June Allyson and Margaret O'Brien in "Music for Millions". In the same bill was a coloured Fitzpatrick Traveltalk "Mexican Police on Parade" and a coloured Tom & Jerry cartoon "Naughty But Mice".

The following week brought a big musical with an all-black cast from M. G. M.: "Cabin in the Sky", the main stars being Ethel Waters, Lena Horne, and Rochester. Also in the bill was a Tom and Jerry coloured cartoon "Mouse Trouble".

Next, from M. G. M., William Powell and Myrna Loy in "The Thin Man Goes Home". In the same programme was a coloured cartoon "Peace on Earth".

Then, from Warner Bros., Joan Crawford in "Mildred Pierce", which I seem to recall was a fine drama with a big courtroom scene towards the end. Also in the bill was a Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon "The Hep Cat".

And then, from M. G. M., came one of my favourite Musicals of all time: Judy Garland, Mary Astor, and the lovely little Margaret O'Brien in "Meet Me In St. Louis", remembered for its charming story, its lovely songs including the title number, the Trolley Song, and the Merry

Little Christmas song, and for its splendid technicolor in gorgeous pastel shades. (A technicolor process now abandoned to make way for the hard, garish colour of the present day.) In the same bill with St. Louis was a coloured Travel-Talk "Georgetown, Pride of Penang" and a Duffy Duck cartoon "The Wise-quacking Duck". There were several other colour items, and this was in fact something which we were often playing now - a programme in colour from start to finish, with the exception of the Universal News.

Next, from M. G. M., the Marx Brothers in "A Night at the Opera", with a supporting programme which included "Gun to Gun", another of the really fine Warner potted westerns, and two coloured cartoons "Tree Surgeon" and "Daffy Duck's Southern Exposure". The Daffy Duck cartoons came from Columbia Films.

Then, from M. G. M., Red Skelton "Whistling in Brooklyn", the supporting bill including a Warner potted western "Roaring Guns" and two coloured cartoons "Batty Baseball" and a Daffy Duck cartoon named "Daffy Duckeroo".

The following week brought Ann Southern in "You Can't Do That To Me", plus a potted Musical "Three Cheers from the Girls" and a Barney Bear coloured cartoon "Bear Raid Warden".

Then what was becoming a rarity - the double feature programme. This one had, from M. G. M., Lana Turner in "Keep Your Powder Dry" plus, from Warner Bros., Jack Carson in "Make Your Own Bed", and, in addition, two coloured cartoons "Happy-Go-Nutty" and "Hobby Horse Laffs".

Next week another double feature

programme, and a real giant one (I can't help wondering whether I may have accidentally booked the two big features for the same date, as I did on the occasion, long before, when I found myself with the 2-hour "Hit the Deck" and the 2-hour "The Rebel" in the same bill, not to mention the shorts.) This one, however, included that superb film "The Adventures of Mark Twain" starring Fredric March, plus, from M. G. M., Wallace Beery in "Barbary Coast Gent". And a coloured Tom and Jerry cartoon "The Bodyguard".

In the following week, from M. G. M. came an all technicolor

programme headed by Brian Donlevy in "An American Romance", very famous and popular in its day, and also in the bill was a Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon "The Mouse Comes to Dinner".

Then, to wind up the term, we played the re-issue of the M. G. M. classic "David Copperfield", starring Freddie Bartholomew, W. C. Fields, Edna May Oliver, Madge Evans and plenty of others. In the supporting bill was a coloured cartoon "The Unwelcome Guest".

(ANOTHER ITEM IN THIS SERIES NEXT MONTH)

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# The Postman Called

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

W. T. THURBON (Cambridge): I hope Josie will forgive me if I ask whether she is being quite fair to Sir Hugh Greene over the omission of Sexton Blake from "Rivals" and "More Rivals of Sherlock Holmes". As I read the introduction it seemed to me that Greene was using stories from a collection of bound volumes of the monthly magazines, "Strand", "Pearsons", "Windsor", etc. If so, he would not have moved into the field of the weekly papers such as The Union Jack, Penny Pictorial, etc. It would not necessarily be snobbishness on his part, but merely the fact that the weekly papers did not come into consideration in his projected series.

Mr. Cure may be interested to know that I have a copy of Union Jack No. 319, of 20 November, 1909, "Sexton Blake, Scoutmaster". This was pretty quick off the mark, since the Brownsea Island Camp was only held in 1907. This was a story of Sexton Blake taking the place of a kidnapped scoutmaster whom he rescues with the aid of Tinker and the "Wolf Patrol" from some villains engaged in skulduggery in connection with a mine on the moors.

BRIAN DOYLE (Putney): In the August issue you say 'I doubt whether there are film fan magazines for today's enthusiasts ... I don't think there are ...'

In fact, there are three popular fan magazines: "Photoplay Film Monthly", "Film Review" and "Films Illustrated", as well as more 'serious' publications as "Films and Filming", "Sight and Sound", "Monthly Film Bulletin" and "Continental Film Review". So movie fans are still catered for these days!

I miss the old "Picturegoer" and "Picture Show" very much, especially for my work as a film publicist, which partly consists of getting interviews, photographs, etc., of the stars in the Press, including such magazines as these.

JOHN ROBYNS (Hayle): The 'Collectors' Digest' for August is loaded with Cinema nostalgia.

"A Word from the Skipper" in reference to the Kinematograph Weekly and "Pictures" stirred memories almost long since forgotten.

Like yourself, I too dislike people who have the effrontery to give detailed data of long since past film artistes who were not even born when silent films were shown.

It is sad that Pearl White was a chronic alcoholic, but surely the sadness was for Pearl White herself. But there is a bond between 'stars' and their public. I remember with great pleasure those old Pathe Frere Pearl White serials even after over sixty years, and now at the age of 75 my supreme collection of Pearl White souvenirs and films afford great pleasure.

Mary Pickford was called "The World's Sweetheart" and the title was indeed justified, but when she and Pearl White were at the height of their fame, I believe that Pearl White was a more popular world star than Mary, and for this reason. In those early days the serial film had a great hold on the public and since Pearl White specialised in serials, it is safe to say that Pearl had more 'fans' than Mary, by virtue of the fact Pearl was before the public for many weeks at a time.

EDWARD MURCH (Yelverton): I find the Cleeve series well worthy of its high reputation. The great thing I find with these Gem stories is the

lack of padding. Much as I love old Bunter, I am heretic enough to say that sometimes I find the lad a trifle tiresome, and tend to skip what I can tell is to be an inconsequential chapter where he is merely Bunterising and not furthering the plot or adding to vital characterisation, etc.

LAURIE SUTTON (Orpington): Recently I was watching a "Looking Back" programme on TV, and they showed some film of the old Franco-British Exhibition at White City. I found myself craning forward, trying to spot Tom Merry, Figgins, and Cousin Ethel in the fun-fair scenes. My little boy, aged 5, has started school this year, and we had a school circular announcing that "Professor Blades is coming to St. Anne's to give another of his fascinating Percussion Demonstrations". Surely, I thought, with a name like that, this could only be Lowther, Kerr, or Gordon Gay in disguise.

Mrs. W. MORSS (Walthamstow): You will be pleased - I am sure - to hear of a healthily growing off-shoot of the Charles Hamilton Centenary Exhibition which I arranged with help from the Staff at our Central Library in Walthamstow, in 1976.

I bumped into the Chief Librarian last week, and he asked me whether I knew that one of our Branch libraries had - as a result of the Exhibition - approached him for help - as they wanted to set up a permanent shelf and spot for the Howard Baker reprints. The object being to popularise the books and make them easily accessible to everyone.

I went along to see for myself what had been done, and was delighted to see a long wide shelf with lots of reprints well publicised just inside the door. The librarian assured me they did lots of "trade".

Other libraries please note! The size of the books is NO bar to display. What Walthamstow can do - you can!!

WILLIAM BRADFORD (Ealing): I await my monthly C.D. with an eager anticipation equalled only by my boyhood excitement at the arrival of "Chums" or "Magnet". If only I had discovered it earlier!

H. TRUSCOTT (Huddersfield): Mr. Cook seems to find nothing peculiar in having raised a criticism concerning the inclusion in the C.D. Annual of an article he had not read. At the risk of being thought stuffy and old-

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fashioned, I do! He says that I couldn't blame him for suddenly thinking when he saw my article PINK FURNITURE in the C.D. Annual that he was looking at a piece from the "Guild of Cabinet Makers". I restrain myself (and it needs some restraint) from making a remark about his suddenly thinking, and content myself with saying that I most certainly can blame him - for not reading the article before he made his ludicrous mistake.

As to my "sweeping statement", I see nothing sweeping about claiming that A. E. Coppard wrote one of the most outstanding books ever written for children. If I had claimed it was the most outstanding, he would have had a point. What I did write is quite justifiable. Nor do I understand Mr. Cook's remark about my flitting from the particular to the general. What I wrote was particular all the way.

As for his final sentence, may I remind Mr. Cook that it was he, or his "correspondent", who queried why the article had been included? I did not query why the editor had included Mr. Cook's letter.

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# News of the Clubs

## MIDLAND

Meeting held 25th July, 1978. This was a lively and enjoyable meeting.

The usual features Anniversary Number and Collectors' item were on view. These were Anniversary Number Popular 340 published on 25th July, 1925, and a bound volume of Nelson Lees, Number 53, published 10th July, 1916, and other consecutive numbers to 2nd Sept. 1916. Also on show was a hefty volume from Ted Sabin, "The Official History of Fleetway House". This aroused interest because it included facts about editors of the old papers. M. C. Down who visited our club in the fifties was mentioned.

There was a lively discussion on the fact that in the long Greyfriars saga many characters featured in the early Magnets were

dropped and new characters brought in. Bulstrode vanished from the scene and of course some characters were featured in an attempt to increase readership. Morgan was included to catch the Welsh school-boy.

Not all this was Charles Hamilton's doing. The substitute writers were often guilty as for example when Courteney was killed "off" by Pentelow and Piet Delarey, the South African junior introduced.

Geoff Lardner wondered more was not made of Skinner with his ill-disposed humour and subtle cleverness. Other characters were mentioned who might have been "developed". Still perhaps it is not quite fair to Charles Hamilton who did so much to enthrall us to point out that he might have done more. Time sets a limit to all our efforts.

A reading by your correspondent on Coker's mad antics in trying to get Prout to make fifth formers prefects while the Head is away ill and Prout, temporary head was very amusing - Coker at his funniest.

We shall not meet again until 31st October.

With the holiday season upon us we wish all Old Boys' Book enthusiasts enjoyable holidays with lots of reading of the old favourites.

J. F. BELLFIELD - Correspondent.

LONDON

Seventy years after the first Red Magnet appeared, the club assembled at the Charles Hamilton Museum in a celebration Luncheon and tea party. The president of the club and also curator of the museum was an ideal host and as, is now customary, provided suitable souvenir menu cards. The front cover depicts Magnet 389, volume 9, and the back one is a picture of Bunter being caught by Mr. Quelch purloining a pot of jam. Inside is an appropriate piece by John Wernham entitled "Seventy Years After". But to my mind the highlight of the card is the delightful treatise by Alice Stafford and entitled "A Girl's Eye View of Greyfriars". It contains information about the Fleetway House.

There were twenty-nine members and friends at the gathering, who after an excellent luncheon, were entertained by John Wernham. He played over tapes of the Serendipity, John's interview with C.H. Chapman, the Greyfriars Suite in its entirety and then screened the

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colour film of the Margate meetings, drawings by Chapman, a visit to the latter's home at Tokers Green, John's interview about the museum and Hamilton plus many more subjects. Photographs on the front lawn were taken on what must have been one of the very few fine Sundays of this summer.

A fine tea was enjoyed ere the last callover time arrived.

Next meeting at the home of Reuben and Phyllis Godsave, 35 Woodhouse Road, Leytonstone, London, E11 3NU. Phone 534 1737.

BENJAMIN WHITER

### NORTHERN

Saturday, 12 August, 1978

A welcome from Chairman Geoffrey Wilde to a goodly company which included Sue McCormick, reading English and Drama at Aberystwyth University and home in Preston for the long vac.

Last month's comic readings were followed up by three dramatic readings. The first was chosen and read by Mollie and consisted of excerpts from Angela Brazil's 'The Luckiest Girl in the School', a story written over sixty years ago.

It is a story of Wynona Woodward's schooldays, and the excerpts were about Wynona, her brother Percy and their aunt Harriet. Brother Percy finds a secret drawer in an old cabinet. In the drawer is a document - aunt Harriet's Will. Percy burns it - but - ultimately, all is well that ends well!

Keith Atkinson chose chapters 8, 9, 10 and 12 of the Second Wharton the Rebel Series and elected Sue McCormick as reader. Wharton seeks to escape from Quelch by hiding in the seagulls' cave. Later Quelch is trapped by the tide, facing certain death, until Wharton returns to rescue him - at the risk of his own life.

Geoffrey Wilde chose and himself read another story of a cave, this time from the 1938 'Phantom of the Cave', in which Bunter, frightened out of his wits by a ghostly apparition, faints in terror. When Bunter recovers he is many miles away - and his story of the phantom is not believed!

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**ARTISTS BY ACCIDENT** by W. O. G. Lofts

It is interesting to record just a few of the artists who became quite famous by their illustrations of a popular character(s) as it were by 'accident'. Sherlock Holmes surely the greatest fictional character ever invented was originally intended to have been drawn by Walter Paget, whose excellent illustrations of the H. Rider Haggard and Robert Louis Stevenson novels had caught the publishers eye. Somehow the lines got crossed, and his brother Sidney Paget got the commission, using his brother Walter as the Holmes model. Walter's excellent profile it has been said was very much more presentable than Conan Doyle's original conception. Very few Holmes devotees were also aware that Sidney Paget curiously lived just off Baker Street, and opposite Charles Dickens home.

Another pair of brothers in a curious mix-up were the Payne's both clever comic artists in the early days. G.M. was probably slightly the better creating Constable Cuddlecook in The Jester. The Daily Mirror in 1921 had created Pip-Squeak - and Wilfred through 'Uncle Dick' (B. J. Lamb) and they wanted G.M. to illustrate this famous trio. A phone call to the Amalgamated Press office got through to the wrong Payne - his brother Austin B. and he ended up being the artist. No brotherly love when it came to business.

C. H. Chapman was another artist one could say by accident got one job and lost the other! When the second Magnet artist Arthur Clarke died suddenly in 1911 (it has been reported whilst actually drawing a Bunter illustration) Chapman was rushed in and took over his work (first drawn by him 7th October, 1911). As Clarke was very much thought of, and only thirty-four when he died, it was quite possible he could have illustrated almost to the end of The Magnet's run. When The Boys' Friend wanted another artist to take over the Rookwood characters from Phillip Hayward, Chapman was strong favourite having proved his ability to draw the Greyfriars boys. He was waiting patiently to see the editor in The Boys' Friend office, when the outside door suddenly flew open, and the burly G. W. Wakefield swept in straight past the astonished Chapman and into the editors den and got the job. Chapman who personally told me the story, was almost speechless at

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the time, how anyone could go out of turn and get what he considered his extra job.

John L. Jukes the comic artist is best known for his front page strip of Alfie the Air-Tramp in The Joker. Yet he was only the third artist. The creator A. T. Pease had run out of ideas very quickly, and another very talented, very neat under-rated artist took over named Gerry Pain. After about a year, he sad to say, committed suicide and Jukes was rushed in to take over. Quickly Jukes soon put his own characteristics and comic material in the strips and drew it for many, many years.

Jukes, got the regular job by accident in more ways than one!

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DEAR MR. EDITOR .....

by Leslie S. Laskey

Writing in the July issue, Len Wormull describes his rather unrewarded attempts to lodge suggestions and queries at the Editorial Offices of the Fleetway House in the 'thirties.

I am fortunate in being able to claim a 100% success rate in my own similar efforts. Only twice did I write to an Editor - both occasions were in 1938 - but I was lucky on each occasion.

At that time "The Champion" Editor was awarding penknives to readers who sent in jokes which were then published. I sent a joke which, at that time, I thought was uproariously funny, although, by constant repetition in slightly varying forms, it has now become a hoary old chestnut. It popped up once again in Michael Watts's column in the "Sunday Express" only a few weeks ago. Anyhow, it must have caused, at the very least, a modest guffaw in the "Champion" Office for I duly received my penknife, and later had the pleasure of seeing my joke, and my name, in the columns of the "Champion".

It was a good little knife, with two blades. Forty years later it is still in my study desk and is used frequently.

About the same time I also wrote a letter to the Editor of the "Magnet", requesting a story about Aubrey Angel. This particular character had never appeared in my Greyfriars story I had read up to that time, and I was curious about this rather shady and shadowy Fourth Former who had been the very first personality reviewed in the

"Greyfriars Alphabet" when this feature appeared in the new "Greyfriars Guide" in July 1937. In my letter I mentioned that I had been in bed ill, for several months. Possibly this fact helped to arouse editorial sympathy. At any rate, a few months later, in "Magnet" No. 1613, there appeared a story entitled "The Sportsman of the Fourth", in which Aubrey Angel played the leading role. I cannot remember whether I had a reply to my letter; but it didn't matter much, in any case. My wish had been fulfilled. It was a good story, too, and this appears to have been Angel's first appearance since the Lochmuir Castle Christmas series in 1923.

I think it must have been Angel's unusual name which aroused my interest, apart from the fact that he never seemed to feature in the stories.

Chapter One of "Magnet" No. 546, opens with a group of Fourth Formers discussing the expected arrival of a new boy for their form.

"Angel?"

"Yes; that's the chap's name" said Temple of the Fourth, with a nod.

"Ye gods!" said Fry. "What a name!"

"Oh, rather!" remarked Dabney.

What a name, indeed!

Once I had learned that Angel was one of the black sheep in the flock, I remember thinking how oddly inappropriate his name seemed to be. However, a name which is a contradiction of either appearance or character can actually help to focus attention on its owner.

At one of my schools there was a master whose physical build exactly matched that of Mr. Prout.

His name was Small!

As a result, he was the object of a good deal more attention from those boys who were not in his Form than might have been the case had he been Mr. Smith or Mr. Brown. Possibly he was not altogether flattered by this particular form of publicity. Certainly, I recall that he often displayed a portentous frown which was exactly like Mr. Prout's.

Angel of the Fourth was certainly very far from being an angel in his personal ways. In fact, our Aubrey really was a bit of a bad lot. Arguably, he was almost as bad a character as the notorious Cecil Ponsonby of Highcliffe, who would surely, in due course, have made acquaintance with the interior of one of H. M. Prisons.

Incidentally, Angel appeared again, briefly, in the Bertie Vernon series in the summer of 1939 ("Magnet" No. 1631). Possibly I had jogged Frank Richards' memory concerning this long-neglected character.

Anyway, my letter to the Editor seemed to have done the trick.

I was a happy and satisfied reader.

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