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CAVALCADE

In their excellent new book "Women & Children First", (we reviewed it in our September issue), Mrs. Cadogan and Miss Craig take a little swipe at the Noel Coward play "Cavalcade", which was packing the Drury Lane Theatre in London nearly fifty years ago.

I am mildly puzzled as to how "Cavalcade" comes to be included at all in a work which purports to consider "The Fiction of Two World Wars". When "Cavalcade" came on the scene, the first world war had been over for more than a dozen years, and the second world war was still quite a long way ahead. Though the play starts with the Boer War and takes in the Kaiser's War in its journey down the years, it is unlikely

that it carried much of a message concerning the ethics of war. A playwright, by 1930, was more likely to be politically motivated, if he had any motivation beyond earning his living.

"The impact of 'Cavalcade' was tremendous", our ladies tell us. And they go on to assert: "From this distance in time it seems surprising that this rather stilted and selective view of the social effects of war could have been so well received."

In fact, it is an exaggeration to claim that the impact of 'Cavalcade' was tremendous. On the vast majority of people in this country it had no effect at all. It was an enormous theatrical hit, and it packed Drury Lane for many months because it was a rattling good show. "Annie" and "Elvis" are packing their respective theatres today. "The Mousetrap" has been running for over 25 years, but it would be laughable to suggest that it has any impact.

To know what made "Cavalcade" the great hit it was, you have to have seen it. On the stage at Drury Lane.

I should be sadly ungallant if I thought it possible that either of our two ladies who write so well, could be old enough to have seen "Cavalcade" on the stage of Drury Lane, way back at the start of the 1930's. No doubt they have read the play - but that is something entirely different. They may even have seen the film. It was made a very long time ago, soon after the stage run ended, but it has been re-issued since. I saw it in Walton-on-Naze about 1950, and enjoyed it then, though the film was much inferior to the stage play. When I first saw the film in Gravesend - it opened the then new Super Cinema in that town - in 1933, I was disappointed. It came too close in time to the stage version, for anyone who had seen the latter.

The ladies tell us that "At the beginning of the 1930's a play that brought in 'Soldiers of the Queen', 'Land of Hope & Glory', and 'Nearer My God to Thee' was not likely to fail." They're pulling our legs. It would take far more than a few bars from a couple of patriotic pieces of music plus a bar or two from a hymn tune to fill Drury Lane, at West End prices, at any time in its history.

I saw "Cavalcade" at Drury Lane - twice. It was sheer spectacle which packed Drury Lane for "Cavalcade". The scenery was massive and breath-taking. The cast was enormous. The period atmosphere the

producer obtained was thrilling and remarkable. It was a presentation which would be far, far too costly to put on today. It will never be equalled. Also, it was a bit sentimental, and us old-timers liked our entertainment to be a bit sentimental. And some of the lines, in my opinion, were lovely. We weren't hard-boiled in 1930.

"Cavalcade" was not a musical, though it ended with a big musical number "Twentieth Century Blues", which still lingers slightly in the memory.

If you accept that Coward was putting over some message, then the ladies may have something when they wind up by saying "The overall mood of the play seems ambivalent." What they mean, I suppose, is that the play was patriotic and also showed the tragedy of war.

My view, however, is that Coward intended no message at all. He wrote to entertain the theatre-going public and to make a fortune for himself. And he succeeded admirably.

USE YOUR LOAF!

Though the blatant frauds of the hobby's early days are no longer with us, it happens occasionally, even now, that I get a letter from somebody who has had an unhappy experience to mar his joy in collecting. My advice to all and sundry is never to send money in advance to anybody who is a stranger to you. If the vendor wants his money first - reliable dealers generally don't, though there are bad customers as well as shifty dealers - then use the Third Man system, if you are in any doubt.

And make it quite clear exactly what you want. Years ago, a reader paid a high price for Nelson Lees and received a parcel of John Bulls.

The golden rule is "Use Your Loaf". My experience is that it is the gullible who get cheated. If an offer sounds too good to be true, that is probably exactly what it is. And always pay by cheque if dealing with a stranger.

ETHEL REVNELL

I was sad to see that Ethel Revnell has passed on at an advanced age. Teamed with Gracie West, Ethel was the tall woman in the brilliant

music hall act Revnell & West. Gracie West was the little, short one, the perfect foil to Ethel. Contemporaries of such stars as George Formby, Old Mother Riley, Donald Peers, and Lily Morris, the two brilliant comediennes could pack any theatre in their heyday. I recall them in a girl guide act, and often saw them at Kingston Empire and other houses. They made the thirties shine. Another link with our youth has passed over. There can't be so many of them left.

THE ANNUAL

I promised last month to give you a pre-view of some of the attractions in this year's edition of Collectors' Digest Annual. Our favourite contributors are right on top of their form.

Les Rowley is with us in one of his delightful fantasies which are always so popular. This year he takes a "Day Return to Friardale". Mary Cadogan's superb article deals with Grace Kelwyn who won the hearts of early readers of the School Friend. She has dedicated her article to our own lost heir, the Princess Snowee.

Josie Packman goes to town on the "New Look" Sexton Blake, and, with the mellowness which comes to us as the years pass, gets a different angle on that rather controversial period. Roger Jenkins contributes a wonderful piece on the different counties visited by the Hamilton chums - a piece of research which tingles with nostalgia. It is one of Mr. Jenkins's finest articles ever.

A newcomer to our Annual contributors is Jack Doupe, who has happy memories of the Boys' Own Paper, which reaches its centenary early next year. Nic Gayle is in Nelson Lee land with his "Legend of the Sealed Room", which is fiendishly attractive. A most unusual article comes from John Bridgwater who discusses "Blakenisation".

And that's all I have space for this month. I'm sure it whets your appetite. And that's only the start of our giant Year Book. I hope to find space to pick out a few more plums from this delicious concoction next month.

By the way, have you ordered your Annual yet?

THE EDITOR

Danny's Diary

OCTOBER 1928

There are two attractive new regular features in *The Modern Boy*. Stacey Blake has written a serial named "The Isle of Peril", all about pre-historic monsters which turn up to make trouble for modern travellers. George E. Rochester has written a new series about one, George Porson, who sets out to make his fortune with an ancient aeroplane, a dog, a sense of humour, and four shillings and eightpence.

But the star turn, as always, is *King of the Islands*. First tale of the month is "The Sea-Cook". The original cook is named "Danny" (What A Cheek!) and he is a Kanaka. He gets the boot from the "Dawn". So Ken engages a new cook, a Chinese named Wu-Fu-Wu, who has splendid references. He seems harmless, but he puts a drug in the soup.

In "Prisoners of the Dawn", the little Chinese has seized Ken's ship, and threatens the lives of the skipper and his small crew. In "Turning the Tables", Ken, with the aid of Koko, the Kanaka boy, manages to defeat the crafty Chinese.

In "The Stowaway of the Dawn", it is Danny, the former cook who decides that the Dawn is his home - and there's no place like home - and he stows away on the ketch. An amusing story.

There has been a terrible railway disaster at Charfield in Gloucestershire. The night express from Leeds to Bristol crashed into a goods train at Charfield, just before dawn. It occurred in the station, just where a road bridge spans the line, and some of the wreckage was thrown up into the road. Fire broke out, from the gas lighting of the carriages. The accident seems to have been due to the driver of the express over-running signals. 15 people were killed, and a large number injured.

The first story this month in the *Nelson Lee* is called "Honours Even" and it is the final story concerning the rivalry between St. Frank's and the River House School. Then came "Going to the Dogs" which is the start of a new series with Willy Handforth in the lead. A greyhound racing track has been opened in Bannington, and Willy is very much

against such a sport. And Willy has a new pet greyhound named Lightning.

Next came "Playing the Professionals" in which St. Frank's Juniors get the chance to play Bannington Town, a professional side, at football. Final of the month is "The Plotters of the Remove". Bill Brice, the bookie, is determined to get possession of Willy's dog. This original series continues next month.

Oddly enough, the title of the paper has been changed this month. It is now The Nelson Lee School Story Library. Funny how people think that they can improve things by changing the details. Seems a bit daft to me. And we are promised a new serial next month, with Nelson Lee as a detective again, with Nipper as his assistant.

A fairly good very early Greyfriars tale "A Traitor in the School" in the Schoolboys' Own Library this month. The Moocher, a rascal who knew Billy Bolsover in the old days, turns up in the neighbourhood, Bunter falls on Mr. Quelch and puts him out of action for a time, and a new master, Mr. Roper, turns up in charge of the Remove. But Mr. Roper is a thief in league with the Moocher, and they plan to rob Greyfriars.

The other S.O.L. is "The Conspirators of St. Katie's" by Michael Poole.

Summer time ended on the 7th, and we put our clocks back. So it is winter time - and reading time - again.

The famous Orient Express has been in a collision, and 27 people have been killed in the disaster.

The month's first story in the Magnet, "The Secret of the Schooner", is not by the real Frank Richards. But the next week, Frank was back with a simply terrific new series. In the opening tale of the series, "The Japer of Greyfriars", we meet a new boy named Christopher Clarence Carboy, who is the biggest practical joker that Greyfriars has ever seen.

The second tale of the series is "Be Careful, Christopher!" There is a limit to practical joking, and Carboy oversteps the limit, especially with Harry Wharton. Final of the month is "The Boy With a Past". The rumour gets round Greyfriars that Carboy was sacked from Oldcroft. But Carboy goes on with his practical joking. The series continues next month. A truly fine school tale, this series.

At the pictures this month we have seen Hobart Bosworth in "The Chinese Parrot"; Ben Lyon in "The Perfect Sap"; Adolphe Menjou in "The Sorrows of Satan"; Guy Newall in "The Ghost Train"; Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell in "Seventh Heaven"; Karl Dane and George K. Arthur in "Rookies"; Harry Langdon in "Three's a Crowd"; Renee Adoree in "Heaven on Earth"; Ronald Colman and Vilma Banky in "The Magic Flame"; and Moore Marriott in "Passion Island".

There is a new play on in London entitled "Alibi". The star is Charles Laughton who plays the part of a detective Hercule Poirot. The play is taken from the book "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd" by Agatha Christie.

The King and Queen have opened the new Tyne Bridge at Newcastle and Gateshead. It is said to be a fine example of engineering.

The silly captaincy series has run on in the Gem. The titles are "A Schoolboy's Temptation" about Mellish; "No Good as Captain" about Fatty Wynn; "Tompkins the Valiant" about Clarence York Tompkins; "Tom Merry's Triumph" which tells how the series winds up.

In the Popular, the series has continued about the Rio Kid on the Carson ranch. First tale is "The Rustlers of the Rio Bajo"; then "The Ranch Raiders"; then "The Secret of the Lost Trail"; and lastly "Rounding up the Rustlers", in which the Kid proves that the villain of the piece is Steve Carson, the rancher's nephew. A marvellous western series.

The Graf Zeppelin has flown from Germany and landed in New York, taking 112 hours for the journey.

EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 85, "A Traitor in the School" was made up rather curiously, though it was in a form which worked well enough. The opening dozen chapters from a Magnet tale "Foes of the Fourth", of the Spring of 1912, concerned Bolsover Minor who had been found in the slums of London, after the manner of Joe Frayne. These chapters opened the "Traitor in the School" S.O.L., and were followed by the entire red Magnet story of the same title. In the Magnet, the two tales, in 1912, were separated by a Valence story.

For many years the Charfield railway disaster of 1928 was considered to be the last of the great train fires. With the passing of gas lighting and wooden rolling stock, the danger from fire on the railway seemed to be over. This long complacency was ended, after nationalisation, with three big railway train fires in the years 1949 - 1951, with some loss of life and many injuries. There was fire in a railway crash at Barnes in 1955, and, of course, in the recent sleeper coach disaster in the west country.

The Charfield disaster provided one of the world's strangest and saddest stories. The bodies of two small children were found in the wreckage. No amount of enquiry ever brought to light the identity of the children. They could not be linked with anybody on the train, and nobody ever came forward to claim them. There was never any explanation as to how two such young children came to be travelling unaccompanied on a night express train. The children are buried in an unnamed grave in a Charfield churchyard.)

* * * * *

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

Further to that item about the old Fleetway House building in the June C.D. I passed by it the other day, the frontage was still intact but I caught a glimpse of the back which seemed to be a heap of rubble.

I have been informed that U.J. No. 506 featured Professor Kew and Carlac. The usual Editor's Chat was missing from the previous week's U.J. No. 505 so no indication was given as to the featured character. Another amendment for your Catalogues as well as an additional note of a series of short stories which appeared in the Boys' Herald as follows:

No. 437	The Airship Spy	dated	2 Dec. 1911
438	Jack Arnley's Disappearance	"	9 Dec. 1911
439	The Missing Millions	"	16 Dec. 1911
440	The Strange Case of Mr. Smithers	"	23 Dec. 1911
441	A Highland Mystery	"	30 Dec. 1911

No author's name available. Perhaps someone may be able to supply it.

The new Sexton Blake series is due to appear on B.B.C. 1 sometime in October so will you all watch it and let me know your opinions.

Our Local Library are showing drawings of places in old Dulwich and Peckham. One of them is a picture of the Crown Theatre, Peckham, where the first Sexton Blake play was acted, actually the very first performance. This old theatre has also been destroyed by our modern vandals.

SEXTON BLAKE ON THE AIR

by Roger Sansom

In January 1939, George Curzon played Sexton Blake, with Brian

Lawrance as Tinker, in a serial on BBC Radio. It was slotted into a magazine programme of a type once popular in broadcasting, loosely connected snippets on more or less light-hearted themes.

The other day, nearly forty years on, I read the script of that serial - a curious experience in time-travel, not least because I was doing so on a BBC microfilm machine. The story was a considerable number of very short episodes - linked by an announcer reading the story-so-far at the beginning, and the full "Is this the end for Sexton Blake? Or will Tinker find him in time?" treatment at the end.

One might suppose that such a story would seem (particularly in cold print) rather low on real content in terms of plot interest, or at worst a parody of a rather self-conscious style. On the contrary, the cliff-hanger endings worked very well, always leaving me eager for the next instalment - though to find it I had to whizz through sheets and sheets of photographed script on all sorts of irrelevant matters - the other items in the 'magazine'. Once, spinning my wheel between Blakian episodes, I was stopped short by the speech headings 'Curzon' and 'Lawrance' in the 'chat' part of the programme. I found that Blake and Tinker had been roped in to take part in a studio 'team-discussion' - despite the fact that five minutes later, we were back with the serial to find them still in their usual tight spot.

The script for the Blake story was by the reliable Ernest Dudley (I don't know whether it was an original plot for radio, or had appeared in print), and concerned an 'honourable' partner in a conspiracy who tries to break away and tell all to Sexton Blake. He is murdered in Baker Street itself by his sinister confederates, and his son is also gunned down. The son has vital knowledge - but will he recover, and pass it on? He is abducted from a Hampstead nursing home, and taken to the villains' sinister lair on a deserted island. There Blake and Tinker pursue them, and on the island - before the denouement is complete - nature takes a hand in the story.

With such a long serial, I wonder how many people followed it from beginning to end. Anyway, with a new Blake serial promised later this year, it is nice to note that the detective is not ignored by the BBC. Interesting, too, that they have awarded him such various writers as Mr. Dudley, Francis Durbridge (in a wartime serial), the 'home-grown

Blakian' Donald Stuart for the 1967 series - and now Simon Raven on television. I await with interest Mr. Raven's version of Sexton Blake.

WAS SEXTON BLAKE A JUVENILE CHARACTER? by W. O. G. Lofts

In answer to Cyril Rowe's interesting article in the August issue, as far as I know the Amalgamated Press were always proud of Sexton Blake, their very own detective. They had every reason to be, as after all he had a big hand in building up the Harmsworth Empire, and was one of their biggest moneyspinners. Indeed, only recently one of their executives (now I.P.C. Mag. Div.) was enthusiastically discussing with me the new Blake series that will appear on T.V. later this year. Apart from Howard Baker Publishers issuing a new Omnibus, the Daily Mirror also has some projects in hand.

One thing however, that has puzzled many people through the years, has been the exact age group for which Sexton Blake publications were intended. Most agree that it was probably in the teenager plus category, certainly for a much older boy and girl than most of the A.P.'s other papers catered for. They did advertise the S.B.L. in most juvenile story papers, usually alongside the current issues of the Boys' Friend Library, and the latter was certainly in the juvenile category. Even editors of the pre-war Blake papers were not exactly sure for whom they were catering. The question intrigued Harold W. Twyman editor of the Union Jack so much, that in the twenties he conducted a survey of his readers. The results showed that the ages ranged from nine to ninety-nine! the latter being a reader from Canada, but generally the main group was proved to be in the fourteen to twenty-one year old category.

William H. Back, who controlled both the S.B.L. and the Union Jack until his death abroad in 1922, always maintained that the stories were intended for juveniles. When the Penny Pictorial and Answers published short Blake yarns in the 1906/12 period they dropped Tinker from the series, and replaced him by more mature assistants, as well as changing the detective address. Tinker was apparently considered too juvenile a character to appear in a wholly adult publication. Willie Back incredibly once told W. W. Sayer (Pierre Quiroule) that fine writer and creator of Granite Grant and Ms. Julie to lower the tone of his stories as he was writing on too high a plane for the bulk of the readers. But to

counter this, and maybe it was after Mr. Back's death, there was a slogan in the U.J. "For readers of all ages".

John Hunter who introduced the large Captain Dack in the stories, told me that the tales had developed for the adult market at the time Tinker was given the name of "Edward Carter". The editor Len Pratt had given him instructions to do so as seemingly readers were still writing to Fleetway House for details of his real name. Astute subscribers were puzzled how he could get away with just being called "Tinker" on ration, identity cards, and other official documents such as a passport and the change to an adult readership had started when the former documents were still in use in the late forties.

Why I think Sexton Blake never appeared in the glossy magazines was not due to snobbishness on the part of its editors, but purely because they considered the character to be a juvenile one, and out of place in an adult magazine. There is no question however, that nearly all the Blake chroniclers were capable of writing adult fiction, most of them did in other fields with great success. In the thirties many authors sold their original Blake stories to Wright & Brown cutting out any mention of Blake and Tinker, and substituting with other characters and this was an adult lending library market.

It is of course true that Blake appeared successfully on the stage in the early days, but in the days when melodrama thrilled the public. He of course appeared in dozens of films, but the majority were very poor and B movies, even taking into consideration the period they were shown. I agree with Josie Packman that an element of snobbishness is shown towards Blake today. Sir Hugh Greene was indeed offered a Blake story in one of his collections, but declined it as not having the required literary merit. In answer also to John Tomlinson, Julian Symons has criticised other popular writers through the years including Leslie Charteris and Edgar Wallace because they 'had no literary merit'. As these two great authors of popular fiction have sold probably millions of more books than his own highbrow efforts there is really no more to be said.

In summing it up, there are several more reasons which sway towards Blake as a juvenile character. After all he was published in the juvenile departments at Amalgamated Press, and generations of much

younger boys and girls know of him through reading his adventures in strip form in the Knockout and Valiant comics. The post-war T.V. programmes which brought such tragic results for Lawrence Payne were for the children's viewing, though the pre-war Radio adventures were for the adult listening.

Last of all, that great detective writer Dorothy L. Sayers in a famous essay many years ago, remarked that "Sexton Blake was the office-boys Sherlock Holmes, but a part of our National folk lore". This quotation is now almost a classical phrase used time and time again by various writers meaning in fact that Sexton Blake was read mainly by the adolescent.

* * * * *

Nelson Lee

PSMITH AT ST. FRANK'S? ...

Nic Gayle

One of the less enjoyable aspects of appearing in print in a magazine such as this is that you know that you cannot often get away with mistakes. Your readers are a knowledgeable lot, who will spend an evening checking some throwaway fact or figure to see if you have got it right, and are not slow in putting pen to paper if you haven't. Well, good; that is surely one of the reasons why C.D. is such an alive, prospering and fascinating magazine. But it can be disconcerting for the author; like Agag, he's jolly well got to keep an optic open for banana skins, in this case of the literary variety. In a recent C.D. (No. 371) I took a tumble, and I thought at the time that this was a mistake deserving of an article to itself, but I did not bother to write it as I felt sure that someone else would. Well, I was wrong; nobody did, so I though I would after all, and I have. Here it is.

I made the statement that William Napoleon Browne was a marvellously original character. Well, he is a marvellous character, but he is not original, at least not in outline and origins. The fact is, he represents the outcome of E. S. Brook's lifelong devotion to the writings of P. G. Wodehouse. E.S.B. had nearly every book that 'Plum' wrote, including the early school stories, and it is amongst these that we first

find the personality of the redoubtable William Napoleon Browne; in the pages of Plum's first great character creation, Psmith, to be exact. They are both the loquacious and orotund mentors of two long suffering friends, 'comrade' Mike Jackson in Psmith's case, 'brother' Horace Stevens in Napoleon Browne's. 'Comrade' and 'brother' are the habitual forms of address that are airily used by both parties whether they are speaking to masters, pupils, friends or enemies. Practical socialism, if you like. Both however, are particular about THEIR names, as Psmith expounds here to Comrade Jackson:- " ... By the way, before I start, there's just one thing. If you ever have occasion to write to me, would you mind sticking a P at the beginning of my name? P..S..M..I..T..H? See? There are too many Smiths, and I don't care for Smythe. My father's content to worry along in the old fashioned way, but I've decided to strike out a fresh line. I shall found a new dynasty. The resolve came to me unexpectedly this morning. I jotted it down on the back of an envelope. In conversation you may address me as Rupert (though I hope you won't) or simply Smith, the P not being sounded. "

However, this paltry addition of a single letter is not enough for Browne, as Brother Horace soon discovers:- "... 'not' said Browne 'that I am blaming you. Far from it. In their skittish exuberance, parents frequently nail such abominations to their offspring. In my own case, as you know, William was allotted to me. A bold honest name, but scarcely adequate. There is nothing in the name of Bill to suggest power and forcefulness. Thus the addition of Napoleon. I may add that Napoleon is my middle name. and it will further interest you to learn that I inserted this name of my own volition. "

In physical appearance, Psmith and Napoleon Browne are almost identical; both are tall, thin, immaculately dressed with habitual grave expressions on their faces. Psmith affects a monocle, and devotees of Plum will know that he is not an original prototype; this is in fact a pen portrait of Rupert D'oyly Carte, the son of the Savoy Opera D'oyly Carte. In the St. Frank's saga the monocle is given to Archie Glenthorne rather than Napoleon Browne, and Archie is I think unique in the annals of schoolboy literature because he wears a monocle from necessity rather than as an affectation.

Both Psmith and Napoleon Browne were removed from their previous schools by their fathers - Psmith from Eton, Browne from Uxton - and placed in their present positions after reports which they both describe as 'Libellous'. The attitudes which they adopt to their new schools at this point is revealing, and shows a subtle character difference which is important; Psmith's is a rather tired, mildly disapproving, make the best of it attitude, whereas Napoleon Browne couldn't really care a less. There is just a slight tinge of the nicest intellectual snobbery about Psmith. Both characters need a stage and an audience, but Psmith is rather selective about which gallery he is playing to. Napoleon Browne's totally supreme self confidence renders him quite indifferent to such considerations. For him, St. Frank's is but another coming triumph in a life long tour.

Consider the question of the acquisition of studies. The theme is the same in both cases. Psmith and Napoleon Browne in their respective new schools just coolly choose which studies they want without waiting for any to be allocated to them; thus of course stepping upon other people's toes. In Psmith's case he calmly appropriates the study that rightfully belongs to a boy called Spiller, his name being next on the particular list for this apartment. Browne's scheme, true to those of his more illustrious namesake, is more grandiose and upon a more sweeping scale. He not only appropriates the study of the captain of his form, but also his title - taking his conquests in bulk, as it were. In a superbly comical interview with his new form master, Mr. Pagett, Browne apprises him of these two facts, making use of Mr. Pagett's new hobby of modelling sealing wax as a lever to gain his ends. The point worth noting here is that Browne discovers by accident the nature of Mr. Pagett's hobby, a subject which he knows slightly less about than the good master, and was up until this point relying solely on his persuasive eloquence to see him through.

"... I am itching, positively itching to get to work sir' said Browne eagerly. 'Not that I would dream of touching your own particular sticks of wax. May I crave an honour sir? May I see some of your complete work? Do not delay, Brother Pagett, for I am literally agog.' Mr. Pagett coughed.

'Well, as a matter of fact, I haven't really started Browne' he

said awkwardly. 'I only bought the set yesterday. I .. I thought the hobby might interest me at odd moments. You know something about it it seems.'

'My good sir, it will take hold of you like a drug' declared Browne. 'Crossword puzzles are a mere jest compared with this King of Hobbies. You will regard all crossword puzzles with a pitying smile, and at the end of your day's work, you will dash sealing waxwards like a gazelle leaping to the brook for its evening drink' ...

Well, after this, the ground is laid and the day won. In contrast Psmith, whose nature, if no more worldly wise is more studiously cynical than Browne's, equips himself with full knowledge about his housemaster's pet hobby before he ever meets him; a kind of insurance policy, to be exact. A policy which he cashes in in one of the most memorable Wodehouse scenes during the confrontation between the housemaster and the contestants for the disputed study.

The magic of these two characters lies in their differences as well as their similarities. Some of these I have already touched on, and beyond the rather obvious statement that William Napoleon Browne is NOT just a carbon copy crib of Rupert Psmith, this is not a point that particularly needs emphasising. However, two observations do need to be made; firstly, while both are admittedly adult characters in school-boy's clothing, Browne unbends in a human, youthful way and almost acts his age at times, indulging in horesplay, jokes, rags, cricket and the first youthful stirrings of love in a way that Psmith does not. Because to a certain extent he can fit in, Browne remains a brilliant star character for an author to have, one who can be brought to the fore when he is needed, but can lapse back comfortably in the wings when he is not. Psmith never quite fits in in a school context to this extent; he is either at the centre of attention, or the wheels don't seem to go round as comfortably as they should. Psmith fits uncomfortably into the school environment rather like an adult straddled across a child's rocking horse. He had to grow up quickly, and one senses that his author knew it; the last three Psmith books feature him in various adult roles, as a bank cashier, a newspaper owner, and as a private secretary

The second point is that Psmith's meteoric rise was a destructive orbit for Comrade Jackson. At Wrykyn it was Mike Jackson's show all

the way, but after the advent of Psmith he occupied increasingly small roles till by the last story he ended up being simply married to one of the protagonists in the tale, never actually putting in a personal appearance himself. A rather ignominious end, one feels. But the same cannot be said of Napoleon Browne. Indeed, quite the opposite occurred in one of the greatest series of the Nelson Lee, 'Stevens' Father's Play' in which Horace Stevens absolutely blossoms out into a fascinating and intriguing character, with the help of his guide and mentor.

To finish up then, let us return to the scene where Chambers, the ex-captain-to-be of the Fifth meets his nemesis:-

"... 'And do you think' demanded Chambers with concentrated fury - 'do you think that you and Stevens are going to stay here? ... Have you got the nerve to expect such a thing?'

'My nerve' replied Browne placidly, 'is simply colossal'."

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 225. THROUGH THICK AND THIN

In these sophisticated days, it seems that the anti-hero is more popular than the "straight as a die" specimen. It could be just a sign of the times in which we live. Writers and producers could be out to persuade us that the slick, swilling private eye, with his ready propensity to leap into bed with every female of tight figure and loose morals, is preferable and more realistic than the ascetic Sexton Blake and his like.

In the past thirty years, from time to time, the old argument has been dug up and aired - the one that Harry Wharton was so superior a character to Tom Merry and so the Magnet was more popular than the Gem. We are told that Tom Merry was too perfect. That Harry Wharton was depicted as having faults and failings, and therefore was more human.

It is a specious argument. In 97 out of 100 Greyfriars tales Harry Wharton was depicted as every bit as much the blue-eyed, straight as a die, hero as ever Tom Merry was.

Up till the First World War, Tom Merry was England's most popular schoolboy, and, as a result, the Gem was far more popular than the Magnet up till 1914. Charles Hamilton said so, and C. M. Down said so, but there is plenty of evidence for us beyond anything that two men

said. For instance, when the Penny Popular started, it was Tom Merry who was selected to occupy a good third of the paper. Not Harry Wharton True, the first Magnet was serialised at the back in fairly early days, but, after a few weeks, it ended, and Greyfriars did not turn up again in the Penny Popular until 1917.

The second convincing factor is provided by the tales, introducing Tom Merry and St. Jim's, in the Boys' Friend Library. There were "Tom Merry & Co.", "Tom Merry's Conquest", "The Silent Three", "The School Under Canvas", "Cousin Ethel's Schooldays", and "Through Thick and Thin".

So there were at least six full-length tales introducing St. Jim's in the B.F.L. before 1914. Harry Wharton did not arrive in the B.F.L. until "The Boy Without a Name" in 1915 - and even that was really a Highcliffe Story. And one suspects that "Rivals & Chums", the sequel, in mid-1916, did not sell as well as they expected. There was that slightly fishy business of a thousand copies, which had gone down to the bottom of the sea as a result of a German torpedo, being offered to readers who will "like to have a book which has had a remarkable adventure". Perhaps one is being a little cynical in wondering whether the book hadn't sold well and was being "remaindered off".

By 1915, of course, Harry Wharton went into the Dreadnought in an effort by the new editor, Hinton, to boost flagging sale. Harry Wharton did not save the Dreadnought. It foundered, owing to lack of support and not to any paper shortage, by the early summer of that year.

One can spare just a few lines to look appraisingly at "Through Thick and Thin", which seems to have been Hamilton's last B.F.L. before the war started. Without looking the matter up, one can judge the date roughly from internal evidence. It was a Lumley-Lumley story, and the Outsider had already reformed. As Vernon-Smith and Levison and Mornington were to be in their turn for a time, the reformed Lumley, after the manner of those who underwent reformation in the early Hamiltonia, seemed to be rather a milk and water affair. In this case, he gets under suspicion when he secretly gives help to a sleazy character named Lilburn, whom Lumley had known in his old days in the Bowery of New York.

Though the plot is spread thinly over the 39 chapters, it is a

pleasant tale, with much of the gentle charm of the period. There are three little sequences which may well have been original at this stage but which became items in the stock drawer down the coming years.

Arthur Augustus wires his father: "Fiver urgently needed. - Arthur." He gets the reply "No fivers available. - Father."

Blake is suspected of dirty deeds by the prefect Knox, and when Knox learns that Blake has thrown a bundle of papers into the pond at the end of the football ground, Knox is certain that the parcel contained sporting papers. And Mr. Railton is called in, and Knox is made to look a fool. Both the Bounder and Harry Wharton set up similar subterfuges, years later.

Finally, Lumley breaks bounds and he has not returned at bedtime. Lowther skilfully makes a dummy with some of Lumley's clothes - his clothes "were of an unusually striking pattern for a St. Jim's junior" - and sits the dummy on a chair against an open window, with the idea that any prefect looking for Lumley will think he is merely getting a breath of fresh air. Knox, later on, comes along the dimly-lit corridor, and loses his temper when he gets no reply from the boy at the window. He smacks the dummy's head, and, apparently, Lumley tumbles out of the window to his death, putting Knox in a panic. An amusing little sequence that was to crop up again.

This was probably the last Lumley-Lumley story which Hamilton ever wrote. Just why he abandoned Lumley is inexplicable.

Though Greyfriars was to become the main factor of the S.O.L. in the twenties and thirties, it never featured anything like so much as St. Jim's in the B.F.L. Of St. Jim's there was still to be the new story, famous in its day but never reprinted, "After Lights Out", plus the two splendid travel series from the blue Gem, "The Schoolboy Castaways" and "Under Sealed Orders". But, from Greyfriars, apart from the two Highcliffe stories, there were only the two sub tales "School & Sport" and "Football Champions", both of which featured St. Jim's as well in sporting contests, and the reprinted-from-the-old-Magnet tale "On the Warpath".

So it can hardly be denied that Tom Merry was more popular than Harry Wharton up till the outbreak of war. The fact was that Tom Merry caught the imagination of the human boy in those earlier days. That

human boy wanted somebody on whom he could model himself, no matter how unsuccessfully, and Tom Merry filled the bill. We could add gently, that had Tom Merry not been the success he was, then Harry Wharton might never have been created at all.

The Gem slipped after 1914, the Magnet overtook it, and the Gem never regained the lost ground. It is worthy of thought that Hamilton inexplicably dropped Tom Merry into supporting roles after 1914. Very rarely was he ever to be the star again, even though his name was ever to the fore. It is an inescapable conclusion that the Gem's popularity fell away with the eclipse of Tom Merry.

I wind up with a typical Hamiltonism from "Through Thick and Thin".

"It's all the fault of that boundah Lloyd George", said D'Arcy. "My governah has been much closer with the fivahs since that wotten supah-tax was put on incomes, and now that the House of Lords is pwactically abolished, I suppose peers will have to be vewy economical. I wegard it as wotten. I shall send a telegwan to Lloyd George - Bai jove, I forgot that I am bwoke, and cannot pay for a telegwan. But for that, I should certainly tell the Chancellah of the Exchequah what I think of his weckless conduct."

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THE OTHER TOM MERRY

by J. Mearns

The figure of Tom Merry as the all-conquering hero of the cricket and soccer field at St. Jim's is well-known. His biggest triumphs were in the early days of his career. Before he came to St. Jim's, he was chosen to play for the Clavering First XI cricket team. Later, Kildare picked him to play for the First XI football team against Redclyffe. Both happenings were freaks, you might say.

Despite his undoubted prowess as a centre-forward in Junior games, Tom Merry shone mainly in School matches. When it came to House or Form matches, he was up against Fatty Wynn all the time.

As time went on, he was obliged to 'up' his performance because players like Kangaroo and Talbot of the Shell had arrived as well as Levison and Redfern of the Fourth. The effect on Tom Merry was two-fold. He became a more constructive centreforward and a much

more thoughtful, if no less inspiring, team captain.

It has been remarked how Tom Merry seemed to occupy less of the limelight after the arrival of fellows like Cardew and Talbot and Levison at St. Jim's. Perhaps the truth of the matter is that he'd simply matured a little; grown-up, if you like.

There's a passage in "Cardew the Rebel" which illustrates the process at work. Cardew fails to turn up for Games Practice and Kildare gives Tom Merry a 'dressing down' in front of the assembled 'Middle School' for not carrying out his responsibilities as Junior Captain and ensuring a full turn-out. Tom realised he has been too easy-going. It is extremely doubtful he will ever be so easy-going again ...

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BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 55. "UNDER THE CLOCK"

We opened the new term with John Garfield in "Between Two Worlds" from Warner Bros. In the same bill was a Daffy Duck coloured cartoon "The Ducktators".

Next week, from M.G.M., brought George Sanders in "The Portrait of Dorian Gray". When we played it, the painting was always shown in technicolor, though the main film was in black and white. It reminded me of a silent film, from First National, entitled "Stepping Along", starring Johnnie Hines - a story of a racing-car in which the car was always on the screen in brilliant red, though the main film was in black and white. I still have a few clippings of the car in red, taken out in a vandalistic moment of which I should be ashamed. In passing, when Dorian Gray was shown on TV not so long ago, the whole film was in black and white, though the credits mentioned that the painting was in technicolor. (When "The

Women" was played on TV, the final scenes of the mannequin parade were in black and white, though in the original release they were in colour.)

In the same bill with Dorian Gray we played a coloured cartoon "Jerky Turkey".

Next, from Warner's, came Ida Lupino in "In Our Time". The programme included a potted musical "Cavalcade of Dancing" in colour, and a coloured cartoon "Robin Hood Makes Good".

The following week, from Warner's, brought Errol Flynn in "Uncertain Glory", plus one of the delightful Mack Sennett collections under the title of "Happy Faces", and a coloured cartoon "Porky Pig's Feet".

Now M.G.M. reissued that incomparable romance "The Barretts of Wimpole Street", with Charles Laughton, Norma Shearer, Frederic March and

Maureen O'Sullivan, and we gave it a return date. In the supporting programme was another of Warner's Mack Sennett pot-pourris "Once Over Lightly" and a coloured cartoon "Screwy Truant".

Next, from Warner's, came Humphrey Bogart in "Passage to Marseilles", the supporting bill including a Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon "Puss 'N' Booty", and a potted musical "The Army Show".

Then, from Warner's, came Dennis Morgan in "The Very Thought of You" - which has long gone from my thoughts. A coloured cartoon was "Daffy Duck in Hollywood", and an attractive-sounding potted musical in colour was "Songs of the Range".

Next came a double-feature programme. M.G.M. now reissued "The Wizard of Oz" with Judy Garland, Ray Bolger, Billie Burke, and a lot more, and we gave a return date to this delightful fantasy musical. The second feature came from Warner's and was Pat Kirkwood in "Flight from Folly". Plus a coloured cartoon "Hamateur Night".

The following week, Judy Garland was back again in her most recent film from M.G.M.: Judy Garland and Robert Walker in "Under the Clock", a truly charming comedy, and one of Judy Garland's few non-singing roles. A lovely little film, poignant in the fact that both the star players were to wreck their careers and shorten their lives through flaws in their own characters. A second feature was "The Eighty Days" - the story of the V.I. That is, of course, the story

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WANTED: "The Swoop" by P. G. Wodehouse. Please write to:-

D. MORGAN, 22 HAYES RD., BROMLEY, KENT, BR2 9AA.

of the fly-bombs. It was a documentary, and I have not kept a record of which renter released it. In addition, there was one of Warner's splendid half-hour "westerns", "Oklahoma Outlaws", and a coloured cartoon "Barney Bear's Polar Pest".

Next, from M.G.M., the heart-warming weepie "Waterloo Bridge", with Robert Taylor and Vivienne Leigh. I have seen it several times since, and always enjoy two hours misty-eyed. A potted musical in the same bill was "Grandfather's Follies", and a coloured Tom & Jerry cartoon was "Mouse in Manhattan".

Next week, a very fine and famous film in Technicolor, from M.G.M.: Micky Rooney and the young Elizabeth Taylor in "National Velvet", in which a girl rode a horse in the Grand National. One of the all-time best. A coloured Tom & Jerry cartoon was "Tee For Two".

Last of the month, from M.G.M., brought what sounds like heavy drama: Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn in "Without Love" - though one usually associates those two stars together in domestic comedy. But I forget anything about it. On the same bill was another Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon "Flirty Birdie", and one of the excellent Crime Does Not Pay series: "Phantoms Inc."

(ANOTHER ARTICLE

IN THIS SERIES

SHORTLY.)

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REVIEW

THE TWO RONNIES COMIC BOOK

Denis Gifford
(Corgi Carousel: 65p)

The popular TV comedians in a glorious romp of cartoons, concocted by Denis Gifford and beautifully drawn in action-packed pictures by George Parlett. Outstanding items are "A Very Moving Picture" and "The Island of Thingybob", but there are masses of other hearty laughs. A lovely little paperback treasure-chest to enjoy on the journey home or in the last half-hour before bed. And just the ticket to use as an unexpected gift for the kids. Treat yourself to some merry moments - all for 65p.

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"JINGLES" AND "BOUNCER": A DOUBLE MYSTERY

by Denis Gifford

One of the most fascinating (and infuriating) aspects of our hobby is that just as it seems we have every title of every boys' paper and comic pinned down and catalogued - up pops another! This has happened to me twice in one recent week, a terrible confession for the author of The British Comic Catalogue, which took me ten years to research and is presented by the publishers, Mansell Books, as the definitive reference book to British comics. What makes it odder is that both these titles are, in fact, listed in the Catalogue - Jingles (1934-1954) and Bouncer (1939) - but both, it seems, had predecessors of the same title issued by different publishers. And neither title was ever deposited at the British Museum! Clearly a case for Inspector Lofts!

The Bouncer mystery came to light when I was researching for the Complete Comic Chronology, which is part of my British Comics Encyclopedia issued through A.C.E. To get a basic start-stop publication list I use the files of the trade paper National Newsagent. Here I found, out of the blue, a note that The Bouncer Comic had ceased publication with the issue dated 31st October 1931. I say "out of the blue" because I had found no notice of a paper of that title ever having commenced publication! A careful retracking through back issues produced no such notice, and a search of the British Library catalogues and Publishing trade yearbooks also revealed nothing, except that the paper had clearly never been deposited according to law.

Suddenly, more information was unexpectedly revealed when I

bought from Miss Harris the remains of her late brother Arthur's collection of early comics and related items. Among these were a few issues of the collector's monthly Hobby World. In the issue for October/November 1931 appeared this notice:

The Bouncer

This Boys' penny periodical has suspended publication. The last number issued is No. 36, dated 31st October, 1931. The proprietors inform us that they hope to re-publish the journal in the New Year, in a re-constructed form. See advertisement on another page.

Well, here was a turn-up for the book (or the Catalogue!). More information, and the implication that this was not a comic paper but a story paper, to boot! The "advertisement on another page" announced that Nos. 26 to 36 "of this Boys' Periodical" were available for one shilling and sixpence (Post Free) from Ed Herdman, Publisher, 1 Southgate Street, Bishop Auckland. Had The Bouncer been a local publication, then? I doubt it, as Ed Herdman was listed on page two of the magazine as publisher of Hobby World. The advert also informed readers that "sufficient sets of the above have been set aside to fill orders from abroad." So perhaps somewhere out there, in the remnants of our Empire, sit old subscribers to Hobby World with their runs of The Bouncer! If so, then here is one collector who would be pleased to hear from them and offer them a little more than the one shilling and sixpence paid for the papers so long, long ago!

The Jingles mystery also sprang from the Arthur Harris material. Miss Harris enclosed a letter to Arthur from the late John L. Jukes, the immortal "Alfie the Air Tramp" artist in The Joker. This letter, dated 26 April, 1955, contains the following intriguing statement:

"It gives me great pleasure to know you actually recalled a specimen of my early work in Jingles, edited as you rightly say by Eric Chatfield. In 1922 I dropped out of the field by going to South Africa . . ."

Jingles in 1922? Eric Chatfield? Jukes did work for the old A.P. Jingles, but not until after the Second War. This could never have been called "early work". And as he left England in 1922, then what was the

Jingles (and who was Eric Chatfield) to which the youthful Jukes contributed cartoons? As Harris was an avid collector of amateur magazines, it seems likely that this early Jingles was one such publication, and indeed a later paragraph refers to Chatfield's "pass round mag so neatly hand-written that it was a work of art itself". Jukes also refers to "Chatfield's Uckfield", so once again the wide-spread readers of the Digest may be able to come to my aid. Over to you all (and especially over to Inspector Lofts)!

* * * * *

News of the Clubs

LONDON

Three visitors from the antipodes were in attendance at the highly successful Leytonstone meeting. These were Harry and Doris Matthews of South Australia and Jim Cook from New Zealand. The latter conducted his excellent quiz "Many A Slip" and this must surely have been the highlight of the gathering. The chairman, Eric Lawrence, read the script and Jim took the scores and it was Mary Cadogan that won the very good prize that Jim had provided. In the second slot were both Timothy and Miriam Bruning and Bob Blythe, the latter foregoing the prizes so the two youngsters could have them.

The host, Reuben Godsave, conducted a very fine quiz. This was won by Eric Lawrence and the Rev. Arthur Bruning was second.

Mary Cadogan gave three readings. The first was that of Winifred Morss's letter in the September C.D. dealing with her successful effort in getting the Waltham Forest Public Library to have a complete shelf of the Howard Baker facsimile reprints for loan and this has turned out very good as many of the younger generation are now borrowing these books. Following this first reading, the second was Brian Doyle's article on Frank Richards that is included in the 20th Century of Children's Writers that MacMillans are publishing shortly at £17.00. Continuing, Mary then read her own piece that appeared in Howard Baker's Easter Annual, 1978, entitled "Those Vicarious Vacs." Extracts were read from the newsletters of August and September, 1961

by Bob Blythe.

A fine day with the garden looking very nice in its early autumn foliage and it was a distinguished gathering of 32 that gave the hosts, Reuben and Phyllis Godsave, a hearty vote of thanks, at the conclusion of which turned out to be a very jolly and happy meeting.

BEN WHITER

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The Postman Called

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

D. E. BROOKS (South Tottenham): I thought the opening episode of that TV Sexton Blake serial was a shocker - a travesty. Tinker was terrible. It's an insult to Blake, the great man. A sarcastic satire.

JACK COOK (Newcastle-on-Tyne): I was very disappointed with Sexton Blake on TV. I thought the actors were miscast. Surely Blake should have been more mature. As for Tinker, he behaved like a moron. I expected a better production than this.

E. CORDY (Mansfield): I am full of nostalgia and would like some more of the Time Machine. It takes me back.

JOHN BRIDGWATER (Malvern): I feel I must echo what has been said by so many other devoted readers: thank you for providing us with such an enjoyable magazine which is eagerly looked forward to every month. I am very pleased to see Danny's Diary continuing into my childhood. It brings back many happy memories as does the Biography of a Small Cinema. I used to be a keen picturegoer before the war and the series has brought to mind many of the fine films we saw in those far off days. It is pleasing to see some of these old films revived on television, but all too few are shown.

Shall we be having any more of those excellent old Gem serials? It seems a long time since the last one ended, and I, for one, would welcome another, particularly one with a Christmas theme.

Again, thank you for continuing to produce C.D. with such a wealth of entertaining and interesting items.

R. H. CUSHING (Hitchin): The month of July, if it was not particularly

noted for anything else, marked the publication of 'Good Morning Boys', the well researched biography of the late Will Hay.

The films of Will Hay could well receive acclaim one day in the 'Biography of a Small Cinema', if indeed they have not already had a 'mention' - and it is with this thought mainly in mind that I am prompted to make an appraisal of this very readable book.

Will Hay's schoolmaster was hardly cast in the classic 'Mr. Quelch' mould, but he was, I suppose, every schoolboy's dream of the thoroughly inept and corruptible headmaster that so hilariously mis-governed the less than hallowed precincts of 'Narkover College'.

Other C.D. readers doubtless have their own particular memories of Will Hay - unlike his projected screen image - a genuine scholar.

A book to thoroughly warm the heart of all 'old boys'.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Most of the Will Hay films played the Small Cinema, and have already been noted in our series.)

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FOR SALE: Magnets: Stacey Series, perfect condition, £6.50; Bertie Vernon series (beautifully bound in hard red covers with gold lettering) £8.50; second Wharton the Rebel series, rough copies (quite readable) £8.50. Many other Magnets, Gems, SOL's (some early). I might have what you want! Also, all of Howard Baker reprints at £1.25 each. Send for my list. P. & P. extra. Write first.

DONALD B. DAVIDSON, HOUSE 44, HENDREFOILAN,
SWANSEA, WALES.

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SALE OR EXCHANGE: C.D. Annuals 1971 - 75; St. Frank's SOL's; School Friends; Bessie Bunter Merlin Books. Wanted: S. Friends, Schoolgirls' Own Libraries (pre-war).

MAGOVENY, 65 BENTHAM ST., BELFAST.

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I need -- WANTED ... "The Shadow Crook", G. H. Teed, "Murder Ship", G. H. Teed, both (Mellifont Press). Columbine Publ. Co. (hardbacks) - "Shanghai Dope", Hamilton Teed, "Crooks Vendetta", Hamilton Teed, "Menace Underground", Teed.

ELMO BROOKS, 32A ST. JOHN'S ROAD
STH. TOTTENHAM, LONDON N15.

THE DEMON GOD - IMPRESSIONS OF EPISODE ONE

by Roger Sansom

The appeal of "send-up" has always eluded me; I am not a James Bond fan. Therefore I was less than happy about the spiffing yarns type of publicity which heralded the new BBC TV serial, "Sexton Blake and the Demon God". Also, Mr. Jeremy Clyde normally appears as "cads" or "asses", so the casting of Blake seemed to suggest a snide approach. Indeed, the modern BBC tends to believe that anything which had its origins more than twenty years ago, if not actually absurd, is certainly a period piece, to be approached tongue-in-cheek. As this irreverence for the past includes its own magnificent history, one can hardly feel any special resentment on Blake's behalf. An article in Radio Times actually claimed it was remarkable so much interest should surround a character last chronicled ten years ago. Tell that to the commentators on "Hamlet". It also suggests that Blake suffered a personality change almost every week. To me, the remarkable thing, considering him as a team creation, has always been that he didn't.

Simon Raven's script set the action in 1927. Too much emphasis on "period" where Blake is concerned is rather to miss the point; the ITV series with Lawrence Payne went twenties-mad and you could say the same of the recent "William" and the BBC's Peter Wimsey, but all were enjoyable programmes. And indeed, in its way, I enjoyed the first episode of this one. The opening used the rather overdone 'boo-boop-a-doop' music to establish the epoch - then we were into a "mummy's curse" type of plot which proved at any rate that Mr. Raven had read plenty of vintage Blake's. Mr. Clyde was made to look far more right than I had feared, but alas, his voice is prissy rather than incisive. There was a silly sequence in which Blake (in order to offend the Pasha he had been engaged to approach tactfully) went out of his way to imply that he wasn't attracted by women. This is far from true of the character, but suggests a favourite theme of Mr. Raven's. This Blake was supported by a tough Tinker though the script assumed a bigger difference in age than we saw, a Pedro as yet untried and a rather "superior" Mrs. Bardell. Production was slick and the settings good. Derek Francis is much too English-looking to be cast as an Arab - but the plot has promise and the cliff-hanger ending suggests some suspenseful Sundays. At any rate it is good to have Blake on our screens and even a new paperback of the serial issued - at a rather stiff price for its length.

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DEATH OF NEW ZEALAND FAN

We regret to learn of the death of Mervyn Branks, a popular collector and enthusiast who lived at Invercargill, New Zealand.

Mr. Branks's eyesight had been failing for some years, but he never lost his love for the old papers. He died in his sleep, following an illness. He had been a supporter of Collectors' Digest for a very long time. He was nearing 70 at the time of his death.

THE FLAW IN THE CRYSTAL

(or, Who Were Our True Heroes?)

by J.E.M.

When I was about thirteen, my favourite heroes were Sidney Carton, Herbert Vernon-Smith, Zenith the Albino and Francis Felkington Frapp. The first three will need no introduction to anyone familiar with, respectively, Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities, the Greyfriars saga and the Sexton Blake stories of Anthony Skene. Mr. Frapp is likely to prove a more obscure figure. Even for me his literary context is now rather vague. I do remember that he appeared in The Ranger some time around 1933 in a serial story about a squadron of pirate aeroplanes. But I cannot recall its title, its author or any of the other characters. Frapp was not, I believe, even the leader of this colourful crew, so why was such a minor figure in a scarcely remarkable story so memorable for me?

Well, of course, there was that somewhat striking name (I'm sure his creator knew the meaning of the French words frappé and frappeur) but there was more to F.F.F. than a label. Lawless and cynical, he was also cool, brave and even gallant in combat. He was what we would nowadays call "his own man". When he was finally shot down in flames, "a mocking smile on his lips" - if those weren't the actual words of the narrative they ought to have been! - I could scarcely suppress a sigh.

And what had Frapp got in common with the other idols of my early adolescence? The answer is that, like the noble, melancholy Carton, the criminal but chivalrous Zenith and the wayward courageous Vernon-Smith, he was a failed hero or, if you like, an heroic failure - surely the most romantic and appealing of all fictional types. That is why he and many similar characters left such a lasting impression on me - and, I'm sure on other youthful readers too.

The totally noble and virtuous hero is rare in life; he certainly makes pretty dull reading in fiction. And dull our true heroes never were! Moreover, such flawed characters could actually provide real moral inspiration. Being far from perfect ourselves, we could more easily identify with them ... and, perhaps, learn.

Another character from my childhood reading who remains

obstinately in my mind, and for not dissimilar reasons, is one, Harold Linkman. He starred in a short story called The Cheat in one of Herbert Strang's famous collections (date: around 1930). Beginning with Linkman's first fall from probity in the school examination room, each brief episode in his short life ends with the words, "Harold Linkman had cheated for the first (second, third) time." Driven inevitably to the dogs by a career of dishonesty, he joins the French Foreign Legion (what else?) and finally saves his commanding officer's life by deliberately donning his uniform and getting killed in his place. As the last line of the story has it, "Harold Linkman had cheated - for the last time."

This yarn, I would guess, hardly a literary gem, but what a neat little parable of moral redemption - selfishness expiated by self-sacrifice, cowardice atone for by courage - and surely something of a challenge to those who deride the reading of our childhood as simplistic rubbish with nothing to teach us about life! In such tales we learned what morality is all about: sympathy, honour, fidelity and reciprocity (remember Mrs. Do-As-You-Would-Be-Done-By?).

Of course, a lot of what we enjoyed was trivial, but here I am reminded of the words of a distinguished writer of science fiction. When someone sneered that ninety per cent of sf is rubbish, the author replied, "Ninety per cent of anything is rubbish." The best of our youthful fiction did afford us at least a glimpse of the richness and poignancy of life long before we could truly experience them. More sophisticated literature lay ahead but for many of us it did not demolish our juvenile reading; it simply built upon it, and we still cherish those foundations.

Through a whole army of glittering romantics and flawed heroes, we enjoyed some of the great themes of all fiction - the struggle for honour, the tragic conflict between human strength and weakness - themes as old as the great stories of Greek mythology. As such, they are simply imperishable.

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WANTED: H. Baker Magnets, vols. 18, 22, 23, 29, 28, 39; Monsters, Bessie Bunter of Cliff House School, any original sketches by R. J. McDonald, or C. H. Chapman.

JAMES GALL, 49 ANDERSON AVENUE, ABERDEEN. Tel. 491716.

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".

BERT VERNON, 5 GILLMAN STREET, CHELTENHAM

VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA 3192.

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NEWS OF THE CLUBS - STOP PRESS

NORTHERN

Saturday, 9th September, 1978

Chairman Geoffrey Wilde opened the Meeting by remarking that the weather seemed to indicate firework time rather than early September! Nonetheless cosily ensconced, we discussed a variety of subjects ranging from the coming appearance of Sexton Blake on television to the films (some of them silent) of bygone days.

Darrell Swift regaled us with an account of his recent visit to Hollywood and a description of the set where 'Jaws' had been filmed. Out of the water, he said, rose a huge mechanical whale to the accompaniment of a terrific roar - Darrell had seen at first hand the star of the film!

Ron Hodgson presented us with a quiz in which he read short excerpts from various classics. We were to give the title and the author. Geoffrey Wilde emerged as the winner with a full set of answers.

After refreshments Ron Hodgson continued by giving us a reading from Gem 928, 'Too Good for St. Jim's'. There were just two Gems in the series and Eric Fayne had called it 'a delightful little story'.

Trimble's form-fellows are fed-up with his prevarications and decide to make him tell the truth - with an evident measure of success!

But Trimble reformed turns out to represent an even less desirable prospect to the Fourth than Trimble unreformed! And his form-fellows are led eventually to set about unreforming Trimble!

* * * * *

FOR SALE: Nelson Lees 1st n.s. 1 to 194 complete, S.O.L. St. Frank's, 44 consecutive monthly issue Magnets, long runs, 1936 to 1940. Offers invited.

STAN KNIGHT, 288 HIGH STREET

CHELTENHAM, GLOS., GL50 3HQ.