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VOLUME 34 NUMBER 401

MAY 1980

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A MONTH TO REMEMBER

When, a while back, I drew attention to the fact that we should shortly be reaching the 400th issue of this magazine, I little realised what I was starting and what was in store.

Our village postmen are used to bringing in large quantities of mail to Excelsior House, but the number of letters in recent weeks has been quite unprecedented. And the letters are still flowing in.

Weeks before No. 400 was out readers wrote to say how much they were looking forward to it, and since it appeared they have written to say how much they enjoyed it. It seems to have met with full approval - from the front page with Mr. Webb's superb cover which caught so beautifully the spirit of 400, to the back page where Webster Horrible Hunt put paw to paper to communicate with the Princess Snowee. Webster resides in Australia, by the way, and the letter was reproduced by royal permission.

There was unexpected joy for me, too, in the supplement so warmheartedly and generously contributed by our Northern and London clubs, included in the centre of the issue. So even the editor had something, which he had not read previously, to browse over in S.P.C.D.

Our Midland and Cambridge Clubs sent me along separate messages to add to the joy, and there were magnificent telegrams, lovely cards, and countless letters.

I understudied Snowee - and purred and purred. I can only hope that I deserved a fraction of the nice things which were written, but I "have me doubts".

I would like to write personally to everybody who wrote to me in recent weeks - but after No. 400 comes No. 401. And if I tried to answer all the letters, No. 401 would not be out before Christmas.

"The C.D. is so warm and friendly that I feel we have been close companions for years," wrote Mr. Jack Allison to me in a delightful letter, and he really hits the nail on the head. When I write my editorials, I feel that I am writing to an individual and not to a vast crowd of readers. So may I just say to you "Thank you for everything", in this editorial, and ask each one of you who wrote to me to accept it for the time being.

There was that wonderful day at the Rembrandt Hotel in London when the London O.B.B.C. met to celebrate the 400th issue of Collectors' Digest. Madam was there with me, making her first appearance since her illness last summer. And how she enjoyed herself at the Rembrandt! And so did I! It is a long time since I had such a perfectly happy day.

An excellent meal in perfect surroundings. A huge dining-room (the Blue Room) - and the great, thickly-carpeted lounge with its comfortable armchairs, where we gathered before and after lunch to move from group to group, talking starry-eyed over old times and old friends.

Mr. John Wernham had presented unique menu cards, formed by a 16-page mock C.D. containing star items from the past thirty years. A lovely idea - and a perfect souvenir of a perfect occasion.

There were six Australian readers of C.D. representing our overseas readers from all over the world. For what more could one ask?

Mrs. Mary Cadogan, loyal and true as always, proposed the toast to 'Story Paper Collectors' Digest, and the fact was unimportant that the editor of same, not having the gift of the gab and too lazy to prepare a speech, said a few words off the cuff, seized up, found himself with a blank mind (and no wonder!), and collapsed into his chair to the possible relief of everyone.

Mr. Roy Parsons, with a kind heart and to add yet another touch of luxury to this unforgettable day, had cigars passed round all the tables. I kept mine and smoked it with my feet up at home, hours later, and blew out smoke rings full of memories of a heavenly occasion. All those who formed part of the crowd on that Sunday afternoon will never forget it, I am sure.

The perfect end of a Month to Remember.

A NAME TO REMEMBER

Every old boy and girl, when hearing the name Darcy, thinks at once of the inimitable Arthur Augustus, - warm, friendly, kindly and a gentleman to his fingertips. Or of his Cousin Ethel who adds graciousness and charm to every little group of which she forms part.

Last month, we referred to a visit from the delightful Mr. and Mrs. Wafer from Australia. Lovely folk whom it is a joy to know.

This month we had a visit from another Australian family - the Darcy's. They were at Excelsior House on the Saturday and at the Rembrandt on the Sunday. The kind of people you feel all the better for having met.

Mr. Darcy, bubbling with kindly fun and the epitome of that gentleness and gentlemanliness for which we remember the Darcy who turned up at St. Jim's in far-off 1906. Mrs. Darcy - well, we often quote songs in this column so let's apply one to Mrs. Darcy - "lovely to look at, delightful to know".

And the teenage daughters, so wonderfully natural and entirely lacking that brash sophistication which is so often evident in our home-grown youth. I quote another old song for each lovable Miss Darcy: "stay as sweet as you are, don't let a thing ever change you".

THE PRINCESS SNOWEE'S CORNER

Some years ago we found a dead bird by the wayside. It had a

ring on its leg. We sent the ring to the British Museum, with particulars of where and how the bird had been found. The British Museum sent it on to the British Trust for Ornithology. After a short while, we received from the B.T.O. a most interesting document giving full particulars of the history of that particular bird - a song thrush. We kept the document in a delightful book on birds which was actually a gift to Madam from our good friend, Mr. Ben Whiter, the secretary of our London O.B.B.C.

A few days ago, Snowee came to us in the garden and laid a dead greenfinch at our feet. We hoped that she had not caught and killed the bird, and, in fact, felt fairly sure that she had not, for the bird was cold, while Snowee had been with us only a minute before. But the interesting point was that this bird, too, was ringed.

We rang the Hampshire ringer of the B.T.O., and he said he would drive over at once and collect the bird. Later on we were given the history of this bird. It had been ringed in 1976, and at that time it was two years old. So at the time of its death it was over six years old.

The ringer told us that large numbers of birds are ringed every year, but that the proportion returned after death is fairly small. He told us, in addition, that our area, where birds once abounded, has less every year as, inexorably, open spaces get built upon and trees cut down.

Finally, we were given the satisfactory information that the greenfinch had died from natural causes - it showed no sign of injury. It was a comfort to us that the Princess had not killed it.

THE EDITOR

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Danny's Diary

MAY 1930

The Popular continues to slip. It is showing so much change that I would think it must be losing a lot of the old readers. The unkindest cut of all, as some wise gentleman once said, is that the middle pages are now occupied with comic pictures. It's adding insult

to injury.

The Rio Kid has been replaced with stories of the Popolaki Patrol, by Charles Hamilton. They are adventure stories about a troop of boy scouts on the Congo among the Kikiyus. The five scouts are rather stock characters, which include the leader, Lyn Strong; and Fatty Page, the son of a storekeeper; he is always hungry; and Pip Parker, the doctor's son; and Smut, the Dutchman, the son of a South African farmer; and Stacpoole, who is a wealthy dandy who sometimes wears a monocle. The stories are quite good, but are very short, being of only four shortish chapters each. This month's tales in the series are "The Popolaki Patrol", "The Slaying of Simba"; "At Grips With a Gorilla"; "The Lost Hunters"; and "The Slave-Hunters of the Congo".

The only one of the old artists left is Chapman, who still illustrates the Greyfriars tales, the series now running being the long one about Loder as Captain. Rookwood only appears every other week (the supply of Rookwood tales from the old Boys' Friend is now running out, I reckon), alternating with awful tales about Calcroft School by Sidney Drew, which are too silly. And there is still a long Ferrers Locke tale. Wakefield no longer illustrates the Rookwood tales.

So, as I wrote at the beginning, the Popular is slipping. And it has an awful lot of advertisements, these days. If they don't soon change the programme, they will kill off what used to be my favourite paper.

Early in the month Amy Johnson began her solo flight to Australia. She landed safely in Australia twenty days later. What a brave woman she is!

If the Magnet has not been quite so absolutely tip-top this month, that is only by comparison with its own standards. And there have been some glorious moments of fun.

In "Bunter, the Prize Hunter", the Owl gets a letter from his uncle George. Uncle promises Billy £5 if he wins the term's prize for Latin verse. And, after a series of misadventures, Bunter hands in, for his entry, a copy of the tenth ode of the second book of Horace. And Mr. Quelch is scandalised by it all, in a delicious chapter.

Next week, a bit of a slapstick tale called "Bunter, the Ink-Splasher". Bunter throws ink over Mr. Quelch, and, to avoid his just punishment, runs away and joins a circus - until he finds that he is to

be paraded with a lot of freaks in a sideshow.

Then a new series in which Fish's father, in the States, becomes very rich over a corner in pork, and, in consequence, Fisher T. Fish receives the attention of Barney McCann, the gangster, who sets out to kidnap the new millionaire's son. Some good ideas in this series, and some funny moments. The stories so far are "Rolling in Dollars", "Gangsters at Greyfriars", and "The Hold-Up at Greyfriars". In one really funny sequence, Bunter gets kidnapped in mistake for Fish. The series continues next month.

My Gran sent £1 to her darling Danny for Whitsun, and I bought tickets for Mum and me to go to the Holborn Empire. They have wonderful, extra-long, variety shows there, twice nightly at 6 and 8.45. We went to the early show. The orchestra stalls cost 3/- each (but 3/6 if you book in advance). Top of the bill was Gertie Gitana, who always starts her performance by singing "Nellie Dean". Bottom of the bill was Jimmy James and his company in a sketch "The Spare Room"; also in the programme were Larry Kemble who is a trick cyclist; Conn Kenna and his partner in a comic aeroplane act; Ted Ray who is fiddling and fooling; and Rosie Lloyd, who is Marie Lloyd's daughter. There is a splendid big resident orchestra at the Holborn Empire under the direction of a man named Syd Kaplan.

Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, the Prime Minister, this month laid the foundation stone in Manchester for a new Reference Library which will be the largest in Britain.

It has been a drab month in the Gem. First tale is "The Secret of the Flowerpot". Miss Fawcett has had four burglaries at Laurel Villa. So the Terrible Three, Blake, Gussy and, for no sensible purpose, Trimble, go to Huckleberry Heath. They arrive at the station at midnight, and find Miss Priscilla's car there abandoned . . . No sign of Dent, her chauffeur-gardener. First time I ever heard of Miss Fawcett having a car or a chauffeur! It's all so silly. Tom Merry drives the car home, and has a smash-up. It turns out that some man named Grant found an incriminating letter, and shoved it in a flower-pot of crysanthemums at the house of a Mrs. Truscott. Miss Fawcett visits Mrs. Truscott, and Mrs. T. gives Miss F. the flower-pot. Hence the burglaries at Laurel Villa. Awful tale.

Next, "Skimpole, the Super-Man" which must be the silliest tale ever published in the Gem. Mr. I. Mix is a herbalist in Rylcombe. Skimpole buys a mixture to make him a strong man and a good sportsman, and Mr. Ratcliff buys a mixture to make him good-tempered. We find Skimpole flogging Kildare, and Mr. Ratcliff calling out "Bump him!" and playing cricket as a fast bowler.

Next, "Held to Ransom", a story of Glyn and his inventions.

Then "Brainy Grundy". This was not so bad as usual, and is probably by the real Martin Clifford, but it is all farce comedy, so it really is not very memorable. Lastly "Under Petticoat Rule" in which Miss Linton, a Girton girl who is Mr. Linton's niece, takes over the Shell temporarily. It gave me the itch.

Apart from a poor run of St. Jim's tales, the Gem is packed with a programme of tripey articles and stories. Surely it must get better. It can hardly get worse.

At the pictures we have seen a lovely musical "Sunny Side Up" starring Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell. Among the nice songs in it are "I'm a dreamer, aren't we all" and "If I had a talking picture of you-hoo". Then another nice musical "The Hollywood Revue". A lovely tune in this one is "Singing in the Rain".

Then two silent films: Lillian Hall-Davies in "Volga-Volga", and Clara Bow in "Dangerous Curves". Then an exciting talkie "The Four Feathers" starring William Powell, Richard Arlen, Fay Wray, and Clive Brook. Another nice musical was "Say It With Songs" starring Al Jolson and Davey Lee, with some good songs including "Why Can't You?" and "Little Pal". (I bought Doug a record of Gracie Fields singing "Little Pal" for his birthday.) The last film of the month was Sophie Tucker in "Honky Tonk" which was also a talkie.

Two fairly good tales in the Schoolboys' Own Library this month. "Rival Japers" is about the rivalry between the Remove and the Fifth Form at Greyfriars, and "Gunner Gets Going" is about a new boy at Rookwood, Peter Cuthbert Gunner, who is a kind of George Alfred Grundy. So-so!

EDITORIAL COMMENT: S. O. L. No. 123, "Rival Japers" comprised two Red Magnet stories, originally separated by a few weeks, entitled respectively "Frank Nugent's Great Wheeze" and "The Remove Form's Feud" of the summer of 1912. In passing, in those

Magnets the illustrations had been taken over by Chapman, owing to the death of Clarke. Chapman had been told to imitate the work of Clarke, and it is interesting to see how strikingly good Chapman was when he imitated Clarke.

S. O. L. No. 124, "Gunner Gets Going" comprised eight stories from the Boys' Friend of the summer of 1922. The Rookwood tales in 1922 were very short. One of the blemishes of Hamiltonia was the way character types were transferred from one school to another. Grundy with his two henchmen was introduced to St. Jim's as an echo of Coker, Potter, and Greene, and it is hard to believe that Grundy was ever popular with readers. Yet Gunner, and his henchmen were brought on to the Rookwood stage as a replay of Grundy & Co. This triplication of character types, is perhaps, the price a very prolific writer had to pay, but in retrospect we have long seen what a mistake it was.

I have never been quite certain of the origin of Hamilton's Popolaki Patrol series in the Popular of 1930. The individual tales were very short, and they were never advertised as "new" stories. It is possible that they were a series which Hamilton wrote for one of the Hamilton Edwards papers, though I have never come on them, and I incline to the view that they were new in the Popular. So far as I know they were never reprinted later. There are many reminders of the Magnet's Kenya series of 1931, and one can assume that Hamilton had them well in the forefront of his mind when he sent the Greyfriars chums to Kenya.)

* * * * *

Nelson Lee Column

A LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S

by Jim Cook

Mondays being a vicars' day off the Rev. Goodchild, vicar of Bellton Church, paid one of his infrequent visits to Dr. Stafford, headmaster at St. Frank's. Although ostensibly for a friendly chat and a cup of tea, the vicar's main purpose was hopefully to obtain a donation for the restoration of a damaged reredos. The recent heavy rains had caused a leak in the church roof.

During the course of the conversation in which the kindly old Head had passed over a cheque, an item the vicar had read in one of the London dailies concerning Lord Dorrimore prompted the Rev. Goodchild to mention the famous sporting peer's famous holiday trips abroad with the juniors and girls of the Moor View School. The good vicar was of the opinion these boys and girls must be the most widely travelled young people in the world. The Head agreed. Dr. Stafford then referred to

the school records that Nelson Lee had instituted from the time of his arrival at St. Frank's.

The list of places and countries visited by Dorrie's famous holiday parties looked like a Grand World Tour except that the dangers and thrills experienced were never included in official conducted tours.

It was difficult to know just where the boys and girls hadn't been!

First there was the Treasure Hunt in the South Pacific which was to be the forerunner of many more trips abroad. The following "season" saw the St. Frank's party in North Africa searching for another treasure whose secret lie in a gold locket.

Then follows during the next vacation a wonderful journey to unknown Brazil to find the missing Col. Fawcett. Actually it was Col. Kerrigan, but a Col. Fawcett was missing in the same area about two years later and one can be forgiven for associating fact with fiction in this case.

A short trip in an airship for the next holiday leaves the St. Frank's party stranded in a strange country called Mordania after landing on the Adriatic coast. But though this adventure had many thrills both during and afterwards the best was yet to come when the next trip abroad took the party to the South Seas. Dorrie's famous yacht, the Wanderer, was wrecked on its way to the Solomons, and Lee and the boys were cast on an island.

This account was so enthralling for the vicar that the Head suddenly realised the time had sped by all too quickly and promised he would continue with the further adventures of the holiday party the next time the vicar made his call.

Consequently the Rev. Goodchild appeared the following Monday and the Head was pleased to continue reading through Nipper's narratives of holiday adventures.

Apart from visits to British towns during the School Train interlude, it is to New York and California that is mentioned. Here Dr. Stafford had by-passed the holiday that was spent by Lord Dorrimore, Nelson Lee and the boys in Canada. Although the party was involved with bad cowboys and cunning Red Indians, the Head was fearful of going too deep into these schoolboy adventures with the vicar for obvious reasons. So as a result what has become known as The Slaves of

of Dorrimore Island adventure the Head also omitted to recount.

Another trip to the South Pacific in search for pearls, an exciting adventure in China and later in the far North that has been faithfully chronicled as Northestria then again to Africa to rescue Umlosi's people which was fraught with bizarre events and terrible dangers but which could be considered less hazardous perhaps when the party go to India to rescue the junior Hussi Kahn. This Rishnir "holiday" must be the most fascinating and enthralling of them all. The Moor View girls were very much in evidence although Dr. Stafford forbore describing their actions too deeply as he did in the other adventures in case the vicar started asking where the chaperon could be on these occasions.

South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, were other places visited by the boys and girls and yet another trip to the Pacific and one to Arizona that must have left the Rev. Goodchild feeling a little bewildered. However, the kindly old vicar promised to write a sermon from the material the Head had read out. I wonder what the sermon will be about?

WITHOUT ENVY

by R. J. Godsave

One of the most remarkable state of affairs concerning the school stories written by Hamilton and Brooks was the complete absence of envy by the readers whose parents in the majority of cases were far from well-to-do. Brooks occasionally introduced the Bannington Council scholars into his stories. They played a prominent part in the Howard Martin series and were instrumental in temporarily bringing the barring-out of the Remove to an end, only to replace the barricades after Nipper had explained that they had rebelled against the tyrannical rule of the head-master, Mr. Howard Martin. A friendly rivalry existed between the St. Frank's juniors and the council schoolboys.

In order to be able to send a son or daughter to such schools as St. Frank's and Moorview the parents would have of necessity to be well placed financially. There is no doubt that an author would consider himself to be very much tied from the scope point of view had he only the background of a council schoolboy to work on.

It is interesting to note that Jane Austen's novels were entirely devoted to the landed gentry of those times. Charles Dickens wrote of

the appalling poverty of the early Victorian age, but it would be exceedingly difficult for any author to write week after week with such a background.

The wonderful holiday series by E. S. Brooks in the Nelson Lee Library were only made possible by such characters as Lord Dorrimore whose wealth enabled the St. Frank's party to travel in so many places overseas. Whether the average schoolboy reader of the old papers realised it or not, the educational value in the matter of visits to foreign lands was immense.

* * * * *

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

I hope you will all enjoy the "Dash of Science Fiction" in this issue of Blakiana. Science fiction is so popular these days, not laughed at like it used to be. I can remember reading the Astounding Magazine in pre-war days and imagining what would happen if anyone ever reached the moon. My sister was as bad as me and we both got laughed at for reading such trash!!! But it turned out we were right in the end. What a pity moon trips are so expensive - I should like to go on one before passing on to better worlds.

Derek Ford's consulting room chat is very interesting. I hope to have some more from him in due course.

CONSULTING ROOM CHAT (3)

by Derek Ford

Magnet has parallels in the SBL "Sexton chin" in a Chester casebook. A line of type upside-down appropriately, perhaps, in Stanton Hope's Australian casebook. And I am still wondering about Lewis Jackson's "eel-pie shop". But I do not think Mr. Truscott will have found a cover illustration "misprint", like, say, Bunter receiving a cheque instead of a postal-order! SBL cover 121 (3) "The Case of the Missing G.I. Bride", however, drops the clanger. Parker illustrates Mrs. Walderman in a brown frock jumping into the Channel from the S.S. Avonella, pushed overboard by a shadowy figure. But if Parker had read to page 57 he would have found that she was, in fact, drugged at the time she was thrown overboard clothed in a water-proof and air-proof suit which kept her floating until the light on her

garments enabled her to be picked up on a converted submarine-chaser, Seamew. It wouldn't have made as dramatic cover illustration and spoilt the surprise, but "poetic licence" must at least rhyme.

The End. I wonder if you have given any thought to what will happen to your collection of Sexton Blake cases when you die? No problem if your family is as interested as you. But if not, after the funeral, there could be comments like "Oo, he's kept all his old comics", or "I've asked that fellow from the secondhand shop down the road to make us an offer", or even "I don't know whatever we shall do with all these old papers". What is the solution to this predicament to see that your collection is fully appreciated and that it goes on giving pleasure to new collectors? Enough of this limited material has already been destroyed. These grim, though very important thoughts, were inspired by the alarming news (to me) that nothing has been heard of "Blakiana's" first editor, H. M. Bond, since he relinquished that post in April 1953. I should think he would now be about 67 and his son about 36, so it is possible that his fine collection is still intact. But I would dearly like to know for sure and what dimmed his enthusiasm.

TWO CHAMPIONS

by John Bridgwater

No! Not Blake and Tinker as you might expect, but two Blake stories in a paper not usually associated with the saga. As far as I know only two Blake stories ever appeared in The Champion. They are to be found in numbers 1 and 7.

Perhaps the editor hoped to give the new paper a good start by using an established winner with a ready-made readership. To hold them he relied on no less than four serials and a series of free photo-cards of popular sportsmen. Maybe The Champion was a smash-hit to begin with as Blake was not called in again for six weeks, probably to renew the readers enthusiasm when the first flush of success was beginning to fade. However it was, judging by the subsequent long life of The Champion Blake's two guest appearances were sufficient to ensure a prosperous future for the paper.

In those early days The Champion featured what was called "The Grand Free 8-page Story Supplement". The "8-page" bit is rather puzzling as The Champion gave 28-pages for 2d. whilst The Union Jack

was giving 24-pages for 2d. (the year was 1922). Be that as it may, the supplement was the eight centre pages and these contained a 15,000 word complete story. Today it would be called a "pull-out" feature.

In No. 1, Blake appears in a football story called "Paid to Lose!" by Arthur S. Hardy, illustrated by Frank R. Grey. It is a yarn about bribery and corruption in professional football. A young player is suspected of bribing opposing teams to secure results which will profit the bookmakers. Blake is called in to clear up the matter. So that he may watch the players without arousing their suspicions he is installed as the team trainer, a job he carries out to the great benefit of the team as a whole. The plot revolves around that creaking old pivot, the double. The "baddie" closely resembles the young "goodie" but no-one is aware of the "baddie's" existence. Consequently the "goodie" gets all the blame when the "baddie" is seen in the company of players belonging to other teams and paying for their entertainment. The "goodie" has an alibi but won't use it because it involves his secret sweetheart. It is Pedro who tracks him to his trysting place and so reveals his secret to Blake. Blake keeps him hidden until the "baddie" is arrested and everyone thinks the "goodie" is disgraced and his team certain to be defeated in the big match without him. But, surprise! surprise! Blake produces him at the last moment before the match begins and he plays the game of his life. From a 1980 view-point the story is disappointing. The denouement is obvious from early in the story and a real "corny" touch is having Blake masquerade under the name of Makewright. However, it is all cast in the 1922 Champion image - Mystery, Adventure and Sport - though it is a little short on the first two. I expect it read much better when first published; then there were far fewer Blake stories around with which to compare it.

The story in No. 7 is vastly superior to that in No. 1. It is "The Golden Wolf" by Hartley Tremayne, illustrated by Louis Gunnis. The sport angle does not appear at all though there is plenty of adventure and a dash of mystery. A Greek gentleman called Constantine Zagro claims to be descended from the Emperor Constantine and has an ancient ring to prove it. He is a man of considerable means and tells Blake that he is under constant threat of possible abduction by emissaries from Greece where he expects to be stripped of his wealth and put to

death. Being a descendent of Constantine he is considered to be a danger to the Greek rulers. The ring is stolen and Zagro commissions Blake to find it. Almost immediately afterwards he disappears, obviously kidnapped. This leads to an exciting chase down the Thames into the open sea where a daring rescue from a foreign ship takes place and the ship is sunk. There are two quite unexpected twists at the end which if revealed would spoil the enjoyment of anyone reading the story for the first time. The Golden Wolf of the title is a clever international spy. The end of the story leaves the question "did he drown or did he escape?" unanswered. I wonder if he ever cropped up again somewhere else in the saga? He was a worthy opponent for Blake. Constantine Zagro is a delightful character, excitable and eager to "have a go" at his enemies, getting more and more battered as the story progresses but always bouncing back ever ready to continue the fight. Quite irrepressible! He is another character worthy of a more distinguished place in the saga. This one, at least, is a real champion tale.

* * * * *

DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 162 - Magnet No. 19 - "The Greyfriars Challenge"

The aliens at Greyfriars came from Beechwood School, run by Herr Rosenblaum, and in Magnet No. 6, when that school closed down, Hurree Singh arrived with Adolphe Meunier, Fritz Hoffman, and others. Hurree Singh was of course a British subject and was not regarded as an alien, but the way Meunier and Hoffman continued the Franco-Prussian war in their constant encounters made it quite clear that they were foreigners, and their ways were regarded with tolerant (and perhaps condescending) good humour.

In Magnet No. 19, a large number of French boys came to play cricket against the Remove, and of course Meunier captained them and Hoffman was allowed to play for the Remove side. It was a highly comic occasion and nearly half the story was devoted to a detailed account of the misadventures of the match. The bystanders seemed to meet with more accidents than the players themselves.

Although the match was intended to be the climax of the story, there is also a good deal of historical interest about the beginning of the

tale. The very early Bunter was even then talking about his postal order, but he was trusted to expend a large sum of money on a cold collation before the match and he seemed to have fulfilled the trust. (It would be impossible to imagine Nugent calling him 'Bunty' in later years.) Mr. Quelch was shown to be a master in full control of his class, but he would not in later days have been described as smooth, sarcastic, or merciless. Equally, no boy who was instructed to hold out his hand would have offered to shake hands and get away scot-free as Hurree Singh contrived to do.

In a way, the opening chapter holds the greatest interest of all, since it relates in some detail the moves in a chess game between Wharton and Nugent, the latter being helped by Hurree Singh, who is described as a past-master of the game. Perhaps the most subtle touch (because it is not over-emphasised) is when Hurree Singh points out to Nugent the dangers in certain moves, and Nugent takes the credit for any success but blames his adviser when Wharton wins the game. Charles Hamilton's perennial interest in chess was seldom given so free a rein as in the description of this match played with Hurree Singh's wonderfully carved set of oriental chessmen.

Some weeks later Herr Rosenblaum opened Friardale Academy next door to Greyfriars, and the aliens returned to the care of their former headmaster. The rivalry between the two schools lasted awhile, but the Academy soon ceased to be mentioned, which was perhaps just as well, since light-hearted pranks become a little tedious if over-used, and the aliens had no potential for future dramatic development.

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SELL: 1920 Greyfriars Holiday Annual. H. B. 7, Greyfriars Pretender; H. B. 21, Tyrant of Greyfriars; H. B. 23, Joker of Greyfriars. SELL or SWAP: H. B. 4, Terror of the Form; H. B. 24, Kidnapped Schoolboys; H. B. 25, B. B. in China. WANTS: Billy Bunter's Own, 1979; Great Cartoon Stars, Dennis Gifford; Schoolgirls' Own Libraries with Cliff House stories.

MISS MABEL MCKAY, 186 MARY STREET
INVERCARGILL, SOUTHLAND, NEW ZEALAND.

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WANTED: Nick Carter Weekly, Nos. 2, 5, 6, 7, also following: Nos. 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22. New Story Paper, both coloured covers, 12" x 8", year 1911-12. Offer - "Firefly", complete, mint, 1914, Nos. 1-51, 2 vols. A. P. File copies or sell £60.

PHONE 0635 - 63036 (BERKS.)

REVIEWS
TOM MERRY & CO.

(Museum Press)

Here we have the reproduction, in one superb volume of two editions of the Boys' Friend Library - No. 30 and No. 38 to be precise - and the B.F.L. really was something in those days, with 120-pages plus covers to each book.

These two tales, "Tom Merry & Co." and "Tom Merry's Conquest", are ample evidence of the popularity of the Gem, and of the new schoolboy creation, Tom Merry, who had first been heard of only a few months earlier. "Tom Merry & Co." appeared in the November of 1907. Tom Merry had only recently gone to St. Jim's, accompanied by some of his schoolfellows from the closed school of Clavering, plus the Headmaster of Clavering, a Mr. Railton, who would become a house-master at St. Jim's.

The title, "Tom Merry & Co." sounds meagre and vague today to any who are still wet behind the ears. It is not so to those who know the set-up in late 1907. Tom Merry was not yet accepted as the leader of the St. Jim's juniors. After all, there were Figgins & Co. who were first on the scene - doughty fighters. There were Jack Blake & Co. of Study No. 6 (Blake Herries, and the inimitable Arthur Augustus; Digby was away, on one of the odd periods of absence enjoyed by certain characters in the early Hamiltonia) and Blake had been the accepted leader for a good year.

And here, while the readers of the new Gem were just getting used to Tom Merry being at St. Jim's, came a special bonus in the form of this B.F.L. "Tom Merry & Co.". Who would be the leader of the juniors? It would be decided by the result of the feud with Rylcombe Grammar School. Who could defeat Frank Monk & Co.?

Rylcombe Grammar School - newly opened by Dr. Monk - made its first appearance in this story. Though Dr. Monk was opening a new school, he had a full company of seniors and juniors and teaching staff, but it would be carping to ask how he managed it. Frank Monk, the Headmaster's son, was the unquestioned leader of the Grammar School juniors. Gordon Gay was not yet on the scene. In fact, he arrived in a series of Grammar School tales in the Empire Library, more than two years later, and seems to have been the creation of C. M. Down, though Hamilton adopted Gordon Gay immediately. (Hamilton wrote at least one story for the Empire Library Grammar School series - and that was the only one ever reprinted.)

But Gay was still in the wings when "Tom Merry & Co." was written. Figgins and Co. were defeated, Blake and Co. were defeated. The Terrible Three were defeated. Then Tom Merry had the idea that all the Co's should combine - under one leader - and so Tom Merry & Co. came into being to be synonymous with St. Jim's for ever and ever.

One can confess that "Tom Merry & Co." is a little over-burdened with inconsequential dialogue - after all, there were 120 pages to fill - but it is a happy school story, bubbling with the joy of youth. It was remarkable that it appeared in November 1907. Even more remarkable, was the appearance of "Tom Merry's Conquest", another tale in the same strain, only two months later.

If anything, "Tom Merry's Conquest" is slightly better than the other tale, for Digby is back, and Marmaduke Smythe makes a return to St. Jim's. Readers will remember that the original Marmaduke Smythe story ran as a serial in C.D. recently. It had a sequel which we may find space for soon.

This charming book is beautifully presented, and, though the original covers are not used, the spirit of Edwardian days is delightfully captured with a drawing from Hutton Mitchell on the front cover, and one from Arthur Clarke on the back. It is a "must" for all admirers of the early St. Jim's and the work of the youthful Hamilton.

Special note! This work is published privately. It cannot be ordered from book shops. It can be obtained direct from Mr. John Wernham, 30 Tonbridge Road, Maidstone, Kent, in exchange for a remittance for £4.15 which includes post and packing, or from the Collectors' Digest office. It is fine value for money in these inflationary days.

GAY DOGS OF ST. JIM'S

(Howard Baker: £5.95)

By a coincidence, this latest volume from the Howard Baker firm offers a delightful and varied programme of St. Jim's stories which originally first saw the light of day in the year 1907. The volume comprises seven issues, not quite consecutive, of the Gem of 1931 which was very early in the reprint period. The opening tale in the volume "St. Jim's on the Stage", originally entitled "The Triple Alliance", deals with the subject of amateur theatricals. Tom Merry forms an alliance of the junior "Co's" in order to present a pantomime "Red Riding Hood" and outshine the school's seniors.

"The Great Stamp Mystery" (originally "Tom Merry's Hobby Club") starred the third-former, curly Gibson, who is accused of stealing a stamp. A little more drama in this one, though there is plenty of inconsequential humour. In 1931, this story is introduced as an "enthraling book-length story", which was rather stretching things, for like all the halfpenny Gems, it only ran to nine chapters or thereabouts. Actually, the old halfpenny stories fitted beautifully in a Gem which offered a "full supporting programme". It was not until later on, when the double-length tales came on the scene, that drastic pruning was often done.

"Under a Convict's Thumb" (originally "Tom Merry's Ruse") stars Monteith. The convict is his cousin, but another convict is Figgins in disguise. The Kildare-Monteith rivalry comes pleasantly into this little gem of a tale.

"Gay Dogs of St. Jim's" (originally "The Smart Set of St. Jim's") is one of the most delightful of the halfpenny Gem stories. The change of title is obviously one of those changes for the sake of change, for Gore and his cronies are called the "Smart Set" throughout the reprint.

"The Football Fake" (originally "Playing the Game") starts off with Tom Merry making the rather uncharacteristic remark: "But what amazing weather!" and with an added comment from the author about St. Martin's summer. That was not in the original, when the match was played on a hot mid-September day. The reprint appeared in mid-November, when a blazing hot day would be unusual. An excellent story concerning a plot of Sefton's, and Tom Merry being on the spot to turn out for the First Eleven. An unflinching formula for a

popular tale, down the years.

"The Schoolboy Smugglers" (originally "Tom Merry in Trouble") is a charming period piece. The smuggling of the title concerns food smuggled into the sanny for Tom Merry who is hungry though ill in bed.

"Easy Terms for the Saints" (originally "A Regular Rascal") is the final story and, just possibly, the very best in this collection, which is saying a lot, for every tale is a joy. The "Saints" of the title of the reprint story jars a wee bit, for, after very early days, Hamilton never referred to the St. Jim's fellows as "saints", though the sub writers did, now and then. The rascal of the story is a Mr. Jex who sells items on the instalment system to unwary victims and then duns them for money.

In this volume, the St. Jim's stories, which are the only items which will matter for most readers, are a delight to make one yearn for the halcyon days of 1907 or to look back, with a glistening eye, to the time in 1931 when the grand old tales were finding a new life... A sub-written series of Rookwood tales was running in the Gem at this time, and for lots of readers they will pass interesting hours. There are other complete tales of the thriller type, which are well worth a browse.

All-in-all, a worthy addition to anybody's collection. A Joy For Ever.

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BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 74. STRANGERS ON A TRAIN

From time to time now we had a "variety" show. That is, a programme entirely comprising short subjects. Two hours of musical items, educational subjects, cartoons, novelties, and comedies. So far as I can recall, these programmes of "shorts" were popular, though just why I introduced them as a change, on occasion, from the normal shows I cannot remember with any certainty.

Our first orthodox programme this term brought, from G.F.D., Michael Redgrave in "The Browning Version". Having seen the play, by Terence Rattigan, at "Q" Theatre, I found the film disappointing. I have an idea that the play was a short one, and had formed the second part of a double-bill on the stage. At any rate, on the stage it was fine; on

the screen it was not. The story of a schoolmaster, about to retire, who had been able to win no affection from his classes, from the school staff, or from his wife. Just one boy brings the unpopular master a small gift, with a few words of thanks. The material was too meagre for a film, and they tried to remedy that by introducing school scenes plus a long speech from the master, very much out of character, to the assembled school, to wind it all up. It didn't work - for me, at any rate.

In the same bill was a collection of Mack Sennett sequences (one of the delightful Warner items) entitled "A Laugh A Day", and a Tom & Jerry cartoon "The Casanova Cat".

The following week, from M. G. M.,

brought Spencer Tracy and James Stewart in "East of the Rising Sun", with a big additional, mainly male cast, I remember it as good Boy's Own Paper stuff, concerning rubber-seekers. A Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon in this bill was "The Framed Cat", and a Joe McDoakes novelty was "So You Want to Buy a Used Car".

Next, from Warner's, a Technicolour Musical "Painting the Clouds With Sunshine", with Dennis Morgan and Virginia Mayo. It was, I believe, a re-make of one of the excellent Gold Digger films of early talkie days, and, probably, not a patch on it. I don't recall much about it.

In the same bill was a Tweetie Pie cartoon "Canary Row", in colour.

Next, from M. G. M., Jeanette Macdonald and Lassie in "The Sun Comes Up". It was in Technicolor. A charming picture, lovely for the family, but a sad one. It was sad to see a rather amazing piece of casting, with the lovely and gifted Jeanette in support of Lassie, for animals always steal any picture. It had an added interest in the appearance of the attractive boy player, Claud Jarman Junior. This was Jeanette Macdonald's last film. She went back to the opera stage, and died, all too soon, not many years later. We had played most of her films, and all of her great ones.

In the same bill was a colour cartoon: "Cock-a-Doodle Dog".

The following week brought "Westward the Women" from M. G. M. A comedy western with Robert Taylor as an escort taking a big band of women across the United States to join their husbands, so far as I recall. I think it was pretty good, though, running for two hours, it must have been over-long. (Maybe we would

not think so today, when all films are far too long.)

A coloured Tom & Jerry cartoon in the programme was "Scaredy Cat".

Next, from Warner's, a very pleasant musical in Technicolor: "On Moonlight Bay" with Doris Day and Gordon Macrae. A fragment of a tale, based, so far as I remember, on the Perrod tales, with the spotlight on the sister all the time, and set somewhere about 1915, with lots of lovely tunes from the period including "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles", "Till We Meet Again", and the title song.

A Bugs Bunny colour cartoon in this bill was "Hot Cross Bunny".

To wind up the term's programmes came "Strangers on a Train" from Warner's, starring Robert Walker, Farley Granger, and Ruth Roman. A Hitchcock film, and my favourite Hitchcock. The perfect murder, planned by two young men during a train journey, with the handsome Walker the personification of evil, with a magnificent tennis match thrown in to provide some rare screen tenseness, and the unforgettable runaway roundabout at the fair, in the closing fifteen minutes or so. Hitchcock never did anything more eerie or more exciting. My bloodthirsty young audiences loved it, and I did not hear that anyone of them coshed an old lady or broke a window or smashed up a telephone-box as the result of it.

A coloured cartoon in the bill was "The Ventriloquist Cat".

That vacation we had another meeting of the London Club at Surbiton, and, as on the previous occasion, I invited anybody who would like to stay for a show in the Small Cinema to do so. It was a

longer programme this time, all in technicolor. It comprised a Musical Special in colour entitled "Cinderella's Feller" and starring Scotty Beckett (whoever he was). A Tom & Jerry colour cartoon "His Mouse Friday". A Sport

Parade in colour "Hunting the Fox". A coloured Bugs Bunny cartoon "Hare Devil Hare". A Tweety Pie colour cartoon "Room and Bird". A Droopy colour cartoon "Daredevil Droopy".

The date: April 20th, 1952.

(Another article in this series next month.)

* * * * *

News of The Old Boys' Book Clubs

MIDLAND

Our March meeting had a large attendance, with fifteen present. A very lively and cheerful meeting ensued.

A discussion took place on what was the "purple" period of the Magnet. Members answers showed a marked preference for the early 30's. This was not entirely unexpected.

Our usual feature, Anniversary number and Collectors' Item was on display. The Anniversary No. was Magnet 1306 and 47 years old to the day being published on 25th March, 1933. The Collectors' Item was a bound volume of "The Dandy" comics for the year 1955. The usual interest was displayed in these items.

Bob Acraman had come loaded with items of interest to enthusiasts. He had with him Charles Hamilton's own cine-camera and some "Pilots" where the first stories of High Coombe, "The School for Slackers" with Jimmy McCann were featured.

Brian Simmonds played a 25 minutes' tape of a radio programme where famous Radio and T.V. stars discussed their love for the Magnet, which they had read in their youth.

A game based on a T.V. series "Take a Letter" was introduced by Tom Porter, the solutions were the titles of S.O.L's. The winners were Geoff Lardner, Vince Loveday, and Christine Brettell.

There is a change in our arrangements regarding meetings in 1980. We have usually missed out August and September because of members' holidays, but this year we miss out July and August. There

will be a meeting in September.

JACK BELLFIELD
Correspondent.

CAMBRIDGE

The Club met at the home of Jack Overhill on Sunday, 30th March, the meeting being brought forward to avoid a clash with Easter on the first Sunday in April and the Eagle Convention on the following Sunday.

It was a great pleasure to his fellow members to welcome back Bill Lofts after his prolonged illness.

Bill Lofts gave his talk on "The World of Frank Richards". He said there was no doubt that the most collected works were those of Charles Hamilton; a proof of the high standard of Hamilton's writings. Bill was warmly thanked for his interesting talk.

After enjoying Mrs. Overhill's excellent tea, (and members were reassured to see Bill Lofts' appetite had recovered its form), Bill Thurbon talked on "Riddles of the 'Riddle of the Sands' ". He referred to the many invasion stories that were published between 1871 and 1914. Of these the one 'classic', never out of print since first publication in 1903, was the "Riddle". Bill briefly summarised the life of Erskine Childers, and the story of "The Riddle". He explained that he has become involved in research in 1975 when a question came to him, as assistant College Archivist, about a possible connection between H. H. Brindley, Cambridge Zoologist and Yachtsman, and the book. There was evidence of a belief, held from the early 1930's to Brindley's death, that Brindley had some connection with the story. Bill explained the theories of R. M. Bowker, with whom he had corresponded, of Andrew Boyle in "The Riddle of Erskine Childers", and of the Popham family in their recent book on Childers's sailing logs "A Thirst for the Sea". There was no doubt that the sailing adventure in the story was based on a voyage Childers made in 1897. He said that his son in 1977 had a colleague whose family believed one of their members had been concerned with the story.

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

NORTHERN

Meeting held 12th April, 1980

Our first Annual General Meeting of the eighties fell on a beautiful, budding April day. It drew the usual steady attendance, and members on arrival found Woodhouse Square still caught in warm westerling sunlight.

There was sunshine inside the Swarthmore Centre, too - a lovely Spring Sale of hobby papers and magazines by Darrell Swift. In fine condition as well: how does the lad manage to dig up these treasures? This was a pleasant surprise for everyone, and a sparkling start to our Spring Programme.

The A.G.M. followed, and the year's business was settled with some despatch. The annual balance sheet was studied and approved, and, with a vote of thanks for their year's services, the Club officers were re-elected en bloc.

Over refreshments, a lively discussion on that topical issue for collectors - originals, or facsimilies? Each school of thought had cogent points to make. On one thing at least we could be agreed: we are lucky to have the choice.

Next meeting, Saturday, 10th May, at the Swarthmore Centre.

JOHNNY BULL

LONDON

A highly representative gathering of members and friends assembled at the Rembrandt Hotel on Sunday, 13th April, to pay their tribute to Eric Fayne and Madam on the occasion of the 400th issue of the Collectors' Digest. Presiding over the proceedings was the President of the club, John Wernham, who not only produced an extra-special souvenir issue of Story Paper Collectors' Digest complete with the luncheon menu, but had the wonderful inspiration to produce another of his opus series by doing a double story effort similar to that famous "The Boys Without a Name" and "Rivals and Chums" volume, this time Eric's favourite Martin Clifford's "Tom Merry and Company" and "Tom Merry's Conquest". Two tales about the rivalry between Saint Jim's and Rylcombe Grammar School.

Mary Cadogan spoke a few well chosen words and proposed the toast of Eric Fayne and the Collectors' Digest. Included in the toast was Madam making her first appearance after her indisposition, the great help to Eric behind the scenes. Eric suitably replied with some good anecdotes and stated how pleased he was by the reception given to him and by all the correspondence written re the 400th issue of the Collectors' Digest.

Bill Lofts gave a short talk about the contributors to the C.D. that, unhappily, are no longer with us.

Both Eric Wafer and Ern Darcy spoke a few well-chosen remarks. They are visitors from the Antipodes, Eric with Beryl and Ern with his wife and two daughters.

After lunch, the company adjourned to the lounge for tea and lively get-togethers and conversations. Time passed all too quickly and the end of another milestone in the history of the Collectors' Digest went into happy memories and the hopes of many more issues of the magazine that Herbert Leckenby, of blessed memory, first published all those years ago.

BENJAMIN WHITER

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The Postman Called

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

WILLIAM LISTER (Blackpool): I have often thought how many things are part of one's life, that came into it originally as if by chance.

Such was my contact with the Collectors' Digest.

While on holiday at Bownes, Windermere, twenty-three years ago I purchased a copy of the Sexton Blake Library, containing mention of a Sexton Blake Club, membership by subscription to this 'Collectors' Digest'. I wrote for it; after all Sexton Blake was my only link with days gone by.

Then came my first copy of 'C.D.' and the big bang! Here was mention of the Magnet, Gem, Union Jack and above all, the Nelson Lee, papers I thought had been long dead and buried. I received a new lease of life, and to this day the monthly arrival of 'C.D.' revives my flagging spirit.

E. A. KADISH (Hendon): Congratulations on the 400th issue of "Collectors' Digest".

I was introduced to it in the last years of the "swinging sixties", when some kind person sent me a specimen copy. I had had no idea that such a publication existed, but, after sampling it, I obtained my own copy. I have collected every issue of the 'Digest' - and of the 'Annual' - since that happy date, and it has given me much pleasure, providing a welcome escape from the horrors of terrorism and violence in the "Sadistic Seventies". Let's hope it will continue to give happiness at the beginning of what - to me - looks like the "Empty Eighties". Anyway, may the 'Digest' flourish and prosper in the next decade, come what may!

Mind you, I'm a little disappointed that our Editor has not seen fit to mark the occasion of a special issue in the style favoured by the Amalgamated Press. The March issue contains no mention of the 'free gifts' to be presented with number 400. Apparently, there is to be no 'art photograph' of our distinguished skipper given away next month, not even a facsimile of the Princess Snowee, complete with pawmark, or a packet of micro chips to please the technically minded among our readers. Equally, there is no mention (thank goodness!) of exciting new features, or colourful new layout in the paper itself to attract a vast new readership. After all, we must "move with the times" - where to, I'm not quite sure!

Once again, happy sailing in the good ship "C.D." across the turbulent waters of the uncertain eighties!

Miss ANN O'LEARY (Loughborough): I would just like to say thank you very much for our C.D. every month. I have now been reading this magazine for a year, as well as reading all my father's back numbers (from 1970 onwards). I am now usually the first person to have a look at the C.D. when it arrives, and after I have read it I wait eagerly for the next issue. Sometimes I read it at school before morning lessons begin, and am often asked by curious classmates what I am reading.

Congratulations on the 400th number! It made even more enjoyable and interesting reading than usual, and I wish we had more copies at home, but the magazine began about twenty years before I was born!

While we are waiting for the Coral Jubilee, please can we have

another 'Classic Serial'? We all enjoy reading these very much at home.

ERNEST HOLMAN (Leigh-on-Sea): Congratulations on No. 400 and all the interesting contents. The inserted Tribute really says it all and I can only associate myself with all that it states.

If anything was needed to substantiate the regularity of its arrival each month - how about this? I was barely up and awake - it was not yet 8 o'clock on this first morning of April 1980, when - plop! through the door came - No. 400 of C.D. Nice work, indeed, Mr. Editor!

Re 'Cottage for Sale' - this appeared some years ago as a number in a Beverley Sisters L.P.

Also - 'Small Cinema' No. 73 - Charlie McCarthy was the doll in Edgar Bergen's ventriloquist turns - I believe he died only last year.

J.E.M. (Brighton): A brilliant No. 400! The unbroken publication of C.D. over so long a period is a publishing and editorial triumph to be envied by any professional.

JIM COOK (Auckland): That lovely C.D. No. 400 arrived safely a few days ago. I feel certain everybody will agree with me that it is the acme the hobby has reached. In fact, I cannot see that edition being surpassed - ever.

Miss EVELYN FLINDERS (Hitchin): It just seems impossible that the C.D. is still running after 400 months.

Everything is changing so fast that reading the old stories is like reading about another world. I look forward to the C.D. dropping through the letter-box. My favourite articles are "A Word from the Skipper" and "Danny's Diary". I love reading about Snowee. My sister has a cat that is white with a tabby tail. I have a black terrier-type mongrel dog, very lively and a very good friend. He is 11 years old, and still full of beans. I hope, like the Collectors' Digest, he will last many more years yet.

(We hope so, too! - Ed.)

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300 Ellery Queen Mystery Magazines from 1951, FOR SALE or EXCHANGE for O.B.B., will break up.

G. THOMPSON, 53 WALLASEY PARK

BELFAST, BT14 6PN.

TONY GLYN AND THE THOMSONS

A rejoinder from J.E.M.

Much as I enjoyed Tony Glyn's sturdy defence of the Thomsons, I found his references to Mr. Holman and me decidedly chill. We are accused of not praising the Dundee story papers "particularly highly". Just what altitude of enthusiasm are we expected to reach? "Satisfied a hunger for simple excitement", "aids to juvenile literacy", "large circulations", "irresistible" were only some of my encomia. I even anticipated Mr. Glyn's own reference to the cinematic pace of the Thomson yarns. My least kind comment was that, in retrospect, "it all seems like a diet of cheap doughnuts and ginger pop". But surely Mr. Glyn, in adulthood, can hardly regard the Thomsons as literary caviar?

Nor did I say that I had trouble recalling characters from the Thomson papers. Indeed, I named quite a number (including the immortal Morgyn and the Wolf of Kabul). What I do have difficulty in remembering - after fifty years! - are, as I said, exactly which of the Dundee periodicals such figures appeared in. I was, in fact, hoping that other C.D. readers might also have remembered some of those characters I named - Tiger McTaggart, Bandy Walker and the Kentucky Twins, for instance - from the late twenties and early thirties.

As for that Orwell essay, of course we can bear to have it quoted again - especially one vital distinction it makes between Dundee and A.P. If Dundee was the home of pace, action and colour, the Magnet and Gem paid more heed to characterisation. It is too often forgotten that Orwell gives Hamilton quite high marks in this field. Other students of Hamiltoniana have even gone so far as to suggest that the famous figures of Greyfriars and St. Jim's are, in truth, complex adult personalities in school uniform. Certainly this could help to explain the existence of a mature audience for the Magnet and Gem stories.

I would not argue with Mr. Glyn's view that it was probably the success of the Thomsons which ultimately destroyed the Magnet and the Gem. Whether this was a welcome development is a subject for an altogether different debate.

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WANTED: Magnets & Gems. Also 1920 Greyfriars Holiday Annual. Can offer 1941 in exchange.
D. WRIGHT, 13 EAST LANE, SANDIWAY, NORTHWICH, CHESHIRE. (0606-882397)

DISCOVERING JACK, SAM & PETE

by Nic Gayle

"Here, steady, old hoss!" interposed Pete. "Don't pile up de agony like dat, else it will come toppling down on your head and sort ob crush you! You will find in dis life dat de man or boy who keeps raising difficulties doesn't get on as well as der de one who merely fights dem till he conquers. Dat's de great art in life. Neber mind de difficulties. Fight dem, and eben if you don't win, you will find dat someting a lot better turns up, and dat de fight has brought you a lot more by gaining dis oder ting dan if you conquered de special difficulty you were fighting against." Pete, from *The Mystery Ship*, B.F.L. 175.

Thus Pete, of Jack, Sam & Pete fame, philosophising in his typically comic and woolly-headed way, expressing a splendid moral that must apply poignantly to that ever-diminishing band of Jack, Sam & Pete devotees that yet remain to push forward the claims of their favourite story book heroes. For who has not heard of Jack, Sam & Pete? ... Yet how many have actually read of their adventures? ... Have YOU? ... I'll wager not. By the end of this short article I hope to have given you an idea of what you are missing. Stay with me, and you could well be surprised.

To begin with though, everything seems loaded against Jack, Sam & Pete. First of all, the unpalatable fact for most of us is that J. S. & P. were the biggest money spinners that the Amalgamated Press had, yes, more so than our beloved St. Frank's, Sexton Blake or Greyfriars, so straight away this might cause a little resentment in our minds. After all, we all like our own pet hobby-horse to romp home first. Secondly, S. Clarke Hook who wrote the stories, was indisputably an inferior write to Hamilton, Brooks, Evans or Hylton Cleaver. He was a top second rater rather than a good first rater, so why should one bother, then? ... Thirdly, apart from Bill Thurbon's excellent article in the C.D. Annual of 1976, the only widely known and generally accessible analysis of the stories is an unflattering - and rather biased - one in E. S. Turner's 'Boys Will be Boys', that indispensable guide and manual for all those interested in the old boys' book world. This is certainly calculated to put anyone off, and is biased because it reveals nothing of the good and enjoyable side of J. S. & P., or why the stories

were so perennially popular. Lastly, and I think sadly, the only J. S. & P. tale to be reprinted by Howard Baker is the story from the Penny Popular in the 1975 Holiday Annual, a poor tale rendered nonsensical by mutilation. Imagine a complete Magnet or Lee series reduced to ten pages ... So when all this is taken into consideration, it is unlikely that new readers are going to be attracted. But my dear old hosses, dis is only half ob de picture ...

To take the arguments above one by one, J. S. & P. were so popular in their time because they deserved to be, at least in their early days. The stories are a special mixture of rumbustious slapstick and adventure and can really make one laugh out loud. I discovered them unwillingly, almost grudgingly, in a bound volume of four B.F.L's that I had picked up for a song and thus felt duty bound to have a crack at. The style was strange and unfamiliar, almost devoid of descriptive writing, reliant on strong dialogue to describe all the action and the scenes, and of course for many pages I didn't like it as I didn't really want to. But slowly a change came over me, and I found to my surprise that I was grinning over Pete's humorous exchanges, then chuckling, and in some places laughing outright. I was witty, pithy, and sometimes you had to read between the lines to get at Clarke Hook's true meaning rather like in Hamilton, and I enjoyed that. There was also the unintentional humour of victorian melodrama too, which occasionally peeped in; villains that cry 'perdition!' and 'fury!' are just gorgeous. And to my surprise one or two of the adventure scenes were quite exciting. Without realising it, I was becoming hooked. (If you'll pardon the ghastly pun ...)

This I found began to compensate me for the second objection, namely that Clarke Hook was only a second-rate writer. When you're laughing and chuckling like that you tend to say 'so what?' ... It brings pleasure and it works. This was a real volte face for me, who up till now had been able to accept what I regarded as the cream of old boys' books. So I looked again at Turner's review in 'Boys Will Be Boys' and found myself rather dissatisfied with it. What it failed to do was to paint this pleasant picture of three adventurous comrades utterly devoted to one another and sharing some of the atmosphere of our beloved 'Cos' or Baker Street. It failed to describe the knockabout repartee which gives J. S. & P. their individual characters, and it failed to convey the often

absurd charm of their adventures. This is the sort of thing that I mean . . .

For no particular reason, J. S. & P. are heading for the South Pole. (The tale is pre-Scott and Amundsen.) The cold is so intense that they seek shelter, and Pete finds a cave near a volcano. The extract given below shows in microcosm the world of J. S. & P. Jack, the Oxford English graduate, polite and formal. Sam, an American marksman and hunter (read him with a Yankee accent in mind) getting in a fond dig at his negro friend, and Pete himself, whose less than earth-shattering observations upon volcanos are indicative of his style of badinage. Clarke Hook peeps through too with his observations upon the literary value of some books, and the whole scene is set round a comfy fire reminiscent of a cosy study scene. Now read on . . .

'Amongst the blackened rocks Pete discovered a small cave, which to his delight he found quite warm. It was a sulphur cave, and the floor was strewn with a fine yellow powder, which was so hot that it was as much as he could do to bear his hand in it.

It is true that the fumes given out were rather unpleasant, but Pete cared nothing for this. He wanted warmth, and he certainly got it in the cave.

'Yah, yah yah'. Dis is de most beautiful spot in de land' he declared. 'Why, Jack, you might almost cook potatoes in dis dust.'

'You are likely to get a headache if you remain in there too long.'

'How's dat, Jack?'

'It is a sulphur cave, and the fumes given off are likely to give anyone a headache.'

'Can't help dat, Jack. Dose fumes ain't going to make my head ache near so badly as de cold makes my oder limbs ache. I would rader have aches from heat dan aches from cold. I am particularly pleased wid dis cave, and seeing dat we have got plenty ob provisions, I don't see de slightest reason why we should not enjoy ourselves here for some little time. You see, I want to make some notes on de nature ob dis volcano. In de first place it's a round one, and in de second place it's got a hole in the top. I dunno dat I shan't write a book on natural history when I get home.'

'Well, we have got some tinned rabbit here!' exclaimed Sam, who had just brought in some stores, as also the cooking stove.

'Perhaps if you eat that it will give you some ideas on natural history. I don't know what sort of animal you will place the volcano under, unless you mention that one of the caves near the top was used as a stable for a black jackass!'

'You'm getting natural history jumbled up wid unnatural history, Sammy. Still, before I start on my book, I tink we had better hab supper. Does it take long to write a book, Jack?'

'I should say not, judging by the contents of some of them. But if you take my advice, you will pay attention to your supper, and not bother your noddle about writing books. You will find it rather more trouble than you bargained for, and no-one would read it after you had written it!'

'Well you see, Jack, I should let you do de writing part ob de business and Sammy could do de reading. I would just take de money from de public. Dat wouldn't be de slightest trouble to me. Golly! De comfort ob dis cave is surprising! It reminds me ob de summer days in de tropics, close to de old camp fire!'

Getting interested? ... There is another inducement, and a powerful one. Because of their comparative neglect, J. S. & P. stories in the Boys' Friend Library seem to be plentiful, cheap and many in good condition. I'd be interested to know how you get on. Anyway, 'nuff said for de moment ...

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WANTED: Books by Edgar Wallace - "The Cat Burglar", "For Information Received", "Sergent Dunn, C. I. D.", "Smithy and the Huns"; By Richmal Crompton - "William The Lawless"; Chatterbox Newsbox, Vols. 2, 4, 5. Also books by A. Harcourt Burrage, John Finnemore, Eric Leyland, E. Leyland and Tes. Chard. Any "Monster Library".

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