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COLLECTORS DIGEST
VOLUME 34 NUMBER 405

SEPTEMBER

1980

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THE ODDS & ENDS

In our columns last month, Mr. Tony Glynn put into words some interesting musings concerning Charles Hamilton's immediate post-war work. It is surprising how, even all these years later, strange odds and ends from that period keep turning up.

Mr. Glynn refers to a Topham series, which appeared in 1947. "Or was it a series, since I encountered only No. 1?" adds our contributor.

I myself have a similar pamphlet-style work entitled "Pamela of St. Olive's" by Hilda Richards (authoress of Bessie Bunter). This, too,

is a No. 1 (of the Mascot Schoolgirl Series). The story is an oddly unreal affair, of a Fourth Form (of course), with a lazy fat girl (of course) named Peg Pipping. Whether any more appeared after this No. 1, I do not know.

It would have been sad had this sort of thing been the swansong of a great author. Luckily the Bunter books were just round him. That splended renewal of a career came as a result of those who remembered the old days, and of the attention he received as a result of Collectors' Digest, which linked together in a firm chain those who remembered. Though Hamilton never really admitted it, he owed a very great deal to the early C.D.

Mr. Charles Skilton, who was Hamilton's first major post-war publisher, once told me of the difficulty he had in persuading the author to write on the orthodox royalty basis for a writer of quality. Hamilton was obstinate.

"My price is 15/- a thousand words, and that is what I want," insisted the author. Luckily for Hamilton, Mr. Skilton was able to persuade him at long last to accept the royalty basis, and the Bunter books brought him a fine income, with the respect and attention which he had never quite known before.

THE POST-WAR GREYFRIARS

Also, last month, Mr. Nic Gayle contributed an excellent article which he entitled "In Defence of the Bunter Books". Mr. Gayle recalled some of the most outstanding stories of Hamilton's closing years and our contributor's arguments were convincing, bringing back a wave of memories of the time when those stories were on sale in the shops.

Mr. Gayle undermined the title of his article just a little when he wrote, "My adult view of them is the same as anyone else's; that they cannot compare with the greatest of the golden years of the Magnet, and I would deem it silly and perverse to argue otherwise," and when he added, a little later, "One has to accept that Frank Richard s's powers as a writer diminished towards the end of his life." After all, that is exactly what most of us say.

Is Mr. Gayle being a trifle self-contradictory when he claims

that the quality of the writing diminished, but does not explain in what way it diminished? Is he being a bit "ornery" (as the Rio Kid would say) when he says that the Bunter books could not compare with the best of the Magnet - and then goes on to tell us how wonderful those Bunter books were?

Really, I don't think he is! All the same, nobody genuinely has cause to "defend" the Bunter books against the editor of C.D. I have always loved them. I have every one, in its yellow dust-jacket, in my bookcase, and I would not part with any of them. I rejoiced that the famous characters came into their own again after the war - and I still rejoice that it happened.

Time and time again, down the years, I have made it clear that the criticisms I make of the Bunter books are in comparison with Hamilton's own work. I am firmly convinced that, had he written nothing but the 33 Bunter books, he would still be the world's greatest writer of school stories.

It was Hamilton's "old boys" who brought back Greyfriars and gave it a new lease of life. But, in the post-war years, Hamilton did not write for the "old boys". He wrote always for a new generation. Rightly so, perhaps. And, I fancy, inevitably so. He used his old plots and his old situations - just now and then in a manner which was in conflict with what the "old boys" knew of the Greyfriars story. That did not matter - he was not really writing for those of us with long memories.

The stiff-covered books put just a little too much restraint on the author of the Magnet, who had been accustomed to painting his pen pictures on the almost limitless canvas. He was accustomed to series which went on and on, which necessitated a certain amount of padding and some irrelevant sequences to maintain the length. All things considered, he adapted himself very well to the new medium, though it was never quite his.

Striving for comedy, his humour became more forced and less subtle as he grew older. Because his classical quotations had been commented upon by those who were now writing about him, he overplayed them and quoted far too many so that they tended to become a literary mannerism. Those are my criticisms of the post-war Greyfriars. It doesn't make me love those yellow-jacketed treasures any the less.

WOOD GREEN EMPIRE

Going back for the third time to the August C.D., the mention of the Alexandra Palace at Wood Green reminds me that Wood Green possessed a splendid variety theatre, the Wood Green Empire, one of the Stoll circuit houses. I recall that my father used to tell the story of an illusionist who died, in tragic circumstances, at the second house at Wood Green Empire, one Saturday night. I think he placed the event in 1919, but my memory may be playing tricks.

The entertainer had a Chinese name, though it came out later that he was an Englishman. I believe that, in his trick, he was supposed to catch a bullet in his teeth. On this grim Saturday night, he was accidentally shot dead. Does anyone remember anything about the happening?

THE ANNUAL FOR 1980

All being well, I hope to send you, with this issue, the order form for the 1980 C.D. Annual. As all my friends will appreciate, in these days of rapid and almost unbelievable inflation, it is difficult to plan ahead for anything in the publishing line. The easiest course would be to hold the work over for a time, but I know that "the Annual for Christmas" is something to which so many look forward, so I am hoping for the best. Our gallant contributors are loyally turning up trumps as always with some outstanding articles.

Those who can use the Annual columns to send their greetings to their friends will be helping to keep the old Annual flag flying.

THE EDITOR

* *

DANNY'S DIARY

SEPTEMBER 1930

Schoolmasters haven't half got a sauce. The latest bit of tyranny comes from my schoolmaster, Mr. Scatterby. (He is as bad as Mr. Brander at Greyfriars.) He had the fiendish plan to set us all a holiday task. The cheek of it. We have to do an essay on the Post Office and take it back when term opens in mid-month. So while he puts his feet up and prepares himself for another easy term with us, we have to

slave away.

I wrote that the British Post Office is the best in the world. Letters have to bear a 1½d stamp and postcards 1d. Printed matter is ½d for every 2 ounces. We have four deliveries a day, the last being at about 9 in the evening. We also have four collections, the last being at 9.30 from the General and at 8 from the pillar-box near my home. Our postmaster is Mr. Warner, a very disagreeable man - you would think he was giving you the stamps for nothing - and one of our postmen is Mr. Reeves, who has a young son named Ernie. Telegrams cost 9d for twelve words, and 1d for every additional word, and you can telephone from a box for 2d within ten miles radius. We haven't a telephone, but my brother Doug says we ought to have one so he can ring his young lady.

For my essay I got 6 marks out of 10, and Mr. Scatterby said he hoped I hadn't overstrained myself with work. That was sark!

The Nelson Lee Library reminds me a bit of the Popular. Neither paper seems quite sure which way it is going.

It's all fun and games in the Nelson Lee, with a good many supporting items to back up the school story. First St. Frank's tale this month is "K.K's Secret". K. K. Parkington of the Remove is a he-man with red hair. He has had a letter from Dolly Wilkinson, the daughter of the Head of Carlton College, in which she calls him "My Big Red-Headed Darling," and she promises him a kiss for every save he makes in goal. But actually she is only five years old, and her big sister wrote the letters to help K.K. in a joke. The second week's tale was "It's An Old Spanish Custom" in which Handforth's father gives a lecture on "Buy British", and Handy sets about carrying out that idea with a vengeance.

Next week, "K.K's 'K'ompany". He starts a company to do jobs for people for payment. Buster Boots does not want to entertain his sister's four-year-old daughter, so he hires K.K. to be "uncle" for the afternoon. But when the niece arrrives she is a teen-age girl of high stature, high skirts and high heels, and she greets "uncle" with a kiss. So Boots "gnashed his teeth in envious rage". Another jape, of course.

The fourth and last week brought a very short St. Frank's tale - only 5 chapters - entitled "Handy's First Prize", an d a long tale entitled "Unmasked" by John Brearley about Nelson Lee as a detective.

The "Bunny" series continues in Modern Boy. Bunny was carried to France on a runaway balloon. In "The Vanishing Trick" he finds him-

self in peril in a ship in the Bay of Biscay. This is followed by three stories about Bunny having adventures in Gibraltar. They are "Bunny's Secret," "More Kicks than H a'pence" and "Bunny to the Rescue."

Lancashire is at the top of the cricket table at the close of the season. Yorkshire is 3rd and Kent is 5th. Sutcliffe is top of the batting averages, and Verity is top of the bowling averages.

At the pictures we have seen some very good films this month. They are Nancy Carroll in "Sweetie"; Marion Davies in "Marrianne"; The Duncan Sisters in "It's a Great Life"; Pauline Frederick in "The Sacred Flame"; John Barrymore in a silent film "General Crack"; Colleen Moore in "Footlights and Fools"; and a lovely musical film "Chasing Rainbows" with Bessie Love and Charles King.

The Gem, in my time, has gone from the sublime to the ridiculous. The opening tale this month is entitled "Gussy, the Sloven". Gussy becomes the untidiest and worst-dressed fellow at St. Jim's. An absurd tale even for the tinies. Next "Grundy's Simplified Spelling". Professor Knott-Right has an idea for making spelling easy, and sees Grundy instead of the Head. Might appeal to the simple-minded. Not to me.

"The Mystery Makers", full of supposed thrills. Mr. Kerr disappears, and Mr. Curey, an artist, turns up camping on the island in the river. Plenty of villains - one is called Mr. Bolle. Pretty grim stuff.

The peak of awfulness is reached with the last tale of the month, "The Prisoner of the Moat House", which it seems is the start of a series. Some Russians, Dr. Brusiloff and his beautiful wife, Marie Douvar, Dick Lang who become friendly with Tom Merry, Handcock, the Spalding Hall girls, and Uncle Tom Cobley and all. Some diamonds are missing, and are hidden in Spalding Hall. Marie Douvar, bound for Spalding Hall, is kidnapped. And Dick Lang is dressed as a girl, and sent to take her place - as a girl - in Spalding Hall. As if any boy could really be sent as a girl to a girls' boarding school to be a pupil - and search for diamonds.

A new writer name Daphne Du Maurier has just had her first book published. It is entitled "The Loving Spirit". Daphne is said to give great promise as a writer. She is the daughter of Sir Gerald Du Maurier, the actor, and has a younger sister, Angela.

And the head of Collins, the book publishers, William Collins, had just started something he calls the Crime Club which will publish the best of crime fiction every month. The first story in this Crime Club is entitled "The Noose". Doug bought it for 7/6d. He says it's good.

The Popular is cruising along nicely, at present, with Greyfriars (the Pedrillo circus series), Ceder Creek (the arrival of Hopkins, the Cockney), Rookwood, and the Rio Kid. Rustlers, under Cactus Carter, have stolen 200 head of cattle from the Bar-2 Ranch, and the Rio Kid, Sheriff rounds them all up in "The Hidden Canyon" and "Outlaws K.O'd by Outlaw". In "The Hot Stuff Sheriff" the Kid bandages his face when Mule Kick Hall, the Texas Rangers' Captain, is expected to call at the ranch. And he offends the drunken local doctor who kindly wants to examine his supposedly injured face. Last Kid tale of the month is "Saving His Enemy". The Kid knows that Mule Kick Hall suspects him, so the Kid kidnaps the Texas Ranger and hides him in a safe place. Thrilling stuff.

There has been a railway accident at Euston. The Night Scot from Glasgow ran into the buffers at the London terminus, and 30 people were injured.

The good old Magnet puts all the other papers in the shade this month. The series about the Chinese mandarin, Tang Wang, has continued. Opening story is "The Foe From the Sky". The party is at Wharton Lodge, which is attacked from the air. Ferrers Locke is to take Wun Lung and Hop Hi home, and the chums are going with them. Next week, in "All Aboard for China" they cross the Channel and travel by train to Marseilles to join the Silver Star, with Ferrers Locke as its captain. In "The Hand of the Mandarin" the party meets with liveliness at Port Said and reach Singapore at the end of the story.

Last of the month is "The Terror of the Tong" and, after thrills and adventures in Singapore, they sail on to the China Seas. A tremendous series, beautifully written. Frank Richards never did anything better.

Two excellent tales in the Schoolboys' Own Library. "The Moonlight Footballers" tells of the Greyfriars juniors barred from football as a punishment, and "In False Colours" tells of Mr. Wilmot, the new football coach, whom Jimmy Silver recognises as Dandy Jim, the burglar.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 131 "The Moonlight Footballers" comprised two consecutive red Magnets of the autumn of 1913, originally entitled "Bunter, the Prize Winner" and "The Moonlight Footballers". The stories were not really connected, but they welded together well enough in the S.O.L.

S.O.L. No. 132 "In False Colours", comprised seven tales of the autumn of 1922, a time when the Rookwood stories in the Boys' Friend were very short indeed. The well-worn theme of the rascally cousin kidnapping the relation and goint to Rookwood in his place, was handled pretty well in this case.

Collins, the publishers, who started their Crime Club way back in 1930, are celebrating the club's golden jubilee by re-issuing with special dust-jackets, a story from each of their most celebrated writers down the years, including Agatha Christie, Andrew Garve, Shelley Smith, Freeman Wills Croft, and others.)

* *

Nelson Lee Column

ST. FRANK'S IN NEW ZEALAND

By E. Kadish

"St. Frank's in New Zealand" was a single story, written by Mr. Brooks as part of a long series beginning in January 1929 and ending in late March. The school governors have chartered a liner - subsequently dubbed the "St. Francis" - and propose to send the entire Ancient House and Modern House on a "world trip, in order to give them first-hand geographical education," leaving behind the unlucky (and probably resentful!) inmates of the East and West Houses who would "later, no doubt, go on a similar voyage". The St. Frank's juniors visit Australia, after having rescued Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Manners from the clutches of a diamond smuggler, posing as a farmer, in South Africa. There are other adventures in Australia and, of course, Handforth is well to the fore, being pictured riding an ostrich in South Africa, dressed as a "bushranger" in Australia, and being blown up by a geyser in New Zealand!

The connecting link in this series is cricket, and the Test Matches being played between England and Australia. Various souvenir badges of England's cricketing heroes were presented with the paper, and such names as Larwood, Sutcliffe, Hobbs, Hendren, Hammond and Jardine will kindle a nostalgic gleam in the eyes of enthusiasts of the game. I must confess, however, that I felt a sneaking sympathy for the black sheep of the Remove, Gore-Pearce, who entered a Melbourne pub and was heard to say, "Cricket, cricket, cricket! Nothing but cricket.

I'm fed up with the very subject". Not exactly a tactful remark to make in a bar full of Australians, and Gore-Pearce, Gulliver and Bell are suitably ejected from the premises by the justifiably irate Aussies. However, to the credit of Gore-Pearce and Co. it must be said that, whilst in the pub, they drank only iced lime-juice and soda - not beer!. "Idiot!" said Gore-Pearce. "I'm not reckless enough for that!" when Gulliver asked him if he were going to order beer.

"St. Frank's in New Zealand" actually begins with the juniors in Hobart, Tasmania, and Alec Duncan, the New Zealand boy, announcing that the School Ship is going to call at Auckland and that he hoped to visit his home in Rotorua. This call involves a stop of twenty-four hours only, but Nipper suggests to Nelson Lee that the visit should be extended to two or three days in order to take in the geysers in Rotorua. Nelson Lee eventually agrees.

I am not certain whether Mr. Brooks actually visited the places he mentions in New Zealand or, indeed, any of the districts mentioned in the Austalian tales, but he certainly seems to know his geography, and brings in as many place-names as possible - such as Franklyn, Waikato and Hamilton on the way to Rotorua. The Maori village of Ohinemutu is mentioned, and of course, much is made of the hot springs, Mr. Brooks giving some of his very readable descriptions of geyser activity. Naturally, Handforth displays his usual blockheadedness and plunges into a "steaming, sticky mass of dark-coloured liquid mud". Suddenly, the pool "sprang into active life," and Handforth was shot into the air by the outraged spirit of the geyser, "tossed about like a ball on the top of the column of liquid mud." With his usual undeserved luck, he survives!

The plot involves Duncan taking a party of juniors and Lord Dorriemore to his parents' hotel in Rotorua, and finding that his father had been replaced as owner by a rather loud, aggressive individual named Peter Garrod. Garrod says that Mr. Duncan owed him money and that he "kicked him out". One of the hotel servants, an elderly Maori named Otoko, tells Alec that Garrod - "a bad man" - turned his father out three months previously. Alec traces his family to a dilapidated wooden shack on the other side of Rotorua and Mr. Duncan indicates that Garrod has somehow swindled him and forced him off his own property. Nelson Lee takes a hand, and offers his legal experience in

connection with documents which Mr. Duncan possesses. After examining these, he pronounces Garrod a "palpable swindler", and takes the papers to Auckland for legal advice. Dorrie, however, is impatient to see justice done, and he and the juniors waylay Garrod in his car and demand that he sign a document relinquishing ownership of the hotel. Garrod escapes and emulates Handy by falling into a - fortunately - "comfortably hot" geyser. Again, like Handy, he is shot into the air by the spring and, eventually, agrees to sign the necessary paper, restoring the hotel to Mr. Duncan. The end of the story has the boys visiting the Waitorno Caves, a sort of Pacific counterpart to the Cheddar caves. This included the Glowworm Grotto - "a cave that sparkled with living fire".

Not a great story in my opinion; in fact, the whole series seems rather protracted, but had I been a reader in New Zealand in March 1929, I would have been thrilled to bits, I think, that Mr. Brooks had written about my country.

AN UNUSUAL EDITORIAL & A CRY FOR HELP

By J.W.C.

The following editorial appears at the end of NELSON LEE LIBRARY Old Series No. 308:

"Where is Mordania? is a question I am frequently asked. If some of my chums have been trying to look for it in an atlas, I am afraid they will be disappointed; for Mordania, though representing in character a wild and lawless state in the Balkans, is purely an imaginary name invented for the benefit of the equally imaginary story of King Boris and the Crown Prince."

At the end of the story No. 251 Old Series, the editor has added to his weekly chat the following:

"Should the following notice chance to catch the eye of a reader to whom it is directed, I trust he will answer his mother's anxious appeal forthwith:

"Dear Sid - If you want to come home, come; if not, write. Mother worried, - E.L."

****

The first item is a most unusual and surprisingly unexpected direction from the editor's chair. We were not too naive in our school-

boy days to believe all we read, but at the back of our minds there always lurked the feeling the places we read about really existed as evidence the number of times readers enquired the exact location of St. Frank's. Such rhetorical questions to the editor must have greatly narrowed that worthy's association with the author and the vast unseen audience of readers. For here was Edwy Brooks striving to bring verisimilitude to his stories while the poor old editor was being asked to prove it. Was there another way out other than the reply above?

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It was not very often we saw such an appeal as the one for "Sid" in the N.L.L. In fact, I think it was the only one ever to appear. That "Sid" read the Nelson Lee Library is obvious, and it is hoped he returned home or wrote. I don't suppose we shall ever know at this late hour. But if this should catch his eye we too would like to hear from him.

The notice was published over 60 years ago and it would be a miracle if "Sid" was able to contact us now. But miracles to happen, don't they?

* *

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

I do hope you are all enjoying the articles presented in Blakiana for the last few months. I have been very fortunate in receiving so many articles and I have some already for the Annual which I think you will all enjoy. It's raining again as I type this preamble. I don't seem to remember having this awful weather when I used to buy my Union Jack each week many years ago. I am sure the weather has changed for the worse, like everything else these days. So all we can do is to get out our favourite Blake stories to read and forget about the troubled times and bad weather.

AN HISTORIC ENCOUNTER or THEY COULDN'T KILL RAFFLES

Roger Sansom

I think one of the things which intrigued me about the Sexton Blake saga when I discovered it as a boy was the idea of multiple authorship. A Sherlock Holmes story written after Doyle is a 'Pastiche'; a tale of Greyfriars or the other Hamilton schools from a different hand is a 'sub. story'. But all Blake's chroniclers have equal authority -

which is not to say that all the stories are alike in kind or in quality. This is one of the remarkable aspects of the series, and fasinating in itself; variety and comparison are among the pleasures of reading.

And I have been reading some of the work of a Blakian author who uses not one but two sets of characters taken over entire from other pens. Not unique, perhaps. But the second set was established - indeed famous - outside the annals of Baker Street long before Barry Perowne put "Raffles versus Sexton Blake" in 1937 (SBL Second Series No. 577).

E. W. Hornung created A. J. Raffles, the debonair amateur cricketer and gentleman burglar, in 1899, and wrote four volumes of his adventures. He let him die in the South African war, attended to the last by his faithful friend Bunny Manders. I am reminded of the attempt to kill Sherlock Holmes by Conan Doyle - the author's brother-in-law. Not wishing to corrupt his readers (surely no very real danger), Hornung became unhappy about the character's popularity in view of the 'Robin Hood' morality of the stories. So A. J. had to die for England. (Gerald du Maurier played him on stage, George Barraud and David Niven in films, and Anthony Valentine for television.) Hornung died in 1921.

About Barry Perowne, I write with far less confidence. I hope some knowledgeable person can supply the details. But I have to say that he is a splendid writer. How he came to take up the characters of Raffles and Bunny, how he got permission to resurrect A. J. and set him - in a different period - against Sexton Blake, I would be fascinated to hear.

I first read "Raffles' Crime in Gibraltar", the sequel to the story of their first encounter; it was reprinted as one of several hardbacks aimed at the juvenile market at the time of the Laurence Payne television programme. Interest in this story led me to read most of the Hornung originals. More recently, I borrowed from the library a book of Barry Perowne's Raffles short stories. I discovered that Mr Perowne has a taste for confrontations between much contrasted characters, for in the course of these the cracksman encounters Arthur Conan Doyle, Oscar Wilde, Robert Louis Stevenson and Winston Churchill!

The stories are reprinted from crime magazines such as "The Saint's" and "Ellery Queen's", so they have no individual dates. They are set in the original Hornung period, though time passes and there are

themes continuing between them. Raffles' battlefield death is explained as a mistaken report.

Now fascinated by this literary byeway, I managed to borrow the original Blake v. Raffles story from Josie Packman's Sexton Blake section of the Lending Library. "As promised, this month's programme marks the introduction of that popular character Raffles. So confident am I that this new feature will be received with approval..... that I have asked Barry Perowne to set to work upon another story without waste of time." So runs the Editorial.

Mr. Perowne's plotting is resourceful. He skilfully handles a complex narrative which - like the short stories - shows his interest in modern history. The point of view virtually switches between Raffles/Bunny and Blake/Tinker. Pedro appears, to give Blake the first clue that Raffles is not all he seems. So does a motherly, and quite uncomic Mrs. Bardell. Blake has the Inspector in his pocket, to the degree of being able to soft-pedal Raffles' original burglary. For the Raffles convention demands that he should end the story with the loot, having harmed no worthy individual acquiring it, just as the Blake convention demands he solve the crime and book its instigators. This sounds a bit like the proverbial irresistible force and immovable object, and of course the author solves it by introducing a third, really villainous, party. Raffles' own crime is incidental, and helps towards rounding up a gang of thoroughgoing evildoers. For long stretches, the two star teams are playing on the same side. Tinker saves Bunny Manders' life, and Raffles and Bunny go to his rescue in return. At the end, Blake knows the cricketer is a cracksman, but has no desire to unmask him. Perhaps he too feels that only insurance companies feel rich men's losses. But the murderer - ah, that was a different story, and one with a twist on the last page which I kicked myself not to have guessed. In the last paragraph, the parties concerned are left wondering when the next confrontation would occur between A. J. Raffles and Sexton Blake. Mr. Perowne had it planned for Gibraltar, and another exciting plot.

TWO LONG

by Derek Ford

For Christmas 1946, we had the present of a new name on the cover of the SBL - Derek Long. Nothing seasonable about the case - "Lord Grey-

burn's Son" (133) - of course, that only featured in the weeklies never the monthlies. The case starts from a page one meeting in the Traveller's Club between Lord Greyburn - "with his sharp old eyes, bright as an ancient jackdaw's" - and Blake who is given the commission to find what has happened to Greyburn's black sheep son, Rupert Speaker, whom he dismissed from his house in the long ago and now wants to know if he has reformed enough to take over the family business. The case takes Blake to the "little dead-and-alive country village" of Middenhope where soon there is a murder by stabbing of a blackmailer in the belfry of the ancient church - by another blackmailer - it later turns out. From the country we go to Wapping where the dead body of a tramp is found stabbed outside a pawnshop - it is Greyburn's missing son. There is a tour of all the nearby pubs to find as much as possible about Rupert Speaker's last day alive: "Blake well knew that clues sought this way were the hardest of all to come upon. These were the dry bones of detection, the dull routine of question, question, question, rewarded solely by shakes of the head, blank looks, or useless, stupid information that led nowhere." But Blake is fortunate and soon the case, involving the cleverest fence in the country by the way, is solved. A good read, with touches of John Hunter in style, I thought.

But Long's next case-book is the one to be remembered by - "The Mystery of the Italian Ruins" (224). Featuring small-time London crook Porgy Bates - "a pinhead of the first water. You tap him on the knee to test his reflexes and he kicks five minutes later... muscle-bound between his ears" - who finds in a wallet a silk map, a key and a small wad of foreign banknotes under a piece of loose floorboard, under the bed of which he suddenly discovers a dead man is lying with a dagger through his throat - "the jelly had taken up residence once more in the pit of his stomach. He didn't feel taut and smart any more". For the map his room is ransacked, he is shadowed. A prison cell for safety, so he throws a brick through a window - the police "looked from him in amazement to the ten-foot model behind the small jagged hole." The ship weighed three hundredweight. In his cell he meets up with Det. Inspector Tryon of the Yard, whom we met in Long's first case-book, and soon Bates is accused of the Soho murder. But Scotland Yard is not happy with the case and soon Sir Douglas Chivers of the Home Office is round

at Baker Street calling for Blake's opinion. Porgy is later released in company with Tinker. They return to his lodgings run by Mrs. Sholem - with "the most menacing double-barrelled nose in Soho" - for Porgy to retrieve the wallet from the upstairs flush tank he has concealed it in. Then they are off to Italy and finally a secret passage and the finding of the Mancini family jewels. That is only the bare bones of a most memorable case, the SBL at its very best, and you must read it to get the full flavour.

I see that the Crime Club is fifty years old this year, and I have read a lot worse than the "Italian Ruins" published in that famous series during that time, too. The great pity is that Long only contributed these two case-books to the SBL - even one a year would have been well worth looking forward to from these samples.

The accompanying 1946 Christmas case-book was Anthony Parsons' "The Yank Who Came Back" - his eighth that year. Providing us with another puzzle cover. Disembarking from the s.s. Runemeyer comes a wild-eyed, flying figure of Lew Carradine down the gangway. But not so in the book - "Sadie Bloom brought you ashore in her wardrobe trunk", according to page 63. I just like to think that Parker became so enthralled with the "Italian Ruins" - his cover is taken from late in the book - that just this once he skipped his Parsons and made an unlucky guess.

£16,000 Blake. A recent 'paper headline' read "Blake First Edition Sold for £16,000". It referred to William's Blake's "Song of Innocence and of Experience", completed by him between 1789 and 1794, and sold at Sotheby's auction-rooms. But it made me wonder if grotesque inflation could ever lead to a Sexton Blake being sold for that sort of money. Especially when I read that the song book was previously sold at Sotheby's in 1830 for £1.

Record? What must surely be the longest running weekly detective case of a rival to Sexton Blake - Chief Inspector McLean of Scotland Yard - came to an end in "The Weekly News" dated October 6, 1979. His creator, George Goodchild, died many years ago, but the weekly case had continued until then written anonymously. When the weekly case started in the "News" I have no idea, but I have a hard-cover book of McLean's cases published in 1932 and there are previous titles credited. Has any reader a clue to Goodchild's titles and when the first weekly case appeared?

Index. From time to time I come across items in the papers that I am sure Tinker would have filed away in the "Baker Street Index". Such a one is: "A correspondence college for aspiring criminals in Phoenix, Arizona, is doing so much business that it cannot take any

students for four years. The course includes lessons in bomb-making, safe-breaking, burglary and lock-picking. A U.S. Government spokesman said "Unfortunately, the lessons don't break the law."

* *

DO YOU REMEMBER? by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 165 - Schoolboys' Own Library No. 12 - "Expelled"

It is something of a surprise to realise that the Schoolboys' Own Library commenced publication as late as 1925. The Sexton Blake Library had been going for many years, and so had the Boys' Friend Library in which Hamilton schools occasionally made guest appearances. The Monster Library catered for St. Frank's and up to 1925 the Popular must have been regarded as the main vehicle for reprints of Hamiltoniana. At all events, the Schoolboys' Own Library was largely (though not exclusively) a Hamiltonian publication from the outset, which meant that it was competing with the Popular for the available material.

"Expelled" was the second Rookwood story to appear in the Library, and it had the virtue of being a complete series from the 1916 Boys' Friend. The villain of the piece was Mornington and the initial episode was a novel variation on an old theme. He wanted to play in the football team in the coming match at St. Jim's, and as he was utterly unreliable Jimmy Silver refused to select him. He accordingly arranged with his friends to get some of the players stranded en route. Townsend provoked Lovell at Rookham station where there was a ten minute wait, and the ensuing fight meant that Lovell missed the train. At Laxham where they changed trains Topham sent a jet of soda water over Tommy Dodd in the buffet and Gower assisted him in clinging on to Dodd so that another member of the team got left behind. Unfortunately for Mornington, Jimmy Silver preferred to play a St. Jim's man (Gussy) and so the scheme came to nothing.

Mornington's revenge was to get Jimmy Silver expelled for stealing a five pound note from Beaumont of the Sixth. (Apparently everyone kept records of the numbers of banknotes in those days, which considerably assisted nefarious plans of this nature.) Dr. Chisholm considered the evidence absolutely clear and was prepared to sentence the accused without even giving him the right to speak, but the sentence

was passed nevertheless, and so Jimmy Silver locked himself in his study, refusing to leave Rookwood as a thief. Eventually his father was called in, and having listened to the result of Rawson's investigations he was able to clear his son's name in a fascinating series of cross-examinations. Beaumont and Mornington were expelled, but as Mornington saved Dolly Chisholm from a fire he was allowed to stay at Rookwood. It seems a little hard that the principal plotter should go scot-free and his unwilling accessory expelled, but that was only a minor matter. Just as Ionides was replaced by Loder at Greyfriars, so Beaumont was later replaced by Carthew at Rookwood.

When the Head's house caught fire the Rookwooders all feared for his nine-year old daughter Dolly (which was, incidentally, the pet name of Charles Hamilton's sister). By 1919 Dolly was about the same age as Jimmy Silver and a great friend of Marjorie Hazeldene and Phyllis. Similar mysteries surrounded the daughter or daughters of Dr. Locke, whose names and ages also defy analysis. Possibly it does not do to expect absolute consistency over a long period of time since, after all, minor characters were used to fit the circumstances of the story and not vice versa.

* *

WHY 'REMOVE' AND 'SHELL'? by W. O. G. Lofts

One of the most recurring queries I am asked is why the 'Remove' and 'Shell' were so named in the stories of Greyfriars. Until recently I was able to answer the first correctly, and hazard a guess on the second. To get one's 'Remove', meant simply that one passed his exams and went into a higher Form. As most readers know, there were actually three intermediate Forms in the Fourth at Greyfriars - Lower, Upper, and the Shell. The latter name I always concluded (though guessing) that the word was taken from a school class having a shell-like roof. As it happened investigation did prove me right. The word originated cir. 1800 from the school of Westminster, when an intermediate Form was situated at the apsipal end of the schoolroom and its cone like shape gave it the name of the Shell. Curiously enough, and at that period, it denoted a Form between the Fifth and Sixth, not just below the Fifth as at Greyfriars. Later however, the word became slightly distorted to

denote a Form of juniors waiting to enter the Fifth. Possibly this may have been that great writer of classical school story literature Thomas Hughes. In his follow up of 'Tom Brown's Schooldays' - 'Tom Brown at Rugby' - the Shell is probably mentioned for the first time in literature as 'The Lower Fifth'.

Greyfriars of course differed in many respects from a real public school. Frank Richards was in the main writing around the Famous Five and Bunter, consequently the Remove logically had far more juniors mentioned than any other Form. At times this looked top heavy, as many as thirty-five to forty boys presumed to be under the gimlet eyes of Mr. Quelch. This was accurate in a real live Public School as usually there were several Forms in the Fourth, the simple reason being that most boys enter at the age of fourteen or fifteen, after they had attended a prep school or had a private tutor. Consequently the Fourth Form had to be split into three, or even four Forms to make way for them. Scholastic ability usually decided what part of the Fourth they want into, though there was hardly any difference between the Lower Fourth and the Upper - Cecil Temple always thought that the Upper was higher than Harry Wharton's Remove, and he may have been right. Certainly the Shell was the Upper Form of the three, with a higher age group of boys who had normally moved up through the Forms, and were just waiting to join the ranks of George Blundell and the mighty Horace Coker'.

With the boys at Greyfriars enjoying a Peter Pan existence there were never any problems of them having to move up, which would normally be the case after a year providing they had average intelligence. Many boys did leave school about seventeen unless they intended going on to University when they were usually in the Sixth. This Form had far less boys than any other, being quite often taught by the Headmaster. They also had far fewer lessons than the rest of the school, Prefect duty taking up a lot of their normal spare time. Whilst it is known that Frank Richards was only writing fiction, it is a fact that Bunter and Coker could never have been at a Public School; they would never have passed the entrance exam but then, where would Greyfriars have been without them?

BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 78. SHOW BOAT

Our first programme of the new term was headed by a fine adventure film from M.G.M.: Stewart Granger and Cyd Charisse in "The Wild North". A tale of the Canadian Mounted Police, this one had some exciting and brilliant scenes of shooting the rapids on turbulent rivers, and had a flavour of "Rose Marie". It was in Anscocolor - very bright and vivid, I recall.

I have particular memories of this film because it wound so unevenly on the rewinding machine, for some reason I have never understood. On the projectors it wound perfectly, but on the rewinders it buckled and lumped, and was difficult to handle. For some years by that time, films were sent out in something like 2000-ft., to the spool - quite a massive amount. The larger reels lessened wear and tear on the prints, and they came in as non-flam stock became general. Whether it was some quality in Ansocolor which may have caused the buckling on the rewinder, or whether there was some other reason, I do not know. A grand film (though Stewart Granger was never a favourite of mine), but a real pest for the operator.

A Bugs Bunny colour cartoon in this bill was "Big Top Bunny".

Next week brought Kirk Douglas in "The Big Trees" from Warner Bros. This was a lovely film, one of those family tales - in this case about Quakers, though the trees were the stars - in Technicolor. I have never heard of it since, which is sad, for it was superb.

In the supporting programme was a Tom & Jerry cartoon "Little Runaway", and a Joe McDoakes comedy was "So You Want to Get it Wholesale".

Then, from M.G.M., Barbara Stanwyck and Ralph Meeker in an unusually tense little thriller "Jeopardy". This was a much shorter film than we normally played these days, so it was backed with a good two hours of variety shorts. "Jeopardy" cannot have cost a lot to make but it packed in more excitement than plenty of films costing far, far more. I recall a husband and wife who went on a fishing trip to a lonely stretch of beach. A pier collapsed, and the husband was trapped - and the tide was rising. The wife, frantic with alarm and worry, rushed to a lone stranger for assistance - and he was an escaped convict. It only ran for about an hour and fifteen minutes, but it was great.

Among the supporting items was "Lighter Than Air" (the story of air-ships), a Barney Bear coloured cartoon "Cobs and Robbers", and a Warner re-issue, with sound, of a Larry Semon comedy "Ain't Rio Grand".

Next, a pretty good British period piece from Warner's: Burt Lancaster in "The Crimson Pirate". In Technicolor, with plenty of sailing-ships and sword-fights, it went down well in the Small Cinema.

A coloured cartoon in the bill was "Kiddin' the Kitten", and a technicolor

novelty was "Let's Go Boating".

Then, from M.G.M., came Stewart Granger and Eleanor Parker in "Scaramouche", a jolly romp from the time of the less-jolly French Revolution. I can't remember much about it, except that it was in Technicolor, and I see from my records that it was 11,025 ft., which would be not far off two hours' playing time.

A Tom & Jerry colour cartoon in this bill was "Mouse Warming".

The following week, from Warner's, came Alan Ladd and Virginia Mayo in "The Iron Mistress", in Technicolor. A long western, and a pretty good one, I seem to recall, telling the legendary story of a Mr. Bowie who invented a celebrated knife.

A Tom & Jerry colour cartoon in this bill was "Cruise Cat", and a novelty was "Six Hits and a Miss" though goodness knows what it was about.

To wind up the term's picture shows came, from M.G.M., Kathryn Grayson, Ava Gardner, and Howard Keel in "Show Boat". In glowing Technicolor, lavishly set, costumed and produced, and with all the lovely old familiar songs, this was good enough entertainment. Yet, despite the colour and the extravagance, it was nothing like so good as the version which Universal had made and which we had played well over a dozen years earlier, with Irene Dunne in the lead and with Paul Robeson singing the much loved "Ole Man River".

It makes me wonder what had really happened to films.

In the same programme with "Show Boat" was a coloured cartoon "Car of To-morrow", a Technicolor novelty "Highland Games", and a Droopy Cartoon "Caballero Droopy".

(NEXT MONTH:

THE LAST CURTAIN)

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FOR SALE: Boys' Own Paper; Illustrated London News (1937 - 1956); several Illustrated 1956; Boys' Own Paper 1938, and 1921 part 5, 1923 part 11, 1921 part 5, 1926 part 4, Superman 1974; Life International 1962 several; Woman's Illustrated 1958; John Bull 1956; Woman's Day 1950; Unexpected (Walt Disney; Donald Duck Comic; Hulk, and others); Girl 1957 several. Many Picture Post 1940 to 1956; Film Fun 1962; Buster 1966, Walt Disney 1959; Blighty 1956; Lion 1955; Knockout 1957. All 20p each plus postage. Also many early Magnets and Gems £1 and £2 each; N. Lees £1 each.

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

* *

FOR SALE: SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN ANNUALS, 1923-39 (inclusive). Offers please.

T. KEEN, 16 WESTON PARK, THAMES DITTON, SURREY, KT7 0HQ. (01-398 1672)

News of The Old Boys' Book Clubs

LONDON

August meetings at Blakiana are, on the whole, very well attended and on Sunday, 10th, this was no exception and must have been very pleasing to the hostess, Josie Packman. Thus it was only appropriate that the first item on the entertainment side of the meeting was a Sexton Blake quiz conducted by Josie and in which a new member, R. Sansom, competed. Mr. Sansom will be a welcome addition to the Blakianians but it was Ann Clarke who won the quiz hands down. Her reward was a choice of three Sexton Blake books, the other two went to the runners up. Arthur Bruning gave an excellent discourse on the ghosts and supernatural as expressed by Frank Richards, Edwy Searles Brooks and other authors. A very fine treatise which deserved the generous applause at its conclusion.

The touch of nostalgia concerned the East Dulwich meeting of August 1963 when a record number of members were present. Bob Blythe read the account of the meeting from the newsletter of September 1963.

A very humorous reading from Nelson Lee Library, Old Series, No. 193, and which was entitled "The Schoolboy Sleuth" was given by Ray Hopkins. Another humorous reading was given by Tom Wright and which featured a barring out at St. Sam's during the period when I. Jolly Well Lickum, the form master, was replaced by Mr. Savage.

Next meeting at 35 Woodhouse Road, Leytonstone, London, E11 3NU, phone 534 1737. Reuben and Phyllis will be the hosts, tea will be provided, but bring your own cakes and biscuits. The date, Sunday, 14th September.

BEN WHITER

NORTHERN

Meeting held Saturday, 9th August, 1980

Surprisingly, although being a holiday month, we had eleven faithful members present that evening. Geoffrey Wilde, our Chairman, was on holiday, so he was greatly missed.

After the Library Session, the Chair was taken by Harry Barlow our vice-chairman and the minutes read by Revd. Geoffrey Good.

After the formal business, Darrell Swift told us of his recent visit to the U.S.A., staying with friends in the Philadelphia area. He went to New York one day and met Jimmy Iraldi who has been a life-long supporter of "The Magnet" and the "Collectors' Digest". As a boy in England, he had read the weekly paper and had become quite a fan of Frank Richards' works. When he emigrated to the U.S.A. with his family, he was fortunate enough to find a corner newsagent who was able to supply papers from Britain, including "The Magnet" on a weekly basis. Jimmy showed Darrell many letters he had received from Charles Hamilton - these can be seen in the book "The Letters of Frank Richards". In addition, Jimmy showed his collection of Charles Dickens and Jules Verne works - a very fine collection indeed. A very enjoyable day had been spent with a fellow hobbyist, 3,000 miles away from home.

Mollie Allison our Librarian and Treasurer, had brought a reading from one of the Hardy Boys' books and an excerpt was read by Geoffrey Good whose readings are very much appreciated by Members of the Northern Club. Mollie remarked on the simultaneous publication of these American boys' stories, at both sides of the Atlantic.

After refreshments, further time was spent in general discussion until it was time to depart at 9.15 p.m. Once again, a very cheerful meeting had come to a close. We meet every second Saturday of the month at the Swarthmore Education Centre, Leeds 3, commencing c. 6.30 p.m.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

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The Postman Called

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

RAY HOPKINS (New Cross): Lovely to see Gem No. 1 on the good old SPCD cover. I wonder why the editors turned the Gem into a nothing-but-school stories paper from No. 11 on. Lucky for us that they did!

BEN WHITER (London): The August C.D. cover takes me back to my boyhood. I took in Comic Cuts and can remember most of the characters portrayed therein.

It was indeed sad that the Alexandra Palace was so badly damaged by fire. The first television station in the world. I have a picture I took of the erecting of the T.V. mast. The single-decker Metropolitan trams that went from the Nag's Head, Wood Green, to the east side, and the other route from the Wellington Hotel, Turnpike Lane, to the west side were numbered round about 145 to 150. The railway line you mention closed some years ago, and, for the record, at one time it was planned to extend the Underground from Finsbury Park to the Palace.

ERNEST HOLMAN (Leigh-on-Sea): One or two items from the current C.D. You mention the possibility of St. Frank's having visited New Zealand. I believe they did - there was a series about 1928/29 when St. Frank's went on a cricketing tour of Australia and I am sure they went across to N.Z. No doubt, of course, the Nelson Lee experts will have come up with more detailed information than this.

Your garden, bird table - plus cat - must be something like ours. The tits perform great antics at the nut stocking. My wife also fills a container with oats - a particular robin absolutely loves the idea! (Mind you, the oats get a bit scattered after a while!) Our Cindy is too much of a matronly cat these days to trouble the birds - she just looks at them, half in pity, half in toleration!

Regarding the Bunny Hare stories in Modern Boy - I recently read a Boys' Friend Monthly Library from Roger Jenkins' Hamilton Library and I am sure it is the same story as outlined by Danny. It is No. 360 and called 'Adventure Bound'.

JIM COOK (Auckland): Re your question in your editorial of the current

issue of C.D. Yes, Edwy Searles Brooks did send the St. Frank's holiday party to New Zealand and it appears in "St. Frank's In New Zealand", Nelson Lee Library No. 150, New Series, dated 16th March, 1929.

Although Mr. Brooks had never visited New Zealand he wrote an extraordinary true "atmosphere" of the North Island speaking as a citizen on the spot as it were. And the description where the juniors visit Rotorua to see the geysers reads like one of those Holiday Travel brochures!

I would be grateful if any reader could supply me with a better copy than the one I possess as it is in a poor condition.

ESMOND KADISH (Hendon): I am not quite sure what Mr. Hodkinson means by "lacking in literary merit" and "having one's nose continually rubbed into statements that Hamilton was a literary genius", but what he seems to be saying in his article is that it's quite harmless, chaps, to collect "Magnets" and "Gems" - even if you don't really read them! - as long as you admit that it is pure nostalgia for a vanished youth and that Mr. Hamilton's work is on the same level as the "Red Circle" stories in the "Hotspur" - equally innocuous and valueless!

Actually, I do read Greyfriars - amongst many other things! - almost every day, and I can assure Mr. Hodkinson that I would not bother to do so if I were not immensely diverted and stimulated by the marvellous depth of his characters and the cunning way his plots are crafted, so that each apparently unconnected "incident" is neatly and carefully blended and dovetailed into the next. As Hurree Singh might have said:- "The suspensefulness is terrific!"

It is, of course, easy to get pompous and tiresome about one's pet hobby, but I can't think that Mr. Hodkinson can have read much of Mr. Hamilton. I suggest that he select some series from the "Magnet" between 1928 and 1935 and give Greyfriars a fair trial. I enjoy E. S. Brooks greatly, too, but I can't say that I would put the Red Circle stories on the same level as either Brooks or Hamilton. I remember buying the first issue of the "Hotspur" in 1933 and was more impressed by the "free black cloth mask" than by Mr. Smugg, Tubby Ryan or Jim Stacey. Still, "chacun à son gout"!

DARRELL SWIFT (Leeds): I was interested to read Nic Gayle's article in the August C.D. Like Nic, I never knew the Magnet in its original form, although ten years older than he, I was still not born until after it ceased publication.

My first encounter was also via the Bunter books, to the world of Greyfriars, the Remove, Bunter, The Famous Five, Coker, Prout, et al. We had a school library and I clearly recall a school friend of mine suggesting that I read a Bunter book: at that time, I was concentrating on the Jennings saga. A new book arrived in the library, "Billy Bunter The Bold", and I was the first to borrow this. From then on, I was keen to read any of the Bunter books in the school library.

Although I fully agree that the world of Greyfriars was never depicted in its full form in a comparatively short series of novels, the Bunter books do have a fond affection in my memory and to me, they were Greyfriars. Similarly, I have the same views about the Bunter T.V. series. Although I would agree that viewing them now, they would appear dated, they were, after all, meant for children to view (presumably!) and I viewed them as a boy, in that light. Even though produced on a shoestring budget, I still consider the Bunter series well produced - especially as they were done "live" in the early days.

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DEATH OF MRS. MARY HANSON

We are deeply saddened to record that Mrs. Mary Hanson, of Urmston, died, following a heart attack, on 10th August.

Mr. and Mrs. Hanson are well known to our readers. Alf's clever work has often appeared in the C.D. and in the Annual, and his series of imagination Nelson Lee Library covers which we published a few years ago, are remembered with much pleasure. Though mainly associated with our Northern Club, they attended London meetings occasionally, and were present at a Rembradt gathering. We recall the visit with much affection.

Our very deepest sympathy goes to our friend, Alf Hanson, in his very great loss, and to the family.

* *

BLOWING THEIR TOPS

by J.E.M.

That sensational volcanic eruption in the USA earlier this year recalled to me - as, no doubt, to many others - the part played by volcanoes in the fiction of our youth. Few CD readers can be without memories of some sinister unstable mountain which suddenly broke its sleep in a great roar and flood of molten lava to test the mettle of our heroes or put some villains to rout.

For me one such memorable tale was Volcano Island in the Union Jack. The eponymous island was the headquarters of the Criminals' Confederation, that worldwide system of mayhem and skullduggery against which Sexton Blake pitted his wits for so long. The crater of an apparently extinct volcano in the Pacific Ocean seemed a perfect hideout for the Crim. Con. but it was to prove a treacherous host and the great crime ring received one of its most disabling blows not from the celebrated sleuth but from nature herself. The dormant volcano, in short, unexpectedly blew its top.

Volcano Island's final moments - after a last tremendous explosion it sinks beneath the waves - can still make the small hairs on my neck crawl. If you can get hold of this story, read it for yourselves.

Another and somewhat different volcanic tale which has stuck in my mind came from one of the D. C. Thomson papers I wrote about in CD 394. Among a number of characters from the old Wizard, Rover et al, I recalled Bandy Walker the No-Gun Sheriff, and it was in a story about this colourful figure that I first learned, just over half a century ago, that there actually were volcanoes in the USA'. (At the tender age of nine I still thought that these exploding mountains were confined to Italy and Japan.)

The little township in which the bow-legged Mr. Walker kept the peace stood at the foot of an extinct crater and one day a trickle of smoke is seen issuing from the summit. This is enough for the local residents who promptly run - all except Walker himself. Soon a bandit gang enter the (almost) empty town to loot it but are inevitably defeated by Sheriff W. and the short throwing clubs he carries in his boot-tops (one of these cudgels was called Betsy, though for the life of me I can't remember the name of the other one). The gang had, of course, lit a

fire near the rim of the volcano to simulate the beginning of an eruption. When later asked by the sheepish but grateful residents how he had guessed the "eruption" was a fake, Walker replies that the smoke was blue which indicated burning wood; true volcano smoke would have been black.

Who says we never learned anything from our juvenile story-papers? And what are your volcanic memories?

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THE EVOCATIVE TITLE

by Nic Gayle

Standing before the shelves of a story-paper emporium, or leafing through the excellent, annotated catalogues that so many of us find indespensable, how do we make a blind choice, that is, a story or series about which we know nothing? ... The answer must be - inevitably, I think - we choose from the titles, our interest being gained by those that manage to paint a picture in our imaginations, those that with three or four deft words suggest more exciting realms than our own, and those that make us want to learn more about the story contained between the covers. In a word, titles that are evocative.

"The Spectre of Blue Lagoon", for instance, or what about "The Eagle of Death"? What images do "The Deathless Horseman" or "The Leap For Life" conjure up for you? ... I must confess I find them exciting, and that they stir my imagination. Who, I wonder, is "The Hermit of the Ice" or the extraordinary "Bland Chinee"? "The Dead City" and "The Mystic Light" seem to promise the sort of thrills I enjoy, and as most of us like a good ghost story, whatever our own personal storypaper preferences, what about "The Wraith of Dismal Swamp"?

There is a dramatic terseness about "The Last Stand" that grips me, and I like the simplicity and effectiveness of "The Call of the South". And as an arouser of multifarious images in my attic of a mind, "The Death Pool Fisheries" is hard to beat.

If any of these have whetted your imagination, you might be interested to know that all the above titles were culled from the Marvel and the Boys' Friend Library, and are all tales of those three intrepid adventurers, Jack, Sam & Pete.

SEXTON BLAKE ENTHUSIAST seeks: S.B.L's (3rd series), Nos. 3, 16, 37, 39, 52, 57, 58, 60. Detective Weekly, Nos. 1, 13. Some exchanges and S.B. Annuals available. Please state price and condition.

BARRY MACILROY, 80 SOUTHWOOD AVENUE, KNAPHILL

WOKING, SURREY, GU21 2EY.

* *

WANTED: Books by A. Harcourt Burrage, John Finnemore, Jeffrey Hamilton, E. Leyland & Tes. Chard, Eric Leyland, Edgar Wallace. Gem (new series) Nos. 13, 40, 41, 82, 88, 95, 96, 100, 106, 110, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125. "William the Superman", "William, the Lawless" by Richmal Crompton.

E. CONNOLLEY, 25 PAYNES PITCH, CHURCHDOWN, GLOS., GL3 2NT

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YOUNG ENGLAND 1880-1937

by L. Hawkey

Exactly a century ago - the week-ending Jan. 3rd, 1880, to be precise, there appeared on the market a new weekly called "Young England" with the sub-heading "Kind words for Boys and Girls". It was in fact published by the proprietors of the adult weekly "Kind Words", and was presumably to rival the already successful "Boys' Own Paper" and "Boys of England" the former having started in Jan. 1879 and the latter in 1866. By including girls in its original heading, the publishers may have hoped to widen its appeal, but in the event, it was, and soon became, predominantly a boys paper, and, through several changes of ownership, was destined to last until 1937. As it pre-dated "Chums" by eleven years, it accordingly ran longer than any of its real competitors, excepting the "Boys' Own" (Boys of England having foundered in 1899) - though, like "Chums" it ceased to become either a weekly or monthly several years before its ultimate demise, taking the form of an "Annual" only.

The first year included a serial set in Africa, amongst the Kaffirs, called "The English Settlers", by W. H. G. Kingston, who promised to be a regular contributor, but ironically - and sadly - this prolific writer - he produced over 120 adventure stories in less than thirty years - died before the year was out. However, Ascot R. Hope also wrote an early serial, and other prominent authors in the 1880's included R. M. Ballantyne, Dr. Gordon Stables, G. A. Henty, Robert Leighton, Cutcliffe-Hyne, Harold Avery, and Fred Wishaw. Distinguished artists were also employed - Randolph Caldicott, A. T. Elwes, (the "Warwick Reynolds" of his day, for animal illustrations), Stanley Berkeley, Gordon Browne, W. S. Stacey, W. H. Overend, A. Forestier, Paul Hardy, Charles Heath Robinson, Louis Gunnis, and Alfred Pearse.

Priced at only a penny a week, it was not so ambitious a product as the "B.O.P." - 16 pages approx. to start, but before long it became a monthly, with 40 pages per issue, priced 6d. This included the inevitable "plate", sometimes coloured, but more often a pinkish or brown "photogravure". By the turn of the century its really old-fashioned look was replaced with a slightly updated format, and the Annuals had pictorial covers, similar to the "Boys' Own", instead of the ornamental "embossed" design, and gilt lettering. Some of the older writers, like Robert Leighton and Harold Avery carried on but the others were replaced by such as W. E. Cule Escott-Inmann, Everett-Green, David Ker, Argyll Saxby, and the ubiquitous Percy F.

Westerman. But the most noteable serial came from the pen of the mysterious Fenton Ash, a product of the Jules Verne -cum- H. G. Wells school (with perhaps a dash of Edgar Rice Burroughs!). His "Son of the Stars" (1908) was a sequel to the already published "King of Mars", and a first-rate schoolboys scientific-fiction story, excellenty illustrated by Watson Charlton, and significant enough to often be mentioned in "Sci-Fi" anthologies.

During the 1900-1914 era, other prominent artists were Frank Feller, W. B. Woolen, Norman Wilkinson, Frederick W. Burton, the highly esteemed Stephen Reid, Rex Osborne, Colbron Pearse (son of Alfred) - G. M. Payne, Florence Meyerheim, Stavert J. Cash (one of the best and most under-rated children's illustrators during the first half of this century) - Felix Leigh, and H. Montague Love. Meyerheim's style was very like Gordon Browne's, and apart from Evelyn Stuart Hardy, sister of Paul Hardy, she was one of the few women to draw regularily in Boys' books. Montague Love emigrated to America around the 1908 period, and became a popular Hollywood actor, in both silent and talking pictures. For almost thirty years his fine voice and presence kept him in great demand, and with Noah Beery Snr. he was one of the best-loved "heavies". He had a leading role as the head of the Borgias in John Barrymore's "Don Juan" recently shown on BBC 2, but he was a really good illustrator before he changed his profession.

It may also be of interest that Savile Lumley made his "debut" in Vol. 23 (1903) and remained one of the magazine's principal artists until its end 34 years later, while C. H. Chapman made a few of his rare appearances outside of the Amalgamated Press.

Albeit slightly reduced in size, and quality of paper, "Young England" survived the Great War, and by 1920 was back to its normal size. A number of its best writers had however, moved on, or in some cases, passed away. However, Rowland Walker, Halliwell Sutcliffe and H. Wedgewood Belfield, were three well-known authors who joined its ranks, while those fine artists Algernon and Montague Black, as well as Norman Wilkinson, graced their pages, mainly with marine and engineering pictures. Wilkinson's fine technique with ships, planes, railways, etc., led him to become a leader of posters for the Railroads, and Transport Services for several decades.

Nonetheless, the magazine gradually lagged well behind its rivals, even though one of them - "The Captain" gave up the ghost quite unexpectedly, in 1925. But it really gave no competition to either "Chums" or the "B.O.P." and sometime in the 20's seems to have ceased publication as a monthly - as "Chums" was to do in the '30's - and continued as an "Annual" only. Well-known authors gradually disappeared, and while several good artists - W. B. Handforth, Tom Peddie, Alfred Sindall and Tom Hall, for example - joined the illustrators, its decline continued inevitably into the 1930 era, whilst the size of the Annual dropped to around 250 pages, and those on rather thick paper, with a rather "cheap" feel about it. For the last 8 or 9 years of its life it was a poor shadow of its original self - though admittedly almost all of the contemporary Annuals - not excluding the famous Greyfriars "Holiday", - deteriorated throughout this decade. The days of the famous serials, many had been subsequently issued in book-form, had gone, - the Annual was now made up of short stories by "unknown" authors, plus sports and "interest" articles, and even some of these, and some of the illustrations, were "lifted" from earlier issues. Of the better artists, only Savile Lumley remained, though he was joined by two others, familiar to C.D. readers - James Mills, who drew a lot in the old "Schoolgirls' Own" and "School Friend" - usually signing just "Mills" - and J. C. B. Knight, who portrayed the "Rio Kid" throughout his run in the "Popular". In its lifetime, "Young England" saw several changes of publishers, though it had been in the hand of the "Pilgrims Press" for its last 30 years or so. At all times it tried to give its public healthy and entertaining reading. To have lasted almost 60 years is no small achievement and it is still worth remembering and collecting for the excellent serials and illustrations, up to the early 1920's.

A PUZZLE TO AMUSE YOU

C	D	N	A	L	B	F	E	L	B	O	N
H	S	I	L	L	E	M	O	L	O	N	G
U	A	N	G	E	L	D	A	E	R	I	G
R	L	O	R	R	E	K	A	B	E	O	E
C	O	K	E	R	E	P	P	O	P	N	W
H	F	R	Y	A	P	H	I	P	P	S	L
E	K	A	R	D	L	I	W	R	I	T	L
R	C	A	M	O	W	E	N	A	N	T	U
R	B	F	P	D	L	R	E	T	N	U	B
Y	B	G	I	D	U	A	T	T	O	C	S
D	U	T	T	O	N	L	E	V	I	L	C
S	T	O	T	T	N	C	G	L	Y	N	N

This clever puzzle is composed by Eric Lawrence. It contains 47 names from the stories of Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Rookwood, and St. Frank's. See how many you can find. You may go in any direction in a straight line - horizontally, vertically, diagonally, backwards and forwards. But you must not change direction in mid-word.

* *

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