STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS DIGEST

Volume 35 Number 411 March 1981

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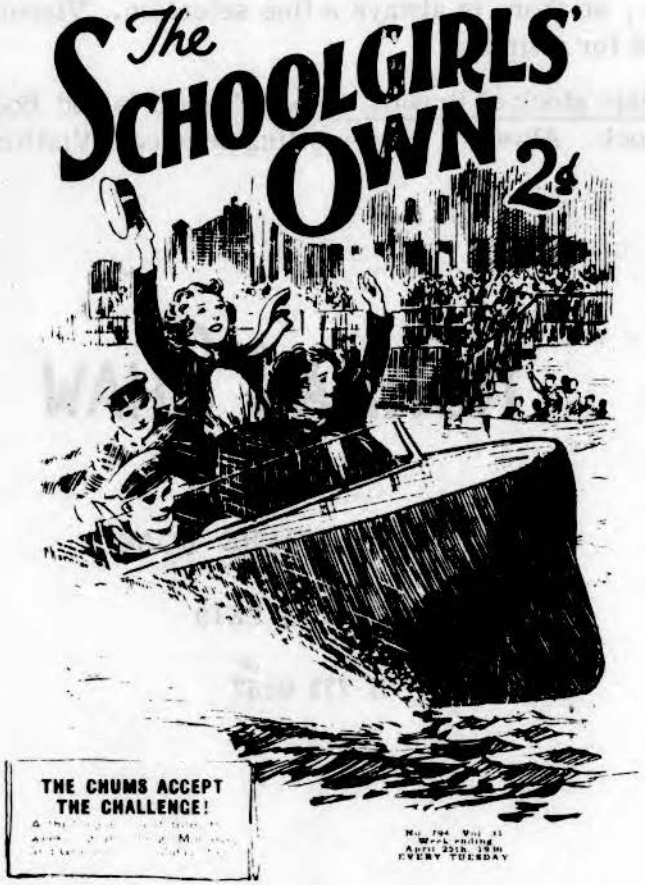

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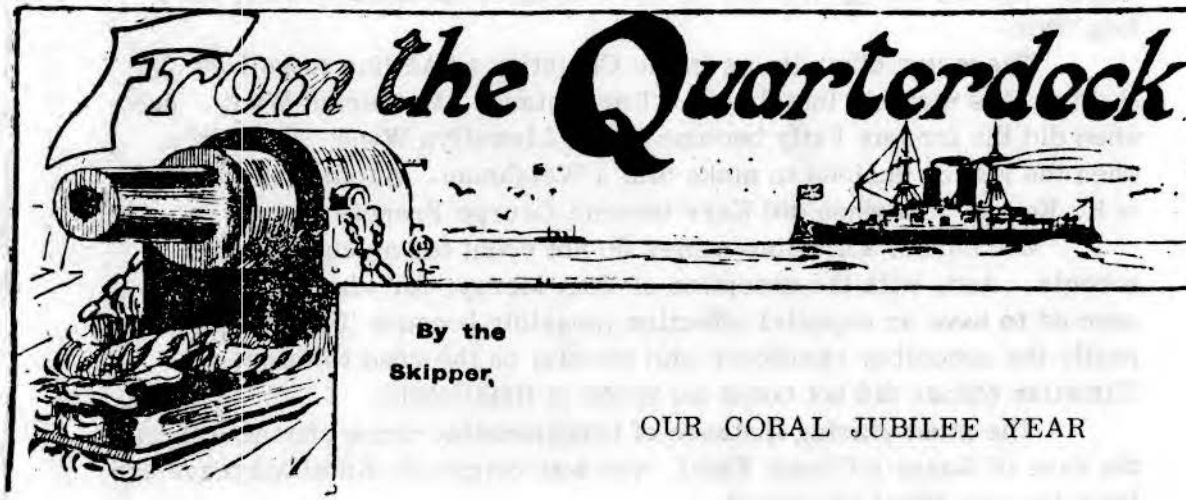

By the Skipper.

OUR CORAL JUBILEE YEAR

TIME CHANGES EVERYTHING

The charm of the Classic Serials which we run from time to time is that one occasionally comes across something which has changed with the passing of time. And I am not referring to sovereigns which time has changed into confetti.

Recently I mentioned that Taggles, originally, was the owner of a bulldog named Towser. Things like that.

In this month's instalment of our story of the early St. Jim's,

readers may be astonished to find that Mr. Ratcliff's Christian name was Gordon in early days. It is hard now to think of Ratty as a Gordon. In fact, Gordon is really an uncommon name these days. I cannot think of a Gordon among all our readers. Is there one?

Today we think of Mr. Ratcliff as Horace. One day I will try to trace just exactly when Mr. Ratcliff became Horace.

This, of course, makes us ponder for a moment over the number of Hamilton masters who were named Horace. Apart from Mr. Ratcliff, there were Horace Hacker and Horace Greely, and, in earlier times, even the magnificent Mr. Quelch was a Horace. Somewhere down the years, before the White Cover days ended, I would think, Quelch became Henry Samuel, though the sub-writers clung to Quelch's Horace for a long time.

There are other items in the Christian name line to pull us up short in this month's instalment. For instance, Frederick Wynn. Just when did the famous Fatty become David Llewellyn Wynn? Possibly when the author decided to make him a Welshman. Another incongruity is H. Kerr. Just when did Kerr become George Francis Kerr?

Of course, Christian names do not count for much in boys' schools. And, with the exception of Tom Merry, for whom Hamilton seemed to have an especial affection (possibly because Tom Merry was really the schoolboy character who set him on the road to fame), Christian names did not count for much in Hamiltonia.

The most glaring instance of irresponsible name change was in the case of Gussy's Cousin Ethel, who was originally Ethel Maynard and later became Ethel Cleveland.

It would seem to indicate a lack of method on the part of a series writer. What it probably does indicate is that Hamilton never dreamed for a moment that his creations at that time were to be permanent. He expected them to be here today and gone tomorrow. But it so happened that he hit on the right formula, and, in addition, he happened to have the magic spark which put him out far ahead of his contemporaries.

ANOTHER MILESTONE

It was sad to read in the newspapers that the firm of Cassell's, one of the most illustrious publishers for well over a hundred years, is

ceasing general publication of books.

Cassell's, down the decades, published the work of the most distinguished authors - an awe-inspiring list of great writers which included such men as R. L. Stevenson, Rider Haggard, Hall Caine, H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, Winston Churchill - and Frank Richards.

It is a pleasing thought to us that the work of Charles Hamilton - so much loved by millions and sneered at by a few who would like to think themselves intelligent - found a world-famous publisher in the last ten years of his life.

The first Cassell story by Frank Richards was "Billy Bunter's Beanfeast" in 1952, priced at what, today, seems a staggering figure - 7s/6d. In 1964 came "Just Like Bunter" which the author had left half-completed at the time of his death. The price now was 11s/6d.

They had been issued at the rate of two a year, with the exception of the year 1961 when there were three titles.

Cassell is a name which will always be remembered along with the world's greatest and most popular writers - and the name of Frank Richards is very, very far from being among the least of them.

THE PRINCESS SNOWEE'S CORNER (confided to her Mum)

I am very upset. Humans just don't seem to understand things. The other evening, while inspecting a nearby garden, I found a little field-mouse, which I caught.

Climbing the 8 ft. fence, I carefully carried it (the mouse, not the fence) across our lawn, through my own cat-door, into the lounge where my Mum and the Editor were sitting watching pictures in a box. I thought they would be pleased. But, all of a sudden, the little perisher (the mouse, not the editor) ran away behind the built-in gas-fire. THEY were very disgruntled (so unreasonable!). After many vain efforts to catch it, Mum said: "It's late. Let's go to bed. Snowee will catch it later on."

So upstairs we all went.

In the early hours, remembering what she had said, I went down-stairs - and, of course, after my usual show of patience, I caught it (the mouse, not a cold).

Upstairs I carried it, creeping past her room, for I know she

doesn't like mice, and along the passage to my boss's room. He always says what a clever girl I am.

What went wrong? Well, something did. When he returned to his room after breakfast, he saw the little perisher sitting actually on his pillow. This time he didn't say: "What a clever little gel!" What a to-do! What a carry-on! Up came my Mum. All the furniture had to be moved. Boxes and boxes of precious books were dragged out. Then, at last I caught the mouse - and this time it was disposed of. Hours later, after the room had been all put to rights, I had lost my playmate. Was I thanked for my services? I was not. I was very severely told that, if it happened again, I should be sent back to the Animal Rescue Farm.

It makes you think, doesn't it? I bet they didn't mean it, so I'm not very worried.

THE EDITOR

* *

DANNY'S DIARY

MARCH 1931

Less and less people are travelling by trains. Less and less goods are being carried by rail. Road traffic, and particularly charbancs and motor-bikes, are hitting the railways hard in the bread basket. In the past year or two a number of branch lines have closed down entirely. The most recent to go is the line which ran from Canterbury to Whitstable, said to be one of the oldest in the land. It was mainly single track, with just a few loops at the one or two intermediate stations.

Of course, Britain easily leads the world in the making of charbancs and motor-bikes, so the industries are thriving. But I love the trains. I hope they will become popular again.

There is an improvement in the Nelson Lee Library, which has been a bit of a hotch-potch lately. The editor announces that double-length St. Frank's tales are coming along, so it doesn't look as though the change in the Lee was to everybody's satisfaction. For the time being, there is a new series.

Mr. Rossiter, who is a small Canadian farmer, comes to England with his son Skeets, to claim their titles as Lord Edgemore and Viscount Bellton. Skeets comes to St. Frank's. But there are some villains who are trying to prevent this noble pair from getting their rights. The two stories this month in the series are "From Prairie to Castle" and "Flooded Out at St. Frank's". The series continues next month. These tales are on the short side - but longer ones are on the way.

Mr. Player, the tobacco man, who is famous for his cigarettes.- 10 for 6d, 20 for 11½d - has given £28,000 to build a new block on to Nottingham General Hospital.

Two good tales in the Schoolboys' Own Library this month. "Bunter's Barring-In" is great fun. Bunter ends up in the punishment room, but he manages to lock Mr. Quelch up there - and there is great speculation over the disappearance of Mr. Quelch. There are some hilarious chapters. ("Good word, hilarious!" said my brother Doug, who had the cheek to read my diary. I had spelt it wrong, but it's right now, I hope, though Doug is no great shakes as a speller.) The second tale is an early one of St. Jim's entitled "Saints versus Grammarians" about rivalry between the two schools. Kerr impersonates the Head of the Grammar School, and Gordon Gay impersonates Gussy.

In the second week of the month there were very heavy snowfalls over the entire country, and I had my sledge out. I got Dad to have a ride on it, and he fell off and looked very undignified.

Some lovely pictures at the local cinemas this month. Basil Rathbone and Dorothy Mackaill in "Flirting Widows" was fairly funny. Constance Bennett and Lew Ayres in "Common Clay" was a bit too powerful for me, but Mum loved it. Milton Sills and Dorothy Mackaill in "Man Trouble" was good, and there was a sound cartoon in this programme starring "Oswald, the Pup". Rin-Tin-Tin in "Rough Waters" was good, as was Lon Chaney in "The Unholy Three".

Milton Sills was also in a good sea film "The Sea Wolf", and a lovely musical in technicolor was Jack Oakie in "Hit the Deck". Not so good as the stage show we saw at the London Hippodrome, but there was an extra theme song "I'm still on the shelf, keeping myself for you", and Doug has bought the Columbia record of it.

Ronald Colman and Kay Francis were simply great in "Raffles", and Robert Montgomery was very good in "The Richest Man in the World".

At the London Hippodrome there is a new Musical Comedy entitled "Stand Up and Sing" starring Jack Buchanan, Elsie Randolph, and Anna Neagle. Doug says he might take me to see it, as he knows I like stage shows. He is a kindly sole.

Yet another set of Ken King tales has now ended in Modern Boy. In "The Master of Fufa", Ken King has to decide whether he will sail away to his home port, leaving Kit Hudson marooned on the lonely coral island of Fufa. In the final tale of the series "Shipmates of the Dawn", the ketch gets back its young Australian mate, so Ken and his native crew are happy as the golden sun sinks in the west. So once again we have said good-bye, for the time, to Ken and the Dawn.

There is a new western series in the paper entitled "The Boy Sheriff" by John Hunter, and a serial "The Amir's Ruby", about a hero named Colin Standish, by Percy F. Westerman.

Cambridge has won the Boat Race - their eighth successive win. There's high times in the lightblue town tonight!

With the first tale of the month in the Magnet, the Tatters series ended. Entitled "A Kinsman's Treachery", it told of Rackstraw's final attempt to disgrace his relative, Chumley, and this time Rackstraw had Ponsonby working for him. I enjoyed this series, which is full of interest in spite of repeating itself in a way now and then. Next week, "The Champion Chump", in which Coker tries to lock Blundell in the punishment-room, and makes a mistake and locks up the Head. Great fun.

Next "A Schoolboy's Sacrifice", a Bounder-Redwing single tale, a bit familiar in plot, but lovely reading. Final of the month, "Billy Bunter's Bunk", with Bunter fleeing from Quelch once again.

Towards the end of the month, the Scotch express was derailed near Leighton Buzzard, with six people killed and a number injured.

A mixed bag in the Gem this month. "The Lighthouse Mystery" is one of those frantic affairs, so full of plot that there's no time to talk. An air liner has been taken over by gangsters, and it lands on Lexham Common, while our chums look on from behind a bush. There's a fast car. A stolen motor-boat, going down river to a deserted lighthouse.

A lot of boring chunks, I found it.

Then a silly tale entitled "Lion-Hearted Gussy". Gussy finds himself shut up in a cage with a lion. He escapes into a cage with two panthers. It's that sort of a tale.

Then came "The Shady Three" which is by the real Martin Clifford, and is exceptionally good. Mr. Lathom gets knocked down in his own study. Trimble is suspected, but the real culprit was St. Leger of the Fifth. A tip-top tale, and a welcome one. Final tale of the month is "Mr. Justice Grundy" in which Grundy reforms and becomes well-mannered and polite.

Jimmy Silver and Rookwood are back in the Gem in complete tales of about the same length of those they used to have in the Popular. The opening story, in the last week of the month, is "Lovell's Lucky Day" in which Mr. Manders's nephew, Monty, comes to Rookwood. Not by the original writer of the Rookwood stories, but not a bad tale.

Doug bought me a Boys' Friend 4d. Library entitled "Rivals of the Blue Crusaders", a football story by E. S. Brooks. Doug likes the mystery stories written by Agatha Christie. She has just had a new one published, and Doug borrowed it from the local library. It is entitled "The Murder at the Vicarage", and it features an old lady detective named Miss Marple. Doug says that Agatha Christie is the best of all mystery writers.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 143, "Bunter's Barring-In" comprised two consecutive Magnet stories from the early summer of 1926, the original titles being "The Persecution of Billy Bunter" and "Bunter's Barring-In". The two stories fitted beautifully into one S.O.L., and this must rank as one of the most successful S.O.L's. S.O.L. No. 144, "Saints versus Grammarians" comprised two blue Gems of late 1911. Originally entitled "D'Arcy's Double" and "The Raiding of the Rival School", the two stories did not appear together in the Gem, but were about a month apart. Both tales featured impersonations, both were incredible, though amusing in parts, and put together they were too much of a good thing. Published originally to publicise the new Empire Library which featured Grammar School stories mainly written by Down. "D'Arcy's Double" was reprinted in the Gem of the thirties, but "Raiding of the Rival School" was never republished.

"Murder at the Vicarage", mentioned by Danny this month, was the first appearance of Miss Marple in a full-length novel. E. S. Brooks seems to have written plenty of stories about the Blue Crusaders, but I cannot recall that anyone has ever written about them in C.D. Did Brooks have no admirers outside his St. Frank's work?)

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

Just a short preamble this month as there are several items in Blakiana and I must not take up too much room. All articles will be welcome as I am running short.

THE DREADNOUGHT

by John Bridgwater

I have spent a few interesting hours lately browsing through my Dreadnought volumes and found no less than twelve Sexton Blake serials, some of which include our old Blake characters. Oddly enough no authors name is given though the authors names of other stories in the Dreadnought are. The Dreadnought had a spasm of War fever which started in September 1914 and ended with the last issue of December 1914. The numbering broke off at No. 121 and started with War Series No. 1. This went on to No. 14 then with the first issue of January 1915 the numbering reverted to the old series and was No. 136 due allowance having been made for the fourteen War series. Strange! Why did the War series end so abruptly? However these are the Sexton Blake serials:-

"The Man from Scotland Yard" featuring G. M. Plummer. No. 27 dated 30 Nov. 1912 to No. 34 dated 18 Jan. 1913.

"The Man of Many Disguises", Plummer again. No. 35 dated 25 Jan. 1913 to No. 42 dated 15 March, 1913.

"The Man Who Vanished", Plummer yet again. No. 43 dated 22 March to No. 49 dated 3 May, 1913.

"The Great Conspiracy" featuring G. M. Plummer, Count Carlac and Detective Will Spearing. No. 61 dated 26 July, 1913 to No. 69 dated 20 September, 1913.

"The Men Who Changed Places", No. 68 dated 13 September, 1913 to No. 84 dated 3 Jan. 1914.

Note here the Dreadnought introduced a crafty trick of overlapping the end of one serial with the beginning of the next. So Blake appeared in two serials in the same paper at the same time for two weeks running. The end instalments of the finishing serial were pitifully small, in fact the last instalment - called the last chapter - was only a single column

tucked away towards the back with a very small heading title. The reader had to search carefully to find it. This overlap was done five times between No. 68 and No. 141 and varied from one to two weeks. I wonder, was Dreadnought readership falling off to such an extent that such tricks had to be resorted to? It is also noted that Blake serials ran continuously from No. 61 to No. 159 when Dreadnought ended - merging with the Boy's Friend.

But to continue the list:-

"The Heir from Nowhere", No. 84 dated 3 Jan. 1914 to No. 98, 11 April, 1914.

"The Man of Mystery", No. 97, 4 April, 1914 to No. 107 dated 13 June, 1914.

"The Mystery of the Scarlet Thread", No. 108 dated 20 June, 1914 to No. 114 dated 1 August, 1914.

"The Mystery of the Yellow Button" featuring Plummer. No. 115 dated 8 August, 1914 to No. 124 dated 10 Oct. 1914 (No. 3 of the War series). From here I have converted War Series numbers to the original numbering for convenience.

"The Redskin Detective", No. 124 dated 10 Oct. 1914 to No. 133 dated 12 December, 1914.

"The Secret Plotter", No. 134 dated 19 December, 1914 to No. 141 dated 6 February, 1915.

"The Merchants Secret" featuring Ezra Q. Maitland, Broadway Kate and Detective Fenlock Fawn.

No. 141 dated 6 Feb. 1915 to No. 159 dated 12 June, 1915.

The first instalment of the Merchant's Secret appeared in the last issue No. 72, dated 30 Jan. 1915, of the Boys' Journal which was absorbed by Dreadnought in No. 141 which reprinted the first instalment for the benefit of regular readers of the Dreadnought.

IT'S A HARD LIFE

by Raymond Cure

It's a hard life; ask any detective or any policeman for that matter, no nine till four-thirty job for them, plus bonus and gimmicks for getting to work on time, with full pay for striking. For some it's a workers' paradise, but not for those in police and detective work. Modern police are pushed seven days a week. But it was ever thus.

Being a fictional detective Sexton Blake was often pushed beyond measure by the authors of the Union Jack. Week after week Sexton Blake was hard at it. We readers insisted on our 1 lb. of flesh (with apologies to Mr. Shakespeare and his Shylock), twopence down and we expected our favourite detective to risk life and limb, along with his assistant Tinker.

Pearl White had nothing on our Blake for peril, the "Perils of Pauline" are not to be compared with the "Perils of Sexton Blake". Perils on the land, perils on the high seas, perils under the sea and in the air, you name it and our Union Jack authors have plunged our heroes into it. There are of course, other ways to die. Poisonous snakes - poison spiders - poison gas sharks - slow torture. Not to worry, our authors knew about them and for a mere twopence a story (per reader) saw to it that Sexton Blake faced the lot. My, how the ingenious minds of those writers provided us with our quota of thrills and not to forget that for a further 4d. to 16d. (1/4d) you could follow Sexton Blake into further dire dangers. I refer to the Sexton Blake Library with its four copies per month.

Yes, it was we who kept Sexton Blake authors on their toes. They must have laid awake at nights figuring how to plunge Blake into further danger. If we had not demanded our twopennyworth of thrills a week we would not have been enjoying the fruits of it today with our splendid collections and equally splendid libraries of the Old Papers in which the Union Jack holds a high place.

By way of illustration let me draw your attention to four copies of the Union Jack from the years 1930/31. David Macluire in his "The Fourth Mummy", U.J. No. 1408, Blake has been strung up hands above his head in the hands of villains, escaping, runs into the path of a sniper, he also nearly has the "bends" while in a diving suit. Anthony Skene, author of U.J. No. 1405, "The Hate Doctor", runs Blake into an ambush, while in "Loot", U.J. No. 1429, David Macluire has Blake shot by a firing squad, and I mean shot, which raises the question "How does he yet live"? I suggest you get the answer by reading "Loot".

Not to lag behind, Gilbert Chester comes up with "Red Tongues" U.J. No. 1428, a rather macabre story featured the murdered victims with a huge red flannel tongue lolling from their wide open mouths. In this Blake misses death by inches in a terrifying skid, later escaping a

shower of bullets and dropping face down in an underground stream after being clubbed. Like I said its a hard life.

CONSULTING ROOM CHAT (1) by Derek Ford

Two Duds. After my "discovery" of Derek Long I turned with anticipation to the three case-books by old-timer (judging by style) Stephen Blakesley. The first, again a Christmas number - "The Riddle of the Burning Bungalow" (253/3) - was promising. Although it was stretching it a bit when Blake recovers a camera to develop "a landscape with a fallen tree on which a man was sitting" - the print of a killer in an unsolved murder twelve years before. But I had to stretch myself more than a bit to get through his other two offerings (274 and 278) - they were awful. Concerning jewel and warehouse robberies, silly-ass Tinker, a silly-ass newspaper reporter, melodramatic kidnappings, and other tiresome goings-on. Detective-Inspector Mort of Scotland Yard features in all three cases and should have been allowed full rein with these two, then we should have never heard about them in the SBL ... Anyway, I can now save your time by marking them off in your catalogue "N.W.V." - "Not wanted on voyage". And I hope I do not find many more for that registration.

Principle. Oh, that editor and author had observed Blake's fine principle in that splendid case-book "The Paper Salvage Crime" by Gilbert Chester (30/3): "I want the best detective cases. Unusual and interesting cases. Frankly, the commission that is commonplace and rudimentary doesn't attract me much."

Devon Drama. As antidote to Blakesley I turned to a companion case-book "The Prisoner of the Manor" by Rex Hardinge (273). No dud this with Tinker in a Devon car crash with a bullet in his head ... "It was at moments like this that he (Blake) recognised just exactly how much Tinker did mean to him. Their life was compounded so much of danger and the threat of sudden death that both had acquired something of the fatalism of the soldier in action - people might die around them, but not either of them. They had come near to it so often that they had come to believe they bore charmed lives. But in the background always was the knowledge that, deep down, he always hoped either that they would go together, or that he would go first. He could not imagine a world without

Tinker, who had been like a son to him for so long.

* *

Nelson Lee Column

NELSON LEE BEFORE BROOKS BEGAN TO FLOW

by Cyril Rowe

Whilst we can never forget, or rather, are only too grateful to remember the Nelson Lee Library from 1915 to its close in which almost all the stories were from the rewarding pen of Edwy Searles Brooks it must be borne in mind that the latter writer took over the characters Nelson Lee and Nipper from Maxwell Scott who had made them well established in the previous twenty years.

Doctor John William Staniforth, born in 1863, wrote his first Nelson Lee yarn when he was around thirty years of age. It was published in "The Marvel" in October 1894. His pen name, Maxwell Scott, became very popular following his many tales which appeared over the years in "The Marvel" and "Union Jack", in "Boys' Friend", "Boys' Herald" and "Boys' Realm".

His early successes "Birds of Prey" and "The Silver Dwarf" were serialised in the B.F.W. and many times reprinted in the B.F. Library and Nelson Lee. The Boys' Friend Library shows some 36 numbers by Maxwell Scott, though only half featured our favourite pair. The rest featured Martin Dale, Kengon Ford, or Vernon Read, three detectives of whose adventures he wrote in "Chums".

He introduced Nipper in "Nelson Lee's Pupil" a serial in the second number of "The Boys' Herald" in 1904, and thereafter featured him in all the tales he wrote about Nelson Lee. In addition to these five characters he wrote yarns about Sexton Blake in the "Union Jack" and in the "Penny Pictorial" and maybe in "Answers". Altogether these characters and particularly Nelson Lee, were a valuable property to the Amalgamated Press which they developed into the successful "Nelson Lee Library".

One supposes that, industrious man as he was, his radical work prevented him from the onerous weekly task, so that although he, and

G. H. Teed, and others initiated the Lee it fell into the able hands of Brooks who made the time to produce the whole series - as practically his life work - till it ended.

The Maxwell Scott score - I think complete - is as follows in BFL Boys' Friend Library:-

No. 4 Birds of Prey, 16 The Silver Dwarf, 17 The Missing Heir, 19 Nelson Lee's Pupil, 24 The Great Unknown, 25 The Stolen Submarine, 34 Nelson Lee's Rival, 62 The Football Detective, 132 Well Cleared, 133 The Pride of the Team, 138 The Hidden Hill, 171 Nipper's Schooldays, 209 The Black House, 213 The Blot, 215 The New Broom, 282 Nelson Lee In The Navy, 298 The Film Detective, 301 On His Majesty's Secret Service, 351 A Perilous Quest, 355 The Secret of The Navy, 358 The Double Six, 365 The Silver Key, 373 A Scrap of Paper, 416 The Seven Stars, 420 Hidden Gold, 437 Out To Win, 464 The Secret Well, 472 The White Slave, 474 The Fighting Fifth, 483 Detective Nipper, 519 The Black House, 527 A Son of The Sea, 530 Detective Warder Nelson Lee, 589 The Iron Skull, 590 The Red Hand, 736 Lorimer's Legacy.
Other tales not collected in BFL were:- "Captain of St. Ninian's", "Nipper of St. Ninian's", "Britain Beyond the Seas", "The Golden Quest". All above in Boys' Friend Weekly.
"The New Bowler" in Boys' Realm; "The Winged Terror" in Boys' Herald. This last named introduces Sexton Blake as well as Lee and Nipper.

But how fully developed were Lee and Nipper when Brooks took over? Did Brooks round them off or were they already fully developed? Did he merely use his own author-wise viewpoint and only set them in a more stable environment, i.e. St. Frank's?

My belief is that Brooks finally changed Lee from a detective into a schoolmaster who only occasionally used his detective faculties, sound and well drawn as they may be and subdued them to what became merely school tales in the main.

However, in these various adventure series, Nelson Lee becomes the capable traveller and explorer, effective, knowledgeable and a great man in a crisis. So Brooks definitely changed Lee from the melo-dramatic creation of Maxwell Scott's earlier authorship.

Similarly Nipper becomes a much more extended personality - he had to be - to write in the first person. He became more educated and more percipient; in fact a bit larger than life toc arry the weight of the now more dominant role - that of schoolboy leader.

The other major change was that Brooks was forever introducing a new character to sustain a plot and a series, so focussing the limelight

once again away, to some degree, from the original couple.

* *

DO YOU REMEMBER? by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 168 - Magnets 1039-41 - Billy Bunter's Convict Series

1928 was in its way a prelude to the Golden Age of the Magnet. A mellow humour was beginning to creep into the style, and with it came an accumulation of background information that provided an authentic touch about Greyfriars customs and traditions. For example, after supper on the first day of term there was "a speech from the Head - the same speech to which generations of Greyfriars fellows had listened, and which some of them knew almost by heart." The masters took afternoon tea in their common room and Prout bored them all by telling them about his winter sports holiday in Switzerland. During the year, bit by bit, the atmosphere was being built up to provide the reader with an impression of a vital and living institution.

The series began at Wharton Lodge where, we were informed, Wadham the butler did not approve of Bunter at the best of times. The Famous Five and Bunter were walking back to the Lodge one cold, wet January afternoon at the end of the Christmas holidays, and because Bunter complained of the weather he was left in a hut until a car could be sent from the house to pick him up. There he encountered Convict 19, George Waring, who robbed him of his hat, coat and wordly wealth (half a crown). When the new term began and Bunter declared that a new temporary master, Eric Gilmore, was Convict 19 and began to think about the fifty pounds reward, the stage was set for a very entertaining series. Incidentally, it has always seemed to me that the London firm of Waring & Gillow (with a slight alteration) probably provided Charles Hamilton with the names in this series, for they were unique, quite unlike the repeated Lagdens and Snaiths to be found in the general run of the stories.

The excitement and drama relating to the convict, with Inspector Grimes seeming much more intelligent than usual, was leavened by a series of humorous sections that were both novel and amusing. The tuckshop was broken into, and Bunter was questioned in front of the whole

school. After misunderstanding most of the Head's remarks, Bunter was eventually asked outright if he was guilty, and replied, "Certainly not! I never knew the lock could be opened as easily as that, sir," to which Dr. Locke exclaimed, "Upon my word! Do you mean to imply, Bunter, that you would have been guilty of this pilfering had you been aware that it could have been perpetrated with facility?" Inventive and novel comedy of this high order was a speciality of the vintage Magnet and can be savoured again and again without ever cloying.

* *

THE GAMMONFULNESS WAS TERRIFIC

by Len Wormull

"Gammon!" said Bob Cherry.

"The gammonfulness", said Hurree Ramset Singh, "is terrific."

Short interval ...

"It's gammon!" repeated Bob Cherry. "Just frabjous, fatheaded gammon!"

Insofar as "terrific" means prodigious, I would go along with Hurree Singh "gammonfully". Of all the weird and wonderful dialogue that stamped the Hamilton trademark, none served the author more slavishly than "gammon". In the Magnet, the word was at its most fashionable peak during the acknowledged golden years of 1927-35. A striking feature of the times was the way newcomers to Greyfriars would arrive "gammon-equipped", as though it were a prerequisite of entry. Henry Christopher Crum, the schoolboy hypnotist, is but one example. The word was so entrenched in Lower Fourth vocabulary - the mighty Fifth and Sixth disdained to use it - that Harry Wharton & Co. could utter it with 'one voice'; a remarkable piece of mental telepathy, you'll agree. Yet, I wonder how many boy readers of Magnet and Gem really understood its meaning, if indeed they knew the word at all? Precious few, I should imagine. Conscious of my own inadequacy, I repaired to the Shorter Oxford Dictionary: 'Gammon - Thieves' slang. Rubbish. Humbug. Ridiculous nonsense. Hoax. To pretend. Stuff with nonsense.' You knew all along, of course.

A variation on the theme came with a remarkable utterance by Bunter to the Famous Five: "What are you gammoning me for?" It sounded so awful and unreal that I blinked twice and paused for thought.

If he meant 'hoaxing', why not say so? Six of the best, Bunter, for getting us flummoxed. I was only a Magnet away to another discovery. Hitherto, I had always believed gammon to be a schoolboy's prerogative; a rather nice-sounding slang word that somehow suited our learned young friends. "Monty Newland's Enemy", from the Devarney series, quickly dispelled the myth. I had reached Chapter 10 when "gammon" assailed me from a new and unexpected quarter. An ex-convict named Ledgey is trying to galvanise P.C. Tozer into action, to no avail ...

'Ledgey rapped out an angry oath.

Mr. Tozer turned a stolid eye on him.

"'Old that in!" he said. "I don't believe a word you've told me, 'cause why - I know you're talking gammon."

Paragraphs later, he repeats the word. Then, as though to deny Tozer the monopoly, it was the turn of Ledgey ...

"My name's Newland," answered Monty. "Mr. Devarney, the man you assaulted is the father of a Greyfriars fellow, and he has gone to the school."

"That's all gammon!" muttered Ledgey uneasily ...

Was the word unique in school fiction? Slang though it may have been, I think the Magnet would have lost a little of its magic without it. In passing, it must be said that, in terms of usage, our author eclipsed Dickens at his own "gammon" (I rather like that). Fortunately, Bill Sikes was not around to witness it, otherwise he might have used that immortal line to Fagin: "Stow that gammon."

And on that note I shall do just that.

Opening remarks from "Wanted By The Police", The Courtfield Cracksman.

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Our Classic Novelty Serial from Early in the Century.

THE REFORMATION OF MARMADUKE

The Famous Four were locked in Study No. 6, and there Blake produced a precious paper. He read it aloud, with a grinning countenance:

"Programme of a Grand Concert to be given in the Lecture Hall at St. Jim's, by the members of the New House Dramatic Society, on Saturday evening at 7 precisely. Under the distinguished patronage of Gordon Ratcliff, Esquire, M.A. Cantab, master of the cockhouse at St. Jim's."

"Talk about cheek!" said Herries. "Let's have a look at the items, kid. Here's Figgy at the head, of course. He would be!"

Blake read out the programme, amid the subdued chuckles of his comrades:

"Song 'Down Among the Dead Men', G. Figgins; Cornet Solo, Frederick Wynn; Cake-Walk, 'Giddy Gilbertine', Herbert Pratt; Sketch, 'School House Funniosities', Messrs. Figgins, Wynn & Kerr; Song, 'Give Me Back My Eighteenpence', H. Kerr; Scene 1, Act 4, 'King John' (Shakespeare), Messrs. Figgins, Kerr & Wynn; March from 'Lohengrin' (Wagner); Mouth Organ Solo, James Perkins; Duet 'Sing Me a Song, Oh!' (Sullivan), F. Wynn and H. Kerr.

"God Save the King! Admission free to residents of the New House, and the same to School House kids who are willing to wash themselves and put on clean collars. Any School House kid found in the hall in the usual state will be summarily ejected."

Blake breathed hard through his nose.

"How's that for high?" he said.

"Oh, never mind, we'll take 'em down!" grinned Digby. "What a bit of real luck it was, your getting hold of this precious document, Blake."

"What will the New House say to our concert on Friday night?" said Blake joyously. "Let's see how we can fix it. You're a deep bass as good as Figgy any day in the week, Herries, and I think you're all right for that cheerful song about the dead men."

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "Listen! 'Down among the dead men - , down among the dead men - down, down, down, down among the --"

"First rate!" interrupted Blake affably. He took a sheet of paper and a pencil. "Song, 'Down Among the Dead Men', G. Herries. That's a start. We shall have to miss out the cornet solo, as we haven't such an instrument, thank goodness, in the School House. I bet my Sunday socks the audience will be glad, too."

"Put in a flute solo," suggested Dig. "I can do that."

"Fine. Flute solo, A. Digby," said Blake, jotting it down. "Now, that cake-walk is about my style. I did it at home in the last holidays, and nobody threw anything at me. I'll put my name down for it. J. Blake, Cake-Walk, 'Giddy Gilbertine'. That's done! Now, about that sketch."

"We'll alter it a trifle," grinned Digby. "Make it New House Funniosities, instead."

"Ha, ha! Yes. New House Funniosities, Messrs. Blake, Herries & Digby," said Blake, putting it down. "We shall have to make up the sketch, but we can do that quite as easily as these New House bounders could make one up about us."

"Rather! Now for a song. That ought to suit D'Arcy."

"Wathah!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Song, 'Give me Back my Eighteenpence', Arthur Augustus D'Arcy," wrote down Blake. "Good! You think you can negotiate it, Gussy?"

"I shall have to pwactice a little, that is all, deah boy. My mamma says I have a sweet voice."

"Your mamma's prejudiced," said Blake. "You sing like a syren - a syren on the Thames. Now for the Shakespeare. Scene 1, Act 4, 'King John', Messrs. Blake, Herries & Digby."

"Where do I come in?" protested D'Arcy.

"You can come in as an extra murderer," said Blake, graciously. "I'll stick your name on. Now, March from Lohengrin, Mouth Organ Solo, comes next. I don't think anybody can beat me on the mouth-organ."

"Shove your name down, then."

"Good. Duet comes next - 'Sing Me a Song, Oh!", said Blake. "That's a jolly good song, and I know that Figgins must have got the score of 'The Yeoman of the Guard' from the School library to learn it up. We can do the same. We can't have the whole bag of tricks to ourselves, so I think we'll put down Mellish and Walsh for that duet."

"Can they do it?"

"I'll make 'em. Kerr would have made up as a girl in that duet - you know how jolly clever he is at making-up -- but Mellish can rig up some girls' clothes, I think. He's a smooth-faced whippersnapper, you know. And Walsh sings well."

"Good! We'll have 'em in here to practise, and break their necks if they don't get on like wildfire."

"That's the wheeze. I think we've made up a jolly good programme. I'll go and get Mellish and Walsh and put them up to it."

"What about telling the other fellows?"

"Not a word to a soul. We'll tell them all on Friday. I've got on to Figgy's game, because he wasn't close enough about it. It would be a sell if he got on to ours, and gave the concert on Thursday night instead, and cut the ground from under our feet."

The chums gasped at the idea.

"You think of everything, Blake," said Herries admiringly. "Blessed if I've got a head like yours."

"It's like mine outside," said Blake, "but there's a difference inside, and no mistake. Wait here for me."

Blake left the study, and in a few minutes returned with Mellish and Walsh. The two latter were looking surprised. Their surprise changed to alarm when Blake locked the door as soon as they were in the study.

"What are you up to, Blake?" exclaimed Walsh. "None of your tricks!"

"We're going to let you into a secret," said Blake soothingly.

Mellish looked at him suspiciously.

"What's the secret?"

"Look at that programme."

Blake put the programme of the New House concert into the hand of the doubting Thomas. Mellish and Walsh gave a simultaneous whistle.

"Thought they were up to something!" ejaculated Mellish. "This will make us sing a bit smaller."

"We're going to dish 'em," explained Blake. "That's where you come in."

And he explained the plot that had been hatched in Study No. 6. Mellish and Walsh shrieked over it.

"Think you can do the duet?" asked Blake.

"Rather!" exclaimed Mellish. "Don't I sing in the choir on Sundays? I shall be able to get the girl's part to a 't'; quite as good as Kerr could, anyway."

"Better, my son - better!" said Blake. "You can't make up so well, but we'll rig you out somehow. Walsh will sing Point's part, and it will just suit him."

"I'll do my best," said Walsh modestly.

"Then I'll shove your names down," said Blake. "You'll come here to practise; and mind, not aword to a soul before the notice is put up on Friday."

"Not a word."

"We're going to take the New House by surprise," said Blake, rubbing his hands. "We'll send Figgy an invitation to the concert on Friday evening, with a programme enclosed. The only thing that worries me is that I shan't be able to see his face when he gets it."

(MORE OF THIS OLD, OLD STORY NEXT MONTH)

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REVIEW

THE LADY INVESTIGATES — Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan. (Gollancz £9.95)

This is one of those fascinating volumes which you start to read immediately after supper - then look at the clock and find it's half-past one in the morning. And even then it's a job to put it down. What stuns me is the enormous amount of reading our talented ladies must have done to come up with another comprehensive work like this.

One deeply admires the total ignoring of class-barriers. There is no dividing line between the hard-cover detective classics and the characters created in the Union Jack or the Schoolgirls' Own. Baroness Orczy's "Lady Molly" rubs shoulders with the Union Jack's "Yvonne". Agatha Christie's "Miss Marple" shares a dressing-room with Sexton Blake's "Mlle. Julie". Patricia Wentworth's "Miss Silver" has tea with "Modesty Blaise" and "The Silent Three", young ladies who speak in bubbles.

I enjoyed the appraisal of Mlle. Julie, the creation of Pierre Quiroule. Though the stories considered were published just before the war, the last two of a long series, they do, perhaps, give a fuller picture of Julie, even though the best of the stories, plot-wise and for happy reading, were those of the twenties.

The study of Christie's "Tommy and Tuppence" is very nicely done, and will not

offend Christie fans. Christie (like Hamilton) had a tendency to make her young adults too coy, but they made their mark. The scanning of Miss Marple is also excellent, though "At Bertram's Hotel", a rather thought-provoking setting, might have had a few lines of consideration with advantage. That the final stories in the life of the great authoress did nothing to help her reputation as the creator of splendid mysteries is a very true conclusion arrived at by our own two lady tecs.

A great galaxy of lady detectives and spies. They're all here in this book, in fascinating array, to charm the hours. Della Street, Eileen Dare of the Nelson Lee, Miss Madelyn Mack, Edith Cavell and Mata Hari. (Great Garbo once brought Mata Hari along to the Small Cinema.) Delightful Nora Charles, described as "the most agreeable of the side-kick spouses", is with us, looking a bit like Myrna Loy, and Nancy Drew is not crowded out.

So many to read about, and so much to enjoy. It is all beautifully written, with no attempt to be clever with modern terms which could crunch between the teeth, and the feminist angle is never overplayed. It is, in my opinion, the best so far from Miss Craig and Mrs. Cadogan, and that's saying something.

I've thoroughly enjoyed it. I fancy you will, too.

NOTE

The Schoolgirls' Own Library published its first issue exactly sixty years ago. Mary Cadogan will be taking a look at this famous and much-loved paper in our next issue.

* *

News of The Old Boys' Book Clubs...

MIDLAND

The meeting, on 27th January, began on a sad note. We stood in silence as a token of respect for two members of the O.B.B.C., who died recently. Win Partridge of the Midland Club and Geoffrey Wilde of the Northern Club. As Laurence Binyon puts it: "They mingle not with their laughing comrades again."

On display, our Anniversary Number was Magnet No. 207, "The Schoolboy Money-Maker" (1912), and the Collectors' Item was No. 1 of the Vanguard Library containing "The New Boy at Northcote" by Chas. Hamilton (1907).

Refreshments, served by Joan Golen, were enjoyed. A reading by your own correspondent from Goldhawk Book No. 6 was followed by Tom Porter's well-known game of Greyfriars Bingo. For once, your correspondent won the first round, and Christine Brettell the second.

It was now 9.30, and we were supposed to leave promptly, which we did.

To all O.B.B.C. enthusiasts everywhere, all good wishes from the Midland O.B.B.C.

JACK BELLFIELD (Correspondent)

CAMBRIDGE

The Club met at the home of Edward Witten on Sunday, 1st February, 1981. Arrangements for the 10th anniversary celebration of the formation of the Club were discussed, and the date for the meeting was fixed as 17th May.

Mike Rouse produced an entertaining set of illustrations of Newspaper strip characters; the first set beginning with "Pip, Squeak and Wilfrid" were of long running series; Mike then produced a further set of illustrations from strips appearing in papers at the moment. Mike also added the immortal "Jane" and "Modesty Blaze", etc. The puzzled and amused faces of the members as they strove to recall names were a picture. This was a most enjoyable item, which left members looking rather ruefully at their scores and wondering what the results would be when Mike tried the same strips - sans Jane - on his schoolboy pupils?

Reference was made to the recent death of Isobel Elsom famous star of the past, who had been born in Cambridge.

After enjoying Edwards hospitable tea Bill Thurbon talked on stories with a stage setting, dealing with theatre and circus, from the Bull leaping games of the Cretans and the Greek stage, up to stories of the 19th century, and with Charles Hamilton's tales of circus and stage, and schoolboy actors.

Keith Hodkinson then put on a series of short extracts from films, mainly of the silent era, in black and white, mostly with sub-titles, and challenged members to identify the actors and actresses appearing. This fascinated everybody. It was a revelation to see how good was the visual humour of the pre-talkie and pre-colour era. Keith was warmly thanked for this item, and Edward thanked equally warmly for his hospitality.

LONDON

The 38rd Annual General Meeting of the club saw Mary Cadogan

duly installed in the chair for 1981. Coinciding with this anniversary was the 60th one of Morcove School and Mary had brought along the first and last issues of the Schoolgirls' Own and also numbers 70, 618 and 693 of the Schoolgirls' Own Library. Also on view was a copy of The Lady Investigates, the book about the lady detectives which Patricia Craig and Mary have written jointly. A reading by Mary about the authoress, Elsie Oxenham and her Abbey series was greatly enjoyed.

For Sexton Blake devotees, Josie Packman read her article culled from the Collectors' Digest Annual for 1975, entitled "Round the World in Eighty Years".

Switching to Nelson Lee, Bob Blythe read the second part of the Trackett Grim story, "The Clue of the Backward Horseshoe" which was supposedly written by Archie Glenthorne. Bob also read his "Down Memory Lane" extract from the newsletter of March 1964.

The outright winner of Roy Parsons Greyfriars Character Quiz was Eric Lawrence, Roger Jenkins filled the second place.

The next meeting will be at the Walthamstow rendezvous on Sunday, 8th March.

Votes of thanks to Thelma, Gladys and Louise for making the tea were accorded and once again it was homeward bound.

BEN WHITER

NORTHERN

370th Meeting held on Saturday, 14th February, 1981. On the evening of a spring-like Valentine's Day, eleven members met in the lobby of the Swarthmore Centre, Leeds. Sympathies were extended to Harry Blowers, who had recently lost his wife. Harry Barlow, vice-chairman, opened the meeting, mentioning that he had attended around 350 of our meetings over the years, closely followed by Bill Williamson. Mollie Allison told us she had received more letters from people expressing their sympathies on the loss of our Chairman, Geoffrey Wilde. Revd. Geoffrey Good gave us a short insight into the forthcoming Howard Baker programme of reprints, and a discussion took place. Jack Allison gave us an interesting talk on "My Collection" - and he stressed that his collection was only small - and indeed, what did we mean by this expression? Over the years, our own club had concentrated more and more on the Hamilton schools, whereas in the past, we had given a much more "fair hearing" to other authors. He told us that Gerry often gave him books to read, and he had to read them, for Gerry would question him about them afterwards! After refreshments, we were pleased to welcome Keith Balmforth - who had "returned to the fold" after some years' absence. He gave us an interesting talk on the poetry in some of the old boys' books, and referred to the 1920 Holiday Annual. He combined the talk with a quiz, going through various poems which were referring to various characters and we had to guess to whom they were referring. We next meet on 14th March at the Swarthmore Education Centre, Leeds 3. JOHNNY BULL MINOR

The Postman Called

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

TOMMY KEEN (Thames Ditton): For those who are interested, it is just sixty years since that delightful story paper for schoolgirls, "The Schoolgirls' Own", was first issued, week ending 5th February, 1921, being the date of No. 1.

For nearly fifteen years, countless numbers of girls (and boys) read of the adventures of the dauntless Betty Barton & Co., and let it be said to the credit of 'Marjorie Stanton' (Horace Phillips), the author, that seldom, or never, were the story themes repeated.

Not once was the rather unsatisfactory theme of 'doubles' used, no overhanging branches to be clutched at as one person nobly saves another from the perils of the river, no mad bulls rushing about, and all series brought to a satisfactory conclusion, without all the tricks which Billy Bunter used, to help solve so many of the famous "Magnet" series.

I always revered, and still do, my beloved St. Jim's and Greyfriars, but thanks to my sister, who condescended to allow me to read her copies of "The Schoolgirls' Own", Morcove School has held for me, just as strong a place in my affections.

JOHN LEWIS (Neston): I enjoyed reading Mr. Keen's article in January's C.D., as I too have always been intrigued by the dearth of mothers amongst the boys of Hamilton's three schools.

I note Bob Cherry is listed amongst the materless; this is not so as Major Cherry's better half is alive and well. Please see Magnet No. 1420, p.4 "At the Eleventh Hour" of 1935:- "Mrs. Cherry was busy with household duties elsewhere".

LEN WORMULL (Romford): I have just read Wodehouse At Work, by Richard Usborne. The author (not Wodehouse) is writing about Psmith, and the various Knuts of other schools. He makes a slighting reference to Frank Richards, and if you are not too weary of these diatribes, here is the quote:

'The Knut with the eyeglass and faultless clothes has become more or less a stock character in Frank Richards and post-Frank Richards schoolboy fiction. Perhaps Psmith is the only example of the Knut with clever talk. The tradition of the Knut in Magnet and Gem is that he should be a Lord, pronounce his 'r's' as 'w's', and say 'you wotter!!!' with at least

that number of exclamation marks. The smallness of his vocabulary fits the smallest of his intelligence, and his vocabulary is further limited by the need to find words for him which have 'r's' to mispwonounce. End of quote. He goes on to say that Psmith has a large vocabulary and wide range of imagery.

E. KADISH (Hendon): What a great pity that the Small Cinema series has had to come to an end. I've enjoyed so very much all the reminiscences on the old films.

Mrs. JOAN GOLEN (Streetly): You mention the 'Bam Bam Bammy Shore' in C.D., and it brought back memories to me of being taken to a cinema where the Manager, a Mr. Snell, appeared on the stage, before the performance and had us all singing. This was one of the songs and that was about fifty years ago, I'm afraid. It was a nice catchy tune which remained in the memory. Another one was a song about 'Dad & Mother acting just like sister and brother'. It may have been entitled "Clover Moon" - does that ring a bell?

My husband and I both play the electronic organ and we have acquired a sizeable amount of music, mostly the old tunes, but neither of these are included. May get them one day. The thirties and forties had some lovely melodies, but I rather like the twenties tunes, though at that time I just heard them being played on pianos, when passing houses. As far as music is concerned these were indeed the Good Old Days.

Rev. J. HUGHES (Queensland): Just 48 years have passed since my Dad and I selected the Gem as my weekly paper as I graduated from "Crackers" and "My Favourite". I can remember that newsagent in Hobart and the elderly lady owner who passed over various papers for me to look at, just as if it had happened a few days ago. And to think, I am still talking and reading Gems and Magnets after all the years.

Fr. F. HERTZBERG (The Wirral): With regard to the current Editorial (No. 410), and its reference to my defence of picture papers, I fear I cannot find the issue which provoked the comment, but in recent years there has not been one occasion which I can recall on which an editorial reference to comic papers was not derogatory. As to the belief that picture papers 'killed off' story papers this is not 'muddled thinking': the reason any publication fails is that its readership transfer their

custom - in this case from words to pictures.

I, of course, did notice the Annual cover illustration, and took it as support of my contention that there was much good in comics. I did not say, or seek to imply, that comic papers today are 'as good as' those of the past. The modern examples I mentioned are comparable, most of the others are so different as not to be suitable for comparison. It would do my comment justice if you were to print again the reference to comics which provoked my defence: the issue should be evident from the date of my letter. Xmas issue, I suppose.

W. T. THURBON (Cambridge): First, Gordon Swan's article on Frank L. Packards "The Wire Devils". I remember this well from the 1920's. It was based on criminals using American railway telegraph offices for sending messages. It inspired me to try to polish up my knowledge of the Morse Code.

The Jack, Sam and Pete tales in the early "Populars" were all based on early halfpenny and penny Marvels. The abridgment was very carefully carried out - the stories included the famous J.S. & P. tale "The Eagle of Death". All were illustrated by J. Abney Cummings, whether he had illustrated the originals or not. Cummings illustrated many early Penny Marvel J.S. & P. tales, and settled down to be the regular illustrator from about number 20 or so. To me, he "made" Jack, Sam and Pete, and I think his artwork had a lot to do with the long run of the tales. I never thought that H. M. Lewis captured the three; his drawings always made me think of the Michelin man in the tyre advertisements.

D. SWIFT (Leeds): The C.D. Annual is as excellent as ever. I was very interested in Harold Truscott's contribution. He did say that he had never met anyone who had enjoyed the Bunter shows on T.V. Well, I know Harold personally, and I was a little surprised that I had not told him that I had enjoyed them, when I watched them as a young teenager. In fact, it was through those shows, coupled with the Cassell Bunter books, that I first came to know of Frank Richards. Perhaps viewing the shows now, I would agree as an adult, that they were poorly produced, but I understand they were televised on a shoestring budget. Just the same, as a boy, I enjoyed them.

SEEING RED

by Esmond Kadish

Gazing reflectively recently at the mass of garishly coloured and characterless modern children's "comics", I thought wistfully of the individuality of the old papers. I could always spot my favourite two-coloured "Magnet" or "Gem", no matter how deeply entombed 'neath a welter of "Wizards", or an abundance of "Adventures", with the tips of the title letters peeping provocatively above their rivals.

It's not that I'm against colour. I wish, for instance, that my local council would choose a more inspiring colour scheme than tapioca and sago to tile the subway when, as a second-class citizen without a car, I am obliged to cross the main road underground. I love my colour "telly", too. You can always "switch-off" mentally when the newscaster is reading the news - or, rather, telling you what opinion to have about the news - and gaze at the pattern on his tie, and wonder whether he purchased it from Liberty's or Harrods. Even when "technicolor" was a term of abuse among highbrow film critics, I used to love those old 20th Century-Fox musicals with Alice Faye, Betty Grable or Carmen Miranda, and I'm quite sure that they must have helped to save my sanity when I was a mere drop in a sea of khaki flooding into a certain garrison town in the South of England. I can still recall my intense chagrin and disappointment when, years later, I was advised to watch out for the scene in "Far from the Madding Crowd", where Terence Stamp, standing on a hilltop, and resplendent in scarlet tunic, is brandishing a sabre against an emerald green, grassy background. When I saw the film in my local cinema, the uniform had turned into the colour of burnt toffee, and the lush green grass had turned into the dried yellow that follows a long period of drought. Perhaps it was just that particular print of the film that was at fault.

Somehow the colours in the old films and papers seemed more alive and glowing. The full colour covers of children's tuppenny weeklies, like "Tiger Tim's" or "Rainbow", were very appealing. These papers always followed the same pattern of a coloured cover, two pages in red inside, and a back page which was also printed in red. One grew accustomed to this format, and even a small change in colour, titling or layout made a tremendous difference. Thus, the back page of "Crackers"

attracted me for a time, not so much because of the picture-story which was "Terry and Trixie - the Stars of the Circus", but because it was printed in red and BLUE! Two colours instead of one - but, of course, there was only one red-coloured page inside "Crackers" to compensate for this extravagance!

Red and blue seems to have been a favourite combination of colours. The "Gem", the "Champion", and the "Nelson Lee" all favoured it for their cover pictures, although I was sometimes rather perturbed by that red sky which often appeared behind St. Jim's. It seemed a bit sinister, as though the school were on fire, like 'Manderley' in the final scenes of Hitchcock's "Rebecca". Red and blue was also adopted by the "Schoolboys' Own Library" for its cover page. Its sister, the "Schoolgirls' Own Library", had to make do with only one colour, a vivid mustard yellow, but made up for this by incorporating the title letters in some very effective and varied designs, done in typical thirties style, and displaying much more originality than the weekly "Schoolgirls' Own" which, until mid-1929 sported a title which looked as though it had been designed and written by a semi-illiterate child. However, the "Schoolgirls' Own" was I think, the first of the weekly papers to swap its dark blue for a very "with it" light blue in 1934. This was, apparently, too daring a decision, because the paper reverted to navy blue and orange in 1935, after only a few months. Such papers as the "Gem" and "Schoolgirls' Weekly", did, however, adopt a light blue and retain it for a long period.

The various colours, size and title design adopted by one's favourite weekly paper gave it an appeal and a welcome familiarity which modern "comics" do not seem to possess. In spite of the occasional experimentation in colour and design in the old papers, there was a sense of security and tradition. It didn't matter what the combindation of colours was - whether the orange and blue of the "Magnet" or the "Schoolgirl" in the middle thirties, the less orthodox violet and orange of the "Schoolfriend" in its last years, or the red and green of the "Schoolgirls' Weekly" before it, too, succumbed in 1939. Even the final pallid salmon-pink phase of the "Magnet", or the insipid digestive-biscuit cover of the "Gem" which seemed, somehow, to portend the subconscious drift towards war, could not completely rob either paper of its character and personality. Of how many of today's children's "papers" can this be true?

ARTISTICALLY SPEAKING

by H. Truscott

Mr. A. J. Standen, in an otherwise quite interesting subjective article "On the Artists", suddenly becomes objective with this interesting remark: "The artist for the 'Magnet' was C. H. Chapman, with Macdonald for the 'Gem', again first impressions being strongest, although we all know that Leonard Shields and Warwick Reynolds were much the better". It may be, of course, that there is a vein of sarcasm underlying the last part of that remark, and, if it is so, the rest of my letter on this subject is unnecessary. Otherwise, may I point out that we do not all know this. I do not, for one. Shields, whatever his ability as an artist, was nowhere for me so far as Greyfriars was concerned. Some of his boys were hideous, all seemed to be conceived in the same mould, there was practically no attempt at characterisation, except with Peter Todd, whom he seems to have modelled, not too well, on Chapman's drawings of this boy, and Bunter likewise; his masters were largely caricatures, and Dr. Locke was as a rule indistinguishable from Mr. Quelch. And, although Chapman could be somewhat inattentive very occasionally, Shields was frequently; sometimes I got the impression that either he had not bothered to read the part he was illustrating, or he had deliberately gone counter to it. Chapman, on the other hand, was Greyfriars, illustratively.

While I do not feel quite so strongly about it, Macdonald was far more St. Jim's than Reynolds, good as the latter's drawings were; Reynolds had a habit, which irritated me, of drawing juniors so that they looked as big as seniors, often in illustrations which contained both. Again, Wakefield epitomised Rookwood for me; although I always liked Saville Lumley's work, he was wrong for Rookwood. This is all subjective, of course.

Even so, the worst example was surely the artist responsible for illustrating certain short stories in early Holiday Annuals. He managed to make both boys and girls look like wooden dolls, and, in a short story (almost certainly by a sub-writer, although attributed to Phyllis Howell, Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh) called "A Cliff House Comedy", in the 1920 HA, achieved the amazing feat of showing Mr. Prout at the wicket, as slim as Mr. Quelch!

On a quite different subject, I was rather surprised, reading Roger Jenkins' article on the Gussy the Runaway series, that there was no mention of Hamilton's version of this story which came only two years earlier, in the 1920 HA - The Wandering Schoolboy. In my opinion every bit as good as the later Gem series (possibly because I read and re-read it many times long before I encountered the later series), it was different again in details. There was no Highcliffe involved, and no Cliff House, although Gussy did meet some of the girls at a picnic. Illustrated by Warwick Reynolds, it had some of the best - and the not so good - of his work.

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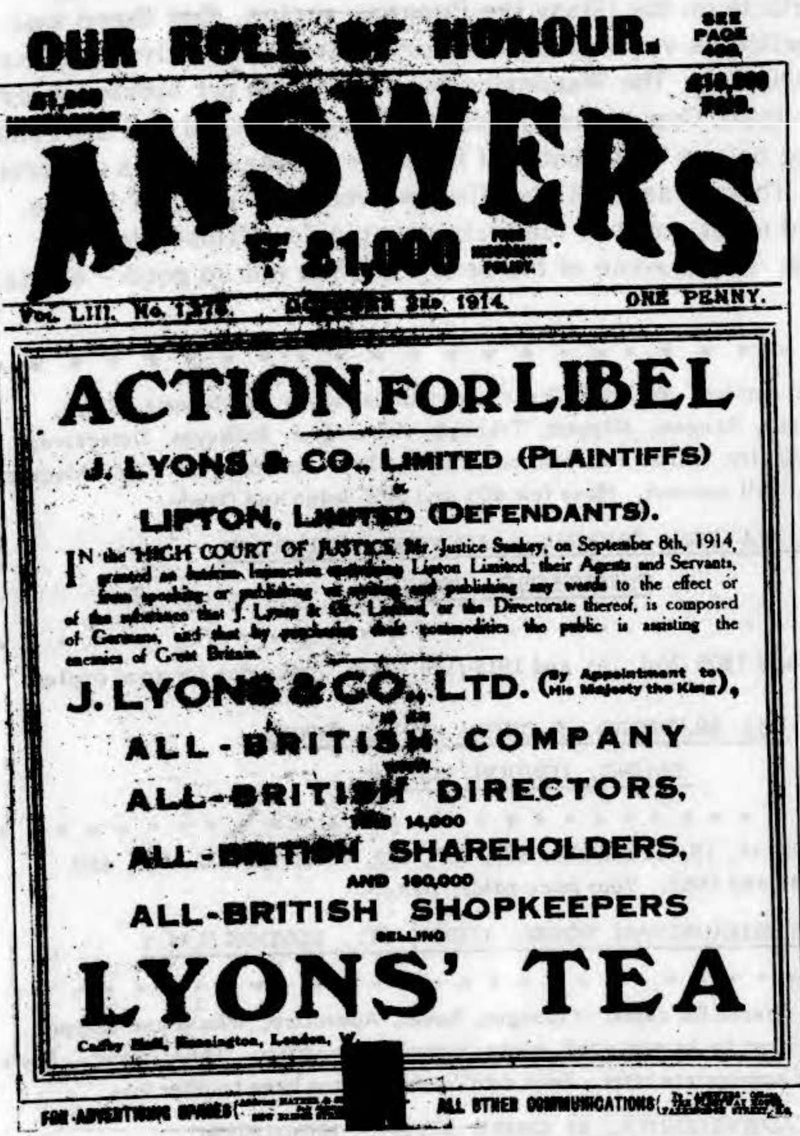
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