STORY PAPER

Collectors' Digest

Vol. 40
No. 474

JUNE 1986

52p.

Some more BOUND volumes available. PLUCK, 2nd series 116-139 (1907) in one vol. Contents very early St. Jim's stories by C. Hamilton; also St. Kit's by Hamilton. Marvellous binding in fine condition. Leather tooled spine and tips. Binding alone would cost over £30 now. The volume £50.

ANSWERS, publishers' binding ex-file copy May-Oct. 1909, contains 23 issues with Sexton Blake stories: £45. PENNY PICTORIAL ex-file copies; all contain Sexton Blake stories. 10 volumes. Offers. Some loose copies £1.25 each.

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STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR
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W. H. GANDER

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The Man at the Wheel.

SHOPPING

In recent issues we have drifted, in our columns, into the sphere of shopping, then and now. Some months back, in our editorial, I bemoaned the fact that, these days, we have to queue for everything. Items are not easy to find, and, once you are lucky enough to find them, you have to queue, sometimes for quite a while, to pay for them.

Danny, recently, spoke of the vast competition, among grocers' shops, of 50 years ago - never-to-be forgotten names like the Maypole, David Greig, Lipton, and the Home & Colonial, all in competition for the business of shoppers. And last

month, in a delightful little article, Eric Lawrence had more to say on the subject.

It all brought back to me the fact that, when I was a child, my mother didn't even have to bother to go to the shops for many goods she required. They were brought to the door. The baker called daily, the butcher came once or twice a week, and, as well as the delivery of the early morning fresh milk, someone called round each day selling "skim milk". It was sold at about a penny a quart, and I recall that my mother was a "skim milk" customer for cooking purposes. Another man called round selling paraffin, and there was, of course, the famous muffin-man. I wonder, too, what became of all the hurdy-gurdies or barrel-organs or whatever they called them. The music from the hurdy-gurdy, with someone churning away at a handle, provided one of the sweetest sounds of my childhood.

Of one thing I'm quite certain. Shopping was a lot easier 50 years ago, even if you didn't have a car waiting in the super-market car-park or one of those hideous shopping baskets on wheels which bark other people's shins on buses in this day and age.

SO SORRY!

In April we published an item headed "A Letter from Frank Richards" under the name of J.P.H. Hobson. Actually, the bright little item was written by our distinguished contributor, Mr. Edward Baldock. We are so sorry for our silly mistake, and offer our sincere apologies to the Rev. J.P. Hobson and to Mr. Edward Baldock.

We have no excuse, but the mistake came about when the Rev. Hobson referred to an article in hand concerning his correspondence with Frank Richards. I searched the files, and came on an article, "A Letter from Frank Richards" which had no writer's name attached to it. I jumped to the conclusion that this was the one, and published it under the Rev. Hobson's name. Once again, my apologies to both gentlemen.

If there is any moral to be seen in this sad case it is this. Please, please, when submitting articles for consideration for publication, always make sure that your name is written on the item. Articles which go into the files get detached from accompanying letters, and your editor, being a fairly busy old boy, might not always notice the omission of any name from the article itself.

PROGRESS?

Mr. Bill Lofts has sent me an article cut out from Sunday

Post. Entitled "And They Dare to Call This Progress", the article is written by Barbara Bruce. I found it a delight, for Miss Bruce echoes some of the points we have been making in C.D. for a long time.

I hope that Miss Bruce will forgive me for quoting from her article which finds an echo in many hearts, I am sure. She starts thus: "I hate progress! In fact, I much prefer things the way they used to be."

"I need a driver and conductor on my bus so I can sit down, find my purse and pay, instead of fumbling for change as I climb on and balance a load of shopping at the same time. And why that smudgy strip of thin paper? Do you remember those bright coloured tickets of long ago?" That business of queueing in the rain to climb on and pay the driver has long been anathema to some of us who have to use buses. And I can remember, as a child, I used to collect the various bus and tram tickets. I even have a few of them left today.

"Nor do I like digital clocks", goes on Miss Bruce. "1945 is a year in my childhood, not a quarter to eight in the evening." We're with Miss Bruce all the way, at this office.

"I prefer weights in ounces, not grams." (If you smoke a pipe, like I do, you will still always ask for an ounce of tobacco, even though you know you're really not getting a full ounce when they give you 25 grams, the modern version. I fancy that was a shabby trick on the part of the tobacco companies, for they made no reduction in the price when slyly cutting the size of the packet in the name of progress.)

"And what about making toast around a cosy fire? The pop-up sort hasn't quite the same smokey tang." Of course, we have known for years that electric toast, for all its convenience, hasn't the flavour of the toast we made long ago.

Miss Bruce makes a number of other points, with all of which plenty C.D. readers will agree heartily. She winds up: "If all this is progress, then leave me out. It may be old-fashioned but I like it that way. And I suspect you might do, too!"

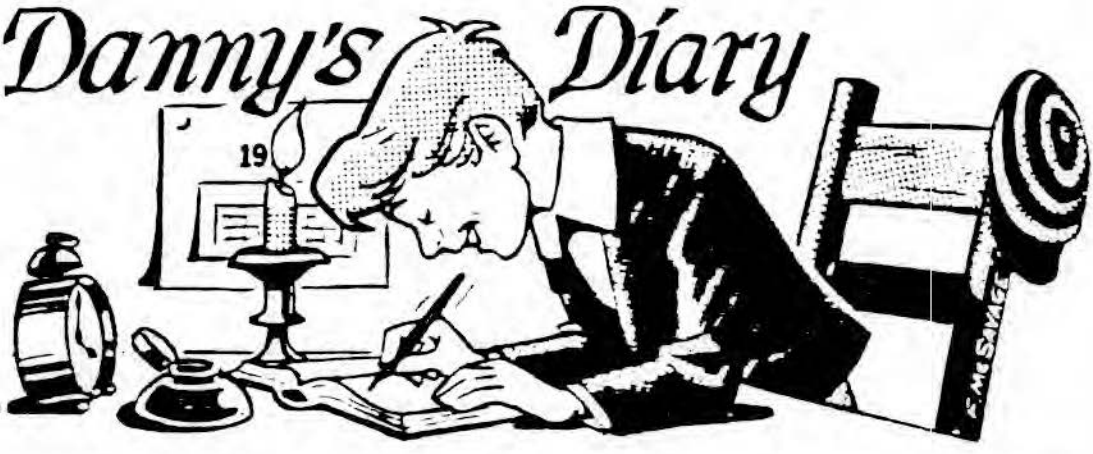
Most of us do, Miss Bruce. Most of us do. I would add to the list our wretched clumsy all-look-alike currency, and the fact that you post a letter in one town and get it postmarked with the name of another. Letters from Gravesend in Kent - an ancient, lovely and important town - are postmarked Dartford, 7 miles away.

And when I post a letter to you in Fleet, it is postmarked Aldershot which is five miles distant from here.

I wonder how many of you have your pet hates in these days of PROGRESS.

THE EDITOR

* *



JUNE 1986

Modern Boy doesn't appeal to me a lot, at the moment, as it is entirely given over to adventure, sport, and science fiction. I expect it will improve again ere long.

There is a motor-racing series, the Speed Kings, by Alfred Edgar; plus stories of Jaggers of the R.A.F., air tales by John Templer; plus the Captain Justice stories which are the pick of the bunch for me; plus the Dustbin Detectives, farcial tales about two tecs who are dustmen, by Sidney Hargrave, and finally there is a new serial "Prisoners of the Moon" by Coutts Brisbane.

This month's Captain Justice tales are "Raiders of San Romas" (about wireless controlled robots); "The Voice from Space" (Justice trying to rescue Len Connor, lost in the unknown wilds of Maraboca); "The Stolen Professor" (more about the lost Len Connor); "Peril of the Pressgang" (with Justice lost in an enemy country.)

In the B.F.L. there is a Captain Justice story this month, "The Sea Eagles". The gallant Captain's campaign is against modern pirates equipped with helicopters and submarines with their headquarters

in an extinct volcano.

The B.B.C. is putting out a limited number of television programmes from Alexandra Palace. I asked Dad if he would buy some equipment so we could watch them, and he said "Ask me again in ten years' time."

G.K. Chesterton, the writer, has died this month.

Doug and I went to Chiswick Empire one night and saw a lovely revue entitled "Splinters" which starred Hal Jones. It was one of those shows, dating originally from the Great War when it was called "Les Rouges et Noirs", and it's an all men revue, with every lady really being a gentleman. It was a very good show.

A truly GREAT month in the monthlies. The Greyfriars story in the S.O.L. is "The Menace of Tang Wang", and it is quite enthralling. Across the thousands of miles that separate Greyfriars from China stretches the sinister hand of the Mandarin Tang Wang. And Wun Lung of the Remove is marked down as his victim. The start of the finest travel series I have ever read.

St. Jim's fills the second slot in the S.O.L. The yarn is "Japers of St. Jim's", the sort of thing at which Martin Clifford excels. The title tells all. Great.

In the Sexton Blake Library there is a magnificent novel by Pierre Quiroule entitled "The Ethiopian's Secret". The star of this wonderful tale is Pompom, the black servant of Mlle. Julie. One of the best of the Quiroule stories and that's saying something.

In the Boys' Friend Library, apart from "Captain Justice and the Sea Eagles" which I have already mentioned, there is a Nelson Lee and Nipper story entitled "Sold Into Bondage". This one is by Alfred Armitage.

Also in the S.B.L. there is a good one entitled "The Seaside Crime" by Warwick Jardine. The seaside performance by the pierrots is just ending when a member of the troupe is shot dead on the stage. Novel setting for this one.

Another good month in the local cinemas. I'm a keen picture-goer, and more often than not, Mum goes with me. Our first film this month was "Sylvia Scarlett", a rather odd little film about a girl who dresses as a boy to escape to France with her father who is a crook. Katherine Hepburn was the girl, Edmund Gwenn the father, and Cary Grant the love interest.

A pretty good adventure film was "The Last Outpost" starring Claud Rains.

One I enjoyed very much was "The Voice of Bugle Ann" with

with Lionel Barrymore as a countryman who seeks revenge when his dog is killed. Also in this programme was the Joe Loutis versus Max Schemling fight for boxing fans.

Mathesan Lang was in "The Cardinal" which was too heavy-going for me, but one I enjoyed was Kay Francis in "I Found Stella Parrish". A good musical with political background was "Thanks a Million" starring Dick Powell, about a crooner who runsfor governor.

Finally, a rather weird one, Bette Davis in "Dangerous" about an alcoholic actress who gets cured. All told, not a bad month, but I've seen better.

A new cinema named the Savoy has opened in Cobham in Surrey. It is a Shipman and King theatre. Doug and I went to the opening, and the film was the best of the month - Erroll Flynn in "Captain Blood". About a man who was condemned by Judge Jeffreys, and ran away and became a pirate. Olivia de Havilland and Basil Rathbone were also in this one.

Another rattling good month in the Gem. June started with "For the Honour of St. Jim's". Gore and Lumley-Lumley play big parts in this fine story about a gambling den which is set up in the Old Manor House on Wayland Moor.

Next came "They Called Him a Coward" starring Manners, who is suspected of running away from Cousin Ethel in a moment of danger, but he had a good reason for it. This one is, I'm sure, not by the real Martin Clifford, but it's not a bad story. At the end Manners gets a camera for bravery.

"The Laugh's on the First Eleven" is all fun and games, and right up my street. An Indian team comes to play the First Eleven at cricket, but the Indians are not all they seem.

Finally, a real rib-tickler "Green as Grass". Algernon Blenkinsop arrives at St. Jim's from Huckleberry Heath, and he's as verdant as the famous heath. Full of side-splitting fun.

The original Magnet tales, being serialised, have finished in the Gem, but they continue in a new serial "Harry Wharton's Challenge", in which Marjorie Hazeldene is kidnapped by gipsies. A famous old tale and lovely to read.

The Wimbledon Tennis Chapionships have been exciting this year. In the men's singles F.J. Perry of Britain beat Von Cram of Germany, and in the ladies' singles Miss Helen Jacobs of the States beat Miss Sperling of Denmark.

There is a new Agatha Christie story about called "Murder

Raising his two hands, Algernon deliberately extended his fingers from his nose at Mr. Lathom. The Form-master could scarcely believe his eyes. "Goodness gracious!" he gasped. "Am I dreaming?" "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Fourth Form. Algy did not heed. He only knew he was doing his duty!

in Mesopotamia". Hercule Poirot stories continue to pour from the pen of the fair Agatha. What a girl! The narrator of the story is not Hastings but Nurse Amy Leatheran, a nurse who has travelled from Britain to look after the lady who is eventually murdered. It is a wonderful story.

And last, but by no means least, in this joyful month of June, we come to the mighty Magnet. The first story "The Vengeance of Bunter, the Ventriloquist" continues with the series about the American boy, Putnam Van Duck. This was followed by the final story in this series, "The Bogus Beak". So far Poker Pike has put paid to all the efforts of Chick Chew to kidnap Putnam. But Kidnapper Number One of the States is a sticker with a professional pride. His final scheme to kidnap Van Duck is a real corker.

Next came "Billy Bunter's Burglar". He finds himself stranded on an island with a bag of tuck - and a burglar. This story had

a sequel in "The Popper Court Tea-Party". Horace Coker has recovered Sir Hilton's stolen property, and Sir Hilton considers that an invitation to tea at Popper Court is sufficient reward. And Bunter pretends to be Coker. A great, great tale, methinks'.

NOTES ON THIS MONTH'S "DANNY'S DIARY"

S.O.L. 269 "The Menace of Tang Wang" comprised the first three stories of the Magnet's China series of late summer 1930. Probably Hamilton's most famous, most popular, and best travel series of all time. S.O.L. No. 270 "Japers of St. Jim's" comprised 4 consecutive Gems, mainly starring Bernard Glyn, from the Spring of 1924. Included is "Glyn, the Gold-Maker", one of the best and most hilarious "singles" of the period noted for some outstanding "singles".

The 1936 Sexton Blake story "The Ethiopian's Secret", had appeared under the same title in the S.B.L. of the Spring of 1926. It was one of Pierre Quiroule's finest novels.

Of the stories in the Gem of June 1936 "For the Honour of St. Jim's" had been "The Rascal of St. Jim's" in the Spring of 1913. "They Called Him a Coward" had been "Misunderstood", possibly the most famous sub story of them all, by E.S. Brooks, in the Spring of 1913. Manners earned his camera in this story, and Hamilton retained Manner's camera, possibly forgetting its origin.

"The Laugh's on the First Eleven" of 1936 is a precious issue for me. It had been "The Rally of the Rival Cos" in 1911, and it was through me that it was to appear among these later tales. I pointed out to Mr. Down its omission, and he dug it out and republished it. That 1936 issue also contains reference to the Modern School, Surbiton, in the Editor's Chat. At our Gem Club, we had run a competition. Boys had to buy the current Gem, and write an appraisal or critique of the story contained therein. Mr. Down agreed to judge the essays, and he refers to the matter in his chat. I forget the name of the boy who won the special award for the best essay, but I recall that it surprised us all at the school.

"Green as Grass" had been "Algy of St. Jim's (an inferior title) in the summer of 1913. In that hilarious tale, the new boy, Blenkinsop was informed by someone that it was customary for new boys to salute their form-masters on the first morning in class by placing a thumb to the nose and spreading out the fingers. That old rude gesture was well-known in those days. I wonder if it is still used. It is years since I saw that once famous salute.

* *

COINCIDENCE?

by Ann Clarke

When I read The Problem of the Gardener's Cottage (UJ 1205) I was struck by the resemblances to an Agatha Christie short story - "At the Bells and Motley" in a book called "The Mysterious Mr. Quin".

Agatha Christie

Miss Le Couteau, a French Canadian heiress, buys an English country house and furnishes it with antiques, said to be family collection.

She marries Capt. Harwell, whom she met hunting.

Day after return from honeymoon, the Captain disappears.

Last seen in garden by gardener.

Discharged groom suspected.

Gardener goes to other part of country.

Miss Le Couteau sells house and contents to American millionaire.

Union Jack

Miss Delauney, Canadian heiress, buys English country house and furnishes it with antiques.

She marries Capt. Grenfell, whom she met hunting.

The day after return from honeymoon, the Captain disappears.

Last seen at stables by groom, after visiting gardeners cottage.

Discharged groom suspected.

Gardener goes to other part of country and disappears.

Miss Delauney sells antiques to agent of American millionaire.

In both cases, it is discovered that the Captain's background is unknown, and he is suspected of being an adventurer who has deceived the heiress. In both cases the lady has a hired companion, who is honest, and in both cases the discharged groom is engaged

to the innkeeper's daughter but the engagement is broken off because of the suspicion.

In the Agatha Christie story the villains are a troup of acrobats (mother, son and daughter) who carried out a series of cat burglaries on the continent. The parts of captain and gardener are doubled by the son, the mother being the gardener's wife, and covering from him when is is supposedly laid up with rheumatism.

In the Union Jack, the villains are Kestrel and Fifette Bierce, Kestrel taking the parts of captain and gardener, and sometimes the butler as well. The suspected groom is an old friend of Tinker and asks him to help. Tinker does so, while Blake is on another case - helping the French police with some burglaries. His trail leads to the same place.

The Union Jack is dated November 20th, 1926. The Agatha Christie volume was first published in 1930 (Penguin) - I don't know if the individual stories had already appeared elsewhere. Does anyone have any ideas about this?

DOCTOR HUXTON RYMER

(Reprinted from Union Jack No. 980 dated 22.7.192)

Dr. Huxton Rymer originally made his name in the fields of medicine, specialising in surgery and attaining an eminence in that branch which placed him in the forefront of his contemporaries.

He it was who, in Vienna, had first discovered that very delicate hip operation which revolutionised modern surgery, and which he gave to the world through the medium of Franz Josef Hospital. Europe and America had rung with the name of the great Dr. Huxton Rymer.

He had been the recipient of invitations from every University of note; a Pittsburgh millionaire had paid a fabulous sum to induce the wizard to make a rush journey to America to perform an operation on his young son; Royalty of every country had sought him; and decorations from scientific bodies had descended on him from every quarter.

And then, at the very apex of his fame, Dr. Huxton Rymer had suddenly and inexplicably dropped out of things. His mysterious disappearance was far more than a nine days' wonder, and a thousand-and-one theories were advanced to explain the puzzle.

But though his pupils carried on the teachings of him whom they called "The Master", the surgeon did not return to haunts, and

after a time the scientific world knew him no more.

Of his life and his doings after that there still remains extant a patchy record in the volumes of the famous "Index" which the famous criminologist, Sexton Blake, has patiently compiled over many years, and a study of that would serve to provide the answer to many of the questions that have puzzled his former colleagues.

This record was a startling tale of criminal adventure in which Sexton Blake himself played no small part in pursuit of the errant doctor, and of which the chapters were laid in almost every part of the known globe, and in many unknown parts of it, too.

Then, as suddenly as he had drifted across Blake's orbit, he had drifted out of it, and it was not until Blake had once again come across him in India, during the course of a dangerous investigation there, that he knew that Rymer was still following a life of active criminal adventure.

After that Blake had again encountered him in New York during his investigations of a big whisky-smuggling conspiracy, and once later on, when he encountered him in London accidentally, in the grill-room of the Hotel Venetia.

On that occasion Blake had gone out of his way to inform Rymer that the old warrant for his arrest which had been issued by Scotland Yard had been quashed. The detective had gone even further, and had told Rymer that, providing he ran straight whilst In England, he, Blake, would not advise Scotland Yard that he had returned.

Dr. Ruxton Rymer had apparently taken the advice to heart, for he had lain low for a considerable time. He had bought a small estate in Sussex, had spent a good portion of the money he had obtained in New York on fitting it up in a wonderful way, and had also devoted himself to experiments, to writing, and to the manufacture of scientific instruments of the most delicate nature.

But the restlessness of his temperament finally impelled him to conceive a scheme which he thought would satisfy his desires for criminal excitement, and yet keep him clear of the clutches of the law. Accordingly, he let it be known amongt the denizens of the underworld that he was prepared, for a substantial consideration, to advise on all subjects dealing with criminality.

His first case of this description - the affair of Mrs. Stuyvesant Courtlandt's jewels - once again brought him to the notice of Sexton Blake, and it was through information which reached him in this case that Sexton Blake discovered the existence of Rymer's estate

in Sussex, which was called Abbey Towers. Thus also the alias of Rymer himself became known to him as "Professor Butterfield".

* *

ALWAYS THE BRIDESMAID - BUT NEVER THE BRIDE'

by W. O. G. Lofts

PART 2

It is interesting to note that Nelson Lee had his chambers in Grays Inn Road, and did not copy Sexton Blake as well as Charles Hamilton's Ferrers Locke to Baker Street. So there was some originality here. He was recorded at living at No. 131a, which was approached by a narrow stone flagged path and having a neat but ordinary brass plate on the door, bearing his name. Today by working this number out, it is the site of the Blue Lion Public House. Grays Inn Road is a rather longish main road that stretches from Kings Cross to Holborn, its buildings are mixed with old houses and shops, the Royal Free Hospital to the giant The Times and Sunday Times buildings that are about half way down. The home of Nelson Lee was almost opposite 'The Thunderer' as it is called - probably the most famous newspaper in the world, as well as being one of the oldest.

In the first historic story, Nipper, Lee's famous assistant was introduced - a little street urchin who spent his time hanging around the London railway stations, acting as a sort of unofficial porter, and stealing rides on the back of horse cabs. Many years later Nipper (as in the case of Tinker, Sexton Blake's assistant) had a story all to himself when on becoming official assistant to Nelson Lee. In this classic story, it was discovered that he was actually a missing heir, real name Dick Hamilton. He subsequently became Lee's ward, and went to St. Ninian's School, his adventures at this establishment

being related in many serials in various papers. Another Nelson Lee story appeared in No. 52 of The Halfpenny Marvel aptly entitled "Nelson Lee Detective" where the reader can gleen his excellent writing...

> "Nelson Lee sat in his room in Grays Inn Road, smoking an after breakfast pipe. He had just achieved one of his most brilliant triumphs, and the smile of self satisfaction which played around his firm set mouth, was therefore quite acceptable...

Nelson Lee was called out to solve a mystery at Whitby in Yorkshire where for a time he disguised himself as a nigger minstrel complete with banjo!

WHAT THE DEUCE IS HE DOING HERE, WITH A CHICKEN ON HIS SHOULDER?

by William Lister

It seems a fair question by any standard. It's not often you see somebody walking about with a chicken on their shoulder. It doesn't seem right somehow.

I've heard of pirates in days gone by going the rounds of the local cafe-houses with a parrot perched on their shoulder. I've heard of mystics and wizards with an owl perched on their shoulders; in point of fact, in my farming days I once had a chicken that perched on my shoulder every time I went to feed the poultry, but that was a long time ago.

"What the deuce is he doing here with a chicken perched on his shoulder?" is a question that's just waiting to be answered. First we have to find just where 'here' is and who is 'He'? Answers, that are to be found in the 'Nelson Lee' of October 17th, 1981 (new series No. 91). "The Riddle of the Seven Stars" the start of an all-time Edwy Searles Brooks thriller. A series covering three copies (N.S. 91 to 93) the remaining titles being 'The Curse of Ozra' and 'The Menaced Schoolboy'.

Having pin-pointed where 'here' is, how then did the question arise? Allow me to quote from page 15.

'Biggleswade of the sixth and William Napolean Browne out together, when suddenly Browne said "Excuse me, brother Biggleswade, but do you see what I see?"

The figure in the centre of the Triangle was sufficient to give anybody a start. The figure of no ordinary looking boy of about sixteen. Slim, wearing a long black overcoat which made him look

taller than he actually was. Bareheaded, his long black hair, disturbed by the wind, had drifted it over his head and face in matted, untidy mases. The face, pale to the point of chalkness, mask-like, with flat eyes which stared unseeingly. But, most remarkable of all, an owl sat upon his right shoulder, its great eyes wide open and staring."

"Great Scott!" muttered Biggleswade, "It's human, gave me quite a start."

Readers will have guessed, by now, that Ezra Quirke was back, in St. Frank's. The long awaited return of one of the greatest of schoolboy mysteries; of all school tales you have ever read.

Ezra Quirke, who first burst into our lives in the year 1925 was back.

What about that chicken? you may be asking. You must blame Biggleswade; it was he that asked.

'It's Ezra Quirke, what the deuce is he doing here with a chicken on his shoulder?"

"It's a good job that owls are not familiar with the English language or it might have been mortally offended" said Browne.

My word! some may say, it's taken some time to give us the answer to the title question. You will forgive me when you understand that in my younger days on the travelling fairgrounds we were taught to catch the public's attention by using something unusual to introduce them to our side-shows, the saying being 'A little bit of nonsense on the outside is only to draw attention to what is on the inside'.

What, indeed, is on the inside of these three tales? Much-everything!

The return of Ezra Quirke, phantom figures of an Eygyptian Priest, Seven mysterious Stars in the sky. A 'Ring of Death' of Mummies coming to life, all against the background of Ezra Quirke.

What says the editor, of this series? Exciting, gripping, thrilling, a night of frights and mysteries. The finest ever written by Edwy Searles Brooks.

For me, personally, not as good as the first series (now found in the Howard Baker books under 'The Haunted School') but a good runner up. Welcome back - Ezra Quirke!

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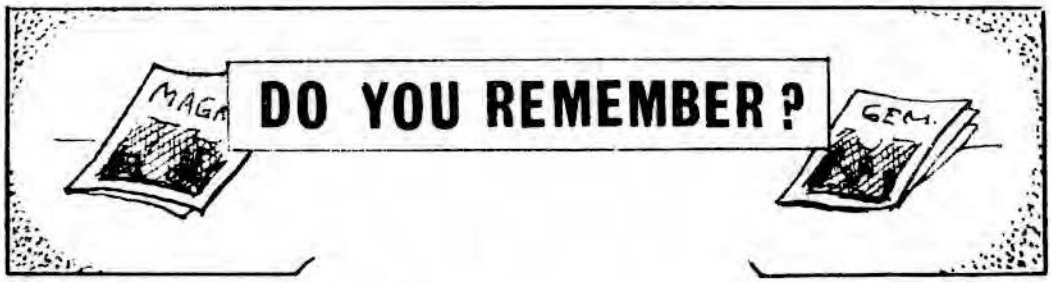
THIS IS C.D.'S RUBY JUBILEE YEAR!



No. 215 - Holiday Annual 1941 **by Roger M. Jenkins**

The Magnet ended in May 1940 and the Schoolboys' Own Library the following month. The 1941 Holiday Annual was published in September 1940 and it was, therefore, the last Amalgamated Press publication to feature the writings of Charles Hamilton. It must have been published well in advance, long before the war-time paper shortage began to bite, since it was printed on the same thick paper used by all the later Holiday Annuals, though the invitation to renew acquaintanceship with the schoolboy characters in the pages of the Gem and Magnet was, for the first time in twenty-two years, conspicuously absent.

The earlier pages were none too promising, being short stories or features by editorial staff, but things began to look up with the sixteen chapter Oakshott story "The Moat House Mystery", a Christmas holiday with Len Lex in Hampshire, interesting if not very original. Cedar Creek was also represented by a Yuletide story, "Snowbound", whilst the Rio Kid tale was at the very end, "The Puncher from Panhandle", in which he shot his enemy dead almost on the last page - not a very seasonable touch, this - but the lesser lights were certainly given a good showing in the final year.

The three main schools were well up to standard. "Jimmy Silver Does the Trick" was a reprint of two Boys' Friends about a feud with the Fifth form, whilst the Greyfriars and St. Jim's stories were both reprints from the year 1926. "Billy Bunter's Busy Day" related how he locked himself in the Head's study to avoid punishment and had to ventriloquise through the locked door to keep staff at bay. "Skimpole the Star Gazer" was about a £25 telescope through which the genius of the Shell was to view 'the lunar luminary'. What D'Arcy saw when the telescope was trained on the New House by mistake was something quite different. In the end, through the sordid greed of the suppliers the telescope was repossessed merely

because the instalments were not kept up.

The first item in the Annual was a poem by the editor of the Holiday Annual and his twenty-two years' experience. It ended with the expression of his relief that the material had all been collated:

> For now I've a moment to spare
> To sleep - in the editor's chair!

The irony of this must have been only too apparent soon after it was written because, when the Magnet suddenly ceased publication, the editor, artists, and author were all peremptorily dismissed by the Amalgamated Press. It was a traumatic experience after decades of faithful service and even the amiable artist, C. H. Chapman, recounted to me his feelings of resentment and shock that he experienced on that fateful day. To handle the last publication is, therefore a mixed pleasure, because with this Holiday Annual Hamiltoniana had reached the terminus after a very long journey indeed.

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REVIEW

HARRY WHARTON'S CHRISTMAS

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker Special: £18)

Here we have another of the Howard Baker Collectors' Edition volumes, well up to the remarkably high standard maintained by these superb books. This one comprises 5 consecutive Magnets from the closing weeks of the year 1913.

The opening story "The Scapegoat", is a Hazelden affair, with the weak Removite in difficulties with a bookmaker to whom he is unable to pay a debt. Harry Wharton takes a hand, and finds himself in trouble as a result. In a startling final chapter we find the gentle Marjorie Hazeldene spilling the beans before the Head of Greyfriars, and begging clemency for her wayward brother.

This one is followed by a thriller of the type fairly often a feature of the Red Magnet. "In Borrowed Plumes" is an exciting piece in which Bunter pretends to be Lord Mauleverer, and regrets his trickery when kidnappers come on the scene.

Then comes the Christmas Double Number for 1913 with a striking red, white, and blue cover by Philip Hayward. The story "The Four Heroes" falls naturally into two parts, with the obvious possibility that it was originally written as two separate Magnet tales. Someone who describes himself as "A Colonial Traveller" sends a £20 note to the Head, requesting that it be presented to the young but anonymous hero of Greyfriars who assisted the said traveller. Bolsover, Bunter, Snoop, and Skinner all claim to be the unknown hero, a development which shows the author's weakness of giving all the virtues to the good boys and all the vices to the little coterie of bad

hats.

It's all a trick on the part of the Bounder, who gets expelled for his devious and skilful plotting. In the second half of the story, the Bounder redeems himself on holiday with the Co. at Wharton Lodge where he rescues Bunter who, has fallen through the ice on the lake. In an amusing bit of nostalgia for those who read the story in later times, we find Bunter bemoaning the loss of his spectacles which "cost seven and six". A cleverly thought out school and holiday story.

Then, back at school and still apparently in the autumn term, we have "Harry Wharton's Christmas Number" which features an effort to bring out a special number of the school magazine.

The final tale "Good Old Coker" was a memorable thriller in its day. It introduces one of Hamilton's shyster laywers. This is the one about Coker's aunt being swindled out of all her money, a situation which brings the tough Coker to tears. It all ends in a blaze of excitement with the round-up of the mysterious tenant of the lonely Spindrift Cottage.

And, even apart from the main stories, these 32 pages Magnets, plus the genuine Double Number, are packed with items of interest to provide hours of joyful browsing. The artist, Chapman, is at his very best throughout.

* *

SCHOOLS NEAR GREYFRIARS

writes Philip Tierney

Esmond Kadish disagrees with my idea that the Cliff House authors should have used schools already known to be in the vicinity of Greyfriars instead of inventing new ones. I appreciate some of his points but am still of the same opinion.

Certainly I agree that Pon & Co. would have been most unsuitable companions for the Cliff House girls but there must have been many boys at Highcliffe of whom we had never heard, so more characters could have been created. It would all have been puzzling to readers but far less so than the sudden appearances of Lanchester and Friardale schools.

However Mr. Kadish is probably right in saying that the ban on Greyfriars would also have included Highcliffe.

But, with regard to St. Jude's and Redcliffe, Mr. Kadish defeats his own argument by pointing out that we know very little about them. It is precisely for this reason that Mr. Ransome and Mr. Wheway could have placed their new boys at these schools without causing any confusion at all.

* *

Will friends note that the new address of ERIC and BETTY LAWRENCE is 2 Blagrove Lane, Wokingham, Berks., RG11 4BE. Telephone: Wokingham 784925.

* *

Come November, D.V., this magazine reaches its Ruby Jubilee. Forty years not out - and never missed an issue.

Cuneo - by Bob Whiter

I wonder how many collectors realized that the recent fine set of postage stamps on railway trains, were the work of T. Cuneo? In case some of you are saying who on earth in Coneo, let me help to refresh your memories.

Let us take for a start the 1931 Holiday Annual, with that fine story "An Englishman from France" by Philip Hardy. Our artist did the black and white illustrations, plus a superb colour plate: "Gentlemen - At your Service!". A story about Ferrers Locke in the following year's annual again had the pictures drawn in black and white by Cuneo. I don't have the intervening years handy, but I seem to remember a coloured plate "The Hero of Waterloo" which showed a young highlander carrying a wounded man to safety in one of them, could it be 1935?

"The Rio Kids' Ride, graced the 1937 H.A. and was further graced with Cuneo's art work, which consisted of several black and white pictures and a fine coloured plate showing Kid Carfax just beating a locomotive with the pursuing outlaws on the other side of the permanent way!

Cuneo also illustrated several of the Serials that appeared at the back of the Magnet. Among those, collectors will recall the following: "The Shadow of the Guillotine" by George E. Rochester which appeared in 1929; Cuneo also illustrated the serial in 1930, also incidently by George E. Rochester named "The Flying Spy". Stanton Hope's "Island of Slaves" was next, circa 1931, then in 1932 we had "The Red Falcon" by Arthur Steffens.

I don't possess all the Chums annuals, but in at least three you can find stories with the illustrations by him. In the 1930-1931

volume the story is "Cordillera Gold" by Eric Townsend. While the following year it was Percy Westerman's "The White Arab" and finally in the 1936-193 annual Cuneo illustrated one of S. Walkey's famous pirate stories, namely "Red Falcon the Pirate Hunter".

The Cuneo story started when her father Cyrus Cuneo, who was born in San Francisco, after studying with Whistler in Paris, returned to America for six months, before coming to England. His work soon appeared in the Illustrated London News and his illustrations to Rider Haggards stories made him well known on both sides of the Atlantic.

When the 1st World War started in 1914 it wasn't long before Cyrus Cuneo was painting realistic war scenes. Unfortunately it wasn't long before tragedy struck. While dancing at a Studio Party, he stooped to catch a pin that had fallen from his partner's hair. One of her nails grazed his left nostril, this caused blood poisoning from which he died a month later; the date was July 1916; he was only thirty-seven. I have in my possession a Y.M.C.A. Gift Book dated 1916, the title page enscribed: "illustrated by the late Cyrus Cuneo being the last work of this famous Artist".

Terence Tension Cuneo was born in 1908. His work which closely resembled that of his father (for some time I thought both artists were one and the same) has a fine vigorous style and close attention to detail. As we have seen the 20s and 30s saw him being kept busy.

In 1940 he joined the Royal Engineers and for most of his 5 years service was a war artist, often being seconded to the Ministry of Information to paint propaganda pictures, to the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office and to the War Artists' Advisory Committee. About this time he had a small book published "Tanks, how to draw them".

His best known works include the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in Westminster Abbey (presented to the Queen by Her Majesty's Lieutenants of Counties), the Queen's Coronation Luncheon at Guildhall, and a number of other Royal occasions. He has also brought several regimental histories up to date by painting battle scenes of the two world wars, for their museums. (Almost all painters have a secret "trade mark" and Terence Cuneo is no exception. His is a mouse which, in a whimsical moment some years ago, he inserted on a small painting. Now it appears, always cleverly concealed in each of his works - running, sitting meditatively or perhaps carrying a flag. "Who's Who" lists his recreations as writing, sketching,

travel, riding and engine driving. I understand a biography of Terence Cuneo has recently been published - I urge all collectors to make a point of reading it should the opportunity arise, as it is obvious I have only been able to touch lightly on the life - full of interest, of this great artist.

* *

MIDLAND

12 members turned up to what proved to be a fine meeting with Bill Lofts ourguest speaker, occupying the chief role in some lively exchanges.

There was better news of our chairman who will be returning home after 13 weeks of hospital treatment. We hope he will continue to improve.

Bill Lofts gave a talk on Chuckles which appeared from 1914 till 1928. Bill displayed a complete model of Greyfriars made out from weekly parts assembled from Chuckles. The paper included both genuine and sub stories about Greyfriars. The model is a lovely collectors' piece.

Refreshments were provided as usual by Betty and Johnny Hopton and Joan Golen. Our grateful thanks to these generous people who, month after month, provide a feast of the gods.

The second part of Bill's talk was about his entrance into the world of Old Boys' Books until he is now known as an expert on these matters. It was while in the army in the Far East that among all the books sent to soldiers by well-meaning people he found a Sexton Blake Library and was thrilled with it. Since then he has been a rabid collector and researcher and an expert on the hobby. This is the second time Bill has given us a treat, and you may be sure he will be invited again.

Our next meeting, the A.G.M., is on May 20th.
JACK BELLFIELD (Correspondent)

CAMBRIDGE

The Cambridge Club met at the home of Roy Whiskin on Sunday, 4th May, 1986. In the absence of the chairman, Edward Witten was in the chair.

Roy Whiskin gave an excellent programme on Kenneth Grahame's famous and much loved story "The Wind in the Willows", illustrating it with tapes and videos. "The Wind in the Willows" was first published in 1908. Grahame had hoped that Arthur Rackham would be the illustrator, but Rackham was unable to do this, and E.H. Shepherd was the first illustrator. Rackham did, later however, illustrate a special edition. In 1930 A.A. Milne made a play out of the story, "Toad of Toad Hall". Edward Witten mentioned that he had once played a small part in a production of "Toad". The book was an enormous success and has continued to be so. It has been televised, recorded, and filmed and still has an enormous appeal to both young and old. Roy was warmly applauded for this most fascinating item.

After enjoying Mrs. Whiskin's tea, Bill Lofts talked about "The Old Time Collectors". The craze for collecting old boys' papers could be traced back for a hundred; possibly for 150 years. It may have begun with the 18th century "Youth's Magazine. In 1832 came the Boys and Girls Penny Magazine. Then Edward Lloyd began publishing "Lloyds Weekly News", and around 1866 published the penny "bloods"; "Boys of England", "Boys Standard", "Boys of the Empire", etc. The change from the "Bloods" began when Northcliffe launched the "Halfpenny Marvel" in 1893, later to be followed by "The Union Jack" and "Pluck". Later came "Chums", "The B.O.P.", etc. In 1921 the Amalgamated Press found a worthy rival in the Thompson papers. Then came the Dealers. Bill was given a hearty vote of thanks for this interesting item.

The meeting closed with a hearty vote of thanks to Roy and Mrs. Whiskin.

LONDON

It was Ladies' Day at the May Loughton meeting and how well they did.

Winifred Morss commenced proceedings with a reading from

Magnet 1116 which told of Bob Cherry persuading his four colleagues to take Mark Linley for a walk to Friardale. Here they visited Uncle Clegg's shop for a feed and found the amiable Uncle Clegg having difficulties with his income tax returns.

Myra Stewart presented a Missing Names quiz which Norman Wright was the first one to solve.

During the tea interval, Duncan Harper put on show several Union Jack covers and those taking part had to name the stories and characters therein. Versatile Ann Clarke was the winner and she followed this item by reading extracts from a Nelson Lee Library entitled "Nelson Lee's Pupil". This story was written by Maxwell Scott and featured Nipper.

Then it was Thelma Bradford's turn to entertain. This she did with a Member's Names quiz. Joint winners here, Leslie Rowley and Ben Whiter who were awarded book prizes.

There followed an excellent discourse by Mary Cadogan. She told of how Patricia Craig and her good self were interviewed on the British Forces radio network about their book "You're a Brick Angela!" which has now been published in paper-back format. Mary mentioned the Anthology "Chin Up, Chest out" which will contain a mention of Jemima Carstairs. Don. Webster suitably presented a vote of thanks to the ladies and the hospitable Harper family.

Next meeting at the Walthamstow venue on Sunday, 8th June, tea provided but bring own comestibles.

BEN WHITER

JACK ALLISON - A TRIBUTE

Jack first became involved in the Old Boys' Book Club, owing to his interest in Latin: his brother Gerry asked him to translate the well known Bunter story written in Latin and published in "The Times Educational Supplement". From then on, Jack maintained a lively and keen interest in our Club and Annie his wife attended until her death in the late '70's.

Jack could always be relied upon to present thought-provoking items to club members. It was obvious from his presentations that a great deal of research and thought had gone into his preparations. Jack's interest in the old papers enabled us all to be enlightened by his knowledge: he had had articles published in "The Scout" a paper he loved - and indeed Jack was a keen supporter of the Scout Movement. His other interest was music and he enjoyed studying Latin and used to translate various items into that language, solely for his own amusement and use.

At our April meeting we were told that Jack's illness was not improving and he was waiting to be admitted to a hospice. We had planned to present Jack

with some memento of his involvement with our Northern Club. However, it was not to be, for Jack passed away on 15th April.

It was fitting that local Scouts were at his Requiem Mass at Christ The King Church, Leeds, to pay their last tributes to a man who had given up so much of his time for them.

The Revd. Geoffrey Good our Northern Club Secretary and Vicar of Thornes Parish, Wakefield, read the Lesson. Our Club was represented at the church by Jack's sister Mollie, Gerry Allison's widow Myra, the Revd. Geoffrey Good, Mrs. Vera Good, Harry Blowers and Darrell Swift.

Thank you Jack, for the happy times we had with you at Northern O.B.B.C. Rest in peace.

THE NORTHERN CLUB

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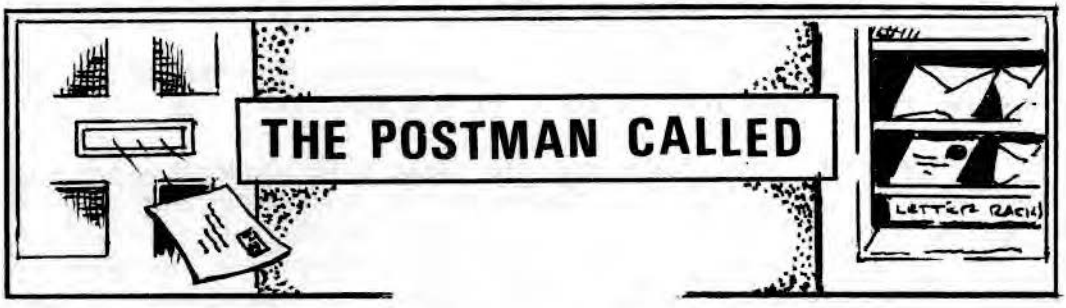

MERVYN LEWIS (Folkestone): I always enjoy Danny's Diary. I liked the Magnet's Brazilian series. It was not too long. Some of the travel series seemed to go on for ever, and I was always glad when the Famous Five were once more back at Greyfriars. The Wilmot series I also thought very good, but it is a mystery why they split it in two. The Poker Pike lot I did not like. As Danny remarked, they were too farfetched. Most of my collection is over a period from 1928 to the finish. Mostly I read in bed last thing at night. It's a good form of relaxing with no distraction from the telly.

LEN WORMULL (Romford): Before turning the pages of this month's Digest, I paused to admire the fine cover by Henry Webb. How well he has captured the Greyfriars environs, and what stories the pictures could tell! Certainly my own memories were rekindled. THE STILE: Bunter the Blade smoked here, as did the Bounder on occasion. And who will forget dear old Pon & Co., lying in wait for the "enemy". The Greyfriars Harriers used it, too. THE CLOISTERS: A favourite haunt of Skinner and his cronies, for the

"un-cultural" practice of card playing and smoking. Considered "rorty" by the lads, how innocuous it all seems by today's malpractices. Remember how Bunter hid Loder's letter to a bookmaker, and then resorted to blackmail? Magnet 1090, if interested. THE INN by the towpath - "The Three Fishers" most likely. Close to the school, with a rear entrance, what fun and games (and drama) the name evokes. Loder making a fool of himself, thinking Wharton & Co. are inside when in fact they are at Courtfield. A hoax, of course. PEGG BAY: With Hawkscliffe close by, a firm link with Tom Redwing, the sailorman's son and Smithy's Pal. The Christmas series, with Redwing imprisoned by Soames in the Smugglers' Cave. The Schoolboy Smuggler, Valentine Compton... the starting point of the great South Seas adventure of 1927. Ah yes, and this is only for starters.

To wind up, how nich it is to escape from this evil world with Collectors' Digest. May it continue to flourish.

J.E.M. (Brighton): How right you are about Tom Brown's Schooldays and other "classics" when compared with Hamilton's work. When I was a youngster we were not encouraged to challenge the literary canons - story papers, in any case, were completely "outside the pale" so we kept our true critical opinions to ourselves. I have since often wondered if some of our scholarly mentors and elders did not secretly enjoy those despised weekly story-papers themselves...!

Mr. Truscott takes me to task for saying that "the old detective stories don't seem to have the unflagging support enjoyed by the school sagas". I'm afraid that the context of my remark did not make clear that I was referring to C.D. readers and their apparently waning enthusiasm for Sexton Blake. Our editor had earlier made a plea for contributions to Blakiana, apparently with little success. Indeed, the Blakiana column containing Mr. Truscott's own comment emphasises the editor's point. Sexton Blake is mentioned only once and by Mr. Baldock (who, incidentally, is incorrect in his statement that the Union Jack metamorphosed into The Thriller. In fact, it metamorphosed into The Detective Weekly).

Of course, Mr. Truscott is right about the continuing popularity of crime fiction, with Sayers, Christie and the rest now joined by a whole new school of crime. Writers who place less emphasis on the amateur sleuth and more on polce and government organisations. The spy story is a further extension of this tendency.

ESMOND KADISH (Hendon): I sympathised (or should it be "emphasised") with Terry Jones' confinement in bed and receiving the Hamilton tonic. I remember being in bed with tonsilitis, whilst still in junior school, and a kind teacher sending a classmate round with a volume for reading - I can't remember what it was now. However, like Mr. Jones, what really comforted me, and reconciled me to enforced inactivity, were copies of the GEM and a Rookwood S.O.L.

W.T. THURBON (Cambridge): I was very interested in the reference in "Danny's Diary" to the film "The Tunnel". I remember seeing it many years ago at one of the now defunct Cambridge fleapits. Can you recall the year it appeared?

(EDITOR'S COMMENT: Shame, sir, for referring thus disparagingly to the lovely cinemas where we spent countless hours of sheer joy! Danny was writing in 1936, so obviously that was when the film was released in this country.)

Fr. F. HERTZBERG (Hr. Bebington): The current comments on prices in CD remind me of the crucial ones in the Sherlock Holmes story "The Noble Bachelor". First published in 1892 it included "a fragment of a hotel bill... rooms 8s., breakfast 2s.6d., cocktail 1s., lunch 2s. 6d., glass sherry 8d.". Lestrade comments "There's nothing in it", but from it Holmes draws important conclusions, including that the bill was from "one of the most select London hotels". The prices "pointed to one of the most expensive hotels. There are not many in London which charge at that rate". Neither are there now! As Martin Dakin commented on the case in his excellent Sherlock Holmes Commentary the bill "sheds a lurid light on the difference in cost of living then and now... We should look in vain for such prices in the lowest joints today". (As late as the 1909 edition of, for example, Ward Locke's London Guide the price of a room at a major central London hotel was from about four or five shillings - although establishments like Claridges and the Ritz did not include their tariff). But, as I always note, these prices must be set against wages - as Dakin notes, in another Sherlock Holmes story, that of a Case of Identity, a single lady could "get on very nicely" on £60 a year.

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TAUTOLOGY and the MAGNET

by Edward Baldock

Is there anything really amiss in the use of tautology as practised in the Greyfriars' and St. Jim's stories? The question might be put: why rush ahead with a plot by the use of clipped and abrupt description and dialogue? Is it not more restful and desirable to have a repetition of a situation, a place or action? It could well be that by such repetitions from a different viewpoint or angle may well enable many young readers to grasp the fuller significance of what the author is trying to convey, quite apart from the identification aspect; while the more senior among us will not be too critical of such a style (being far too loyal, among other reasons). One tends to rather enjoy pausing and surveying a situation with a modicum of tranquility than to rush headlong. I would suggest that tautology is eminently acceptable in the context of the Magnet and the Gem.

Would the Greyfriars' - St. Jim's saga have delighted us for so long a period as it did had the style of Charles Hamilton been other than it was? It is a debatable point. What remains an indisputable fact is that it proved completely successful, so much so that it has fully justified its existence once more, decades after its unhapy demise with the coming of the 1939-45 war; something which surely must be unique in the annals of boys' literature, and stands as a permanent tribute to its author. All the evidence would suggest that, in this case, tautology not only justified itself, but also helped to perpetuate to a large extent the Magnet and its companion papers until they passed into our folklore one day in 1940. Upon this point I feel that George Orwell was a little off the wicket.

Again he is not entirely correct when he says: "...the boys are not even allowed to wear what clothes they like..." This may be the fact to a certain degree. However, one could quote many instances to the contrary. Vernon Smith, Aubrey Angel and the inimitable 'Gussy', to name but three, seem to have 'got away with it' by sporting fancy waistcoats and other unorthodox attire. His remarks concerning the 'dated' use of epithets and slang in the stories hardly hold water either, in our context. Many of the terms used are old-fashioned, it is perfectly true, but we of the hierarchy are not concerned with dates and times - quite the reverse. The whole conception and charm of the Hamilton schools is that they are timeless - therein lies much, if not all their attraction.

I believe it possible to write a critical essay and still be 'in

tune' with the subject. Although Orwell's essay is a model of professional construction and presentation, it seems doubtful that he entertained much sympathy, no doubt through a lack of real feeling, for the works of Charles Hamilton.

* *

FOR SALE: Several hundred Magnets, Nelson Lees all series, and Gems. S.a.e. for lists, please.
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* *

We apologise to all customers who are waiting for our latest catalogue. This has been delayed, but will be ready for late June or early July. A copy will be sent to all who ordered from our Christmas issue. If you did not order, and would like to see our new issue, then please send us 3 x 12p stamps.

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* *

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Write ERIC FAYNE. (No reply if items already sold.)

LOOK - NO GUNS!

by J.E.M.

Our elders rarely approved of the old story-papers. Mine certainly didn't. "They are full of nothing but 'bang! bang!'" was one scornful verdict I recall from nearly sixty years ago. Leaving aside our beloved school sagas, there is no denying that many of our favourite tales did pack quite a lot of violent action. This was, after all, why we read them. But, of course, it was all very innocent stuff when compared with today's offerings to the young.

In spite of their blazing guns and flying bullets, those tales of long ago produced surprisingly few real casualties. The excitement came from the action rather than the violence and homicide was pretty rare. Whether against highwaymen, pirates or baddies in the old Wild West, guns were more often used to threaten or wound than to kill. (Such mercy did not, alas, always apply to Red Indians, African natives, Mongolian tribesmen and other "lesser breeds"; but that is another subject.)

Authors were even quite happy to dispense with guns altogether and they came up with quite a few unusual substitutes. My own first memory of such a departure belongs to the D.C. Thomson paper, ROVER, around 1930. A colourful character called Bandy Walker the No-Gun Sheriff carried in the tops of his knee-boots, two short clubs. These he could draw and hurl at the villains, knocking them out, faster than they could pull their six-guns. Ridiculous? Perhaps, but I shall always have a soft spot for Sheriff Walker. At least he never killed anybody; and, interestingly, he survived well into the atomic age.

Another non-lethal weapon - and one totally suited to its environment - was the wind-maker used by a mysterious masked Arab in BOYS' MAGAZINE, also around 1930. The gadget in question was a bit like a vacuum cleaner, except that instead of sucking it blew. Pursued across the desert wastes, its owner could simply create a sandstorm behind which to escape.

More famous, and certainly familiar to all faithful readers of the WIZARD, was that bizarre character who routed whole tribes of Afghans with nothing more than a flailing cricket bat - or "clicky-ba" as he called it. The RANGER, an AP story-paper from the same period, introduced an equally exotic figure called Black Whip. Those circus performers whose whips could remove a cigarette from a pretty girl's mouth at ten paces had nothing on BW. He specialised in removing automatic pistols from villainous hands by the same means.

The bane of gangsters, as well as of shady lawyers (usually with first names like Jabez), Black Whip wrought havoc with his deadly lash, though, like Bandy Walker, he had no taste for killing.

Lassoos, catapults, boomerangs and suction-tipped arrows were other weapons free from "bang-bang" that I recall from the old stories; and I remember at least one D.C. Thomson character who used a bolas, the South American missile consisting of weights and strong cord which, when thrown, brings down its quarry by entangling his limbs.

Of course, weapons far more devastating than any of these, or the guns they replaced featured in the tales of our youth. Stories with a sci-fic falvour, for instance, introduced death-rays and rockets long before the age of laser beams and star wars. But even to a ten-year-old in those far off days such weapons did not appear specially new. Older stories like H.G. Wells' famous War of the Worlds (remember the Martians' deadly heat ray?), already looked dated.

By contrast, a throwing club or a sandstorm-maker - or even a cricket bat used in ways never sanctioned by the MCC - seemed very novel means for stirring up the action. And all without giving any of their targets much more than a headache!

* *

OASIS

by Father Francis Hertzberg

The April CD included several references to "oasis" in a world which is by no means universally pleasant.

I have a friend who constantly dismisses Greyfriars as "school stories", which he, as an adult, will not find of interest. He can't understand that, good as the stories and characterization are, even better as is the style, the main attraction of the old stories is their delicate and true depiction of their world. Not the world in which they were written and read, but a private world, available only to us, the readers; one redolent of the period from Edward to the beginning of the second world war, but not completely of it. (One in which war or politics may be glimpsed, but in their proper perspective, as secondary.)

The same applies to a character who appears more in the pages of CD than might be expected for one whose only real connection with the papers is in Herlock Sholmes, and an occasional odd reference - Sherlock Holmes.

As might be expected, my friend reads the Holmes stories for their detective content; he doesn't see how shaky is the detection; he pretends the writing, the setting, the characters and the relationship between them do not matter. I do not know whether he is telling the truth, but I could never read either Greyfriars or Holmes for anything other than entering their safe and self-contained worlds, in which the characters are my friends and acquaintances.

Being wrapt in any reading can serve as an "oasis", even if the book is science fiction, war, or travel. The essential factor in old boys' books and Sherlock Holmes is that the world to which they transport us is stable; and although it may be perilous it is safe.

Sherlock Holmes is generally taken to be Victorian. This is not really true, like his contemporary Sexton Blake he did not end with Victoria. Indeed when, and even if, he ended is a matter of debate; the various obituaries which have appeared in the Times are suspect; Vincent Starrett, in a phrase which does not meet with universal approval, commented that "never having lived" (sic) he could never die. But the lingering image of the character is of the late nineteenth century, of horse cabs and fog and gas-light (even the marvellous Basil Rathbone had a sticky wicket when the Universal series placed him in the second world war).

Which leads, at last, to the point. Even decades after the end of the Magnet and the Gem, a Victorian Sherlock Holmes would have found himself at home. The coins in his pocket could well have included a penny minted before his detective career had begun; the counties, in the canonical term, may have been "crooked", but they were as he had known them, and no-one was daft enough to think the changes of 1888, 1894, or 1933 had affected them. There may have been bomb gaps like lost teeth in city streets, but the remaining buildings would largelly have been as he would have known them.

As ROOTS* has demonstrated, the 60s and 70s changes all that, turning our world into one which would be as strange for him to return to as would be that of Alice in Wonderland.

The war, with its hardsips, privations, and common enemy, drew people together, made them proud of their Englishness, and their heritage. No-one had the time to do Mr. Hitler's work for him by helping destroy our identity.

But the "swinging" - really swingeing - sixties had no time for the past. Anything not as new, plastic, and gimicky as the King's Road was boring and to be jetissoned.

The strange world-wide "youth culture" disappeared with the seventies. Reality struck; ironically, it did not undo the damage, but completed the job. The cry was no longer "Swinging England Welcomes The World to Marvel at Its Uniqueness", but "Keep a Low Profile". Don't appear different - from each other or from the rest of the "global village": at home uniformity, size, comprehensivisation of everything from schools to religion, transport, police, and even the sexes; from the rest of the world led to decimalisation (started in Victoria's time, but sensibly dropped), the hundred million "billion", Concord with an E., etc.

The scale was no longer that of the individual human being. Big was Beautiful; economies came with scale. Machines mattered more than people; numbers took over.

A race formerly famed for its proud eccentricities now fell over itself to conform. Going beyond the standard of degredation posed by Socrates (to accept white is black) they adopted that of Orwell (not only to accept it as true, but to love it). Love the lie so much that even where change had not taken place they pretended it had. Metrication crept on; the 24 hour clock ticked on; the 100 hour week waits in the wings. The "changed counties" are accepted as a fact by almost everyone, regardless of the facts.

It is ironic that we still need the oasis provided by such reading even though the Brave New World has eliminated for most people so many of the unpleasantnesses from which those who read them when first published would have wished to escape; even more ironic that that escape is made all the more necessary because of the Brave New World itself.

*ROOTS: Retention of our Traditions. Details from Quarry Bank, 48 Shalmarsh Road, Higher Bebington, Wirral, Cheshire.