STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL. 48 No. 574 OCTOBER 1994

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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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The Editor's Chat

MAGICAL MEMORIES

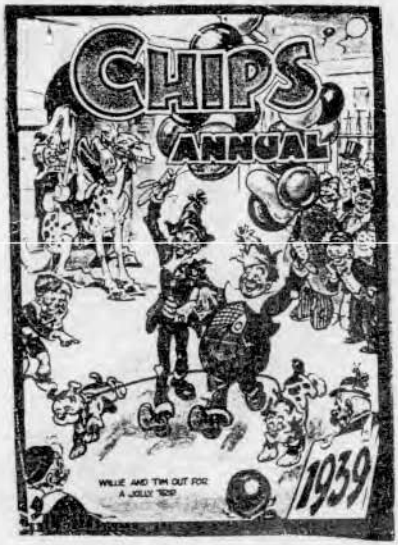
Autumn approaches, and in mellow mood we publish in this month's C.D. an intriguing article by Brian Doyle about a play which I saw as a child and have always recalled with glowing affection. It is *Bluebell in Fairyland*, written by the actor Seymour Hicks and produced over several decades with his wife Ellaline Terris captivating audiences in the leading role. I realized only comparatively recently that, with Aubrey Hopwood, Seymour Hicks had adapted his play into a child's novel entitled *Bluebell and the Sleepy King*. As a story this works almost as well as the theatrical piece which Brian describes so vividly, and the Maud Trelawny line-illustrations to his article have been taken from my treasured copy of this appealing book.

Also on the subject of memory-haunting stories, you will see that, elsewhere in this issue, Ian Johnson provides more information for our reader Jim Lake who enquired in the June C.D. about the Nicholas Thomas tales. We

can report too that Dennis Hilliard's forty-year search for the title of the Derbyshire treasure-hunt adventure has at last been successful (see Dennis Bird's letter in this month's *Forum* and also the item on pages 28 and 29).

OUR ANNUAL

Interesting contributions for the Annual continue to arrive and, as promised, I now give you a foretaste of some of these. Once again we are fortunate in having a previously unpublished story by Charles Hamilton, which has been provided by his niece Una Hamilton Wright, who has written an introduction putting it into context for us. Greyfriars is, of course, well represented. Items on it already received included 'The Decision' by Anthony Cook, which shows Mr. Quelch at a cross-roads in his life and in an appropriately reflective mood, while Ted Baldock has produced some more of his wonderfully atmospheric Greyfriars vignettes. Les Rowley's "Deep and Crisp and Even" evokes the traditional Christmas spirit, and Dr. Nandu Thalange will be giving us 'Bunter's True Diagnosis' (see the Northern O.B.B.C. report in this issue of the C.D.).



St. Frank's articles include a warm appreciation by Tony Glynn entitled 'A Handful of Happiness', and a colourful description by E. Grant-McPherson of the coming of Archie Glenthorne to the School. Bette Colby has sent us a lively piece called 'Sexton Blake - "Cupid"!', Bill Lofts in 'Poor Dear Esme' writes about a very unusual schoolboy, Margery Woods looks at Christmassy

aspects of a wide range of juvenile papers and comics, while Des O'Leary has provided a fascinating article about W.E. Johns's most famous hero with '1936 - Nazi Germany Welcomes Biggles'.

And there is much, much more, which I shall mention next month. Please do remember to let me have your order for the Annual as soon as possible please. The price, including postage and packet, is £9.50 for the U.K. and £10.50 if sent abroad by surface mail.

I am sure you will all agree with me after reading it that this C.D. Annual, as always, is a splendidly satisfying mixture of nostalgia, stimulus and entertainment.

Happy Reading!

MARY CADOGAN

* *

PLACE OF THE MIND by Edward Rake

In his article in C.D. No. 569 called *Fact or Fiction?*, how charmingly does Ted Baldock remind us of the reality of Greyfriars. And how right he is.

(I always enjoy Ted Baldock's articles. To me they are the product of a delightfully imaginative and sensitive mind - a mind which refuses to grow old. Long may he contribute to the C.D.)

Yes, Greyfriars is a place of the mind, like all great literary creations, such as Lewis Carroll's Wonderland, Robert Louise Stevenson's Treasure Island, Anthony Trollope's Barchester, Mrs. Gaskell's Cranford, Hardy Country, and so very, very many more.

Greyfriars is as much a reality in the world of the imagination as any place in the normal, workaday world. As a matter of fact, you can be more familiar with the topography of Greyfriars and with its inhabitants than you can be with your own town or city or countryside.

For instance, take Courtfield which is in the wondrous world of Greyfriars. Courtfield, we learn, is a market town in Kent, lying on the River Sark. It is three miles from Greyfriars. There are many references to Courtfield in the Magnet's pages. It has been part of the Greyfriars scene, part of the background, to a great number of Greyfriars' stories.

If you have read enough Magnets you would be familiar with Courtfield and its environs, so you would know many of the shops and businesses in this bustling town. To whom they belong, what they sell and what they do.

For example there is Chunkleys. The big and expensive department store in the High Street, selling food and furniture, feasts, fittings and fripperies. Pretty well anything, in fact. There is the establishment of Mr. Lazarus selling a variety of second-hand goods and even stage make-up!

If you wish to travel further afield there are trains from Friardale which will take you to Courtfield junction where you can change onto a main line train to London or Dover.

Information like this helps to establish the reality of Greyfriars in the mind - contributing to its verisimilitude.

Many people have nostalgic memories of some land or place of heart's content from long ago. So far as Greyfriars is concerned there is no need to say with the poet Housman

"That is the land of lost content
I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again."

Because the splendid thing is that you **can** come again and again to this exciting, amusing and care-forgetting place of the mind - Greyfriars.

Get hold of some original Magnets or a couple of Howard Baker's facsimile volumes - and turn but a page.

* *

THE ILLUSTRATOR NEVER KEEPS TO THE SCRIPT... OR DOES HE?

by Reg Hardinge


"He is only slightly injured," said Gunga Dass. "Do you recognise him?" Sir Ralph Marshall peered forward into the face of his countryman. "Sir Edward Sinclair, by all that's wonderful!" he exclaimed. (Prologue)

"The rich silken robes of the Asiatic denoted him to be a person of rank. From the folds of his crimson cummerbund the jewelled hilt of a sword reared like the head of a snake, and across his back hung a metal shield, richly gilded and inlaid with precious stones after the manner of Hindustan.

In person he was tall and gracefully built. His eyes were unusually brilliant even for one of his race. His features, holding something of the cruel nobility of the eagle in the hooked nose and thin lips, were undeniably

handsome in a sinister fashion. His flowing black beard and curling mustachios completed a countenance that was inexpressibly striking, and even in the meanest robes the Hindu would at once have been pronounced a man of distinguished birth.

It was hard to realise that those slender, artistic hands were as cruel as the talons of an eagle. Yet this magnificent specimen of barbaric splendour was the man who had blazed a trail of crime across half the civilised world - Gunga Dass."

The above description and the accompanying illustration are from *'The Union Jack'* No. 1021, 'The Adventure of the Renegade Spy'. The artist Eric R. Parker has faithfully and superbly recorded the attributes of the arch-criminal Gunga Dass, as depicted in the word. Picture provided by the author.

* *

NEW BOYS AT ST. FRANKS: Tom Burton

by Grant McPherson

Our story opens with a flood at St. Frank's. There had been continuous rain, at the old school, for many weeks. (A very topical situation today. So, my readers will have little difficulty in setting the scene.)

The lock gates, a little further up the Stowe, had burst, resulting in the Village of Belton and much of the surrounding countryside being under water. St. Frank's itself had escaped the worst of the flooding, being a little higher; there was only about two feet of water in the Triangle, but in the playing fields it was much deeper. The rain, by now, had almost ceased, and Warren, the school gatekeeper, had begun to collect the school boats and bring them into the triangle, much to the delight of the boys.

The Ancient House Master, Mr. Alvington, had asked Dick Bennett, the captain of the remove, (in reality, these two were Nelson Lee and Nipper, this change in their identities, will be the subject of a future article) to take his chums Sir Montie Treggelis West and Tommy Watson, and row over to Banninton, which fortunately had escaped most of the flood. They were to pick up a new boy, who was arriving that afternoon by train. Nelson Lee warned them to be very careful to keep to the fields and be sure not to get into the flow of the river.

TOM BURTON

This cheery Removite is popularly known as the "bo'sun." He is the best swimmer at St. Frank's, and last year succeeded in swimming the English Channel.

They were able to follow his instructions without any difficulty. Arriving on the outskirts of the town they moored the boat to a tree, leaving Watson in charge, much against his will, the other two made their way to the station. After a short wait the train arrived, discharging only one passenger, a large clumsy looking lad, with a cheerful grin. Bennett approached him, enquiring if he was Burton. "Souse me" he replied "you've got it right, you must be from St. Frank's". "Begad!" said Sir Montie "How did you know?" "Well your caps, gave it away, for one thing", he admitted, "What's the trouble up the line? I heard that there had been heavy seas".

"Belton has been flooded", said Bennett, "We're going to take you to St. Frank's in state, by the way - I'm Dick Bennett, and this is Sir Montie Treggelis West, Bart." "Bust my tops' ls!" Burton exclaimed, "That's a good name, but you're kidding aint you, you can't be a Baronet?" "It's shocking! but true, dear fellow". Montie apologised, "But Benny should'nt have sprung it on you like that". "Well wash my scuppers" cried Burton. "You've given me a surprise." "Not like the one you are giving us," said Montie, "I hate to be rude, but what are scuppers, and do they really need washing?" The new boy looked dismayed, "I knew it would happen," he said, "My dad, told me to be careful, and here I am, talking like a fo' c' sle hand." "It's a free country," said Bennett, "It doesn't matter how you speak, although it's a bit original."

"It ain't really my fault," Burton replied, "My dad was the skipper of a big sailing ship, and ever since I can remember I have run about the ship, and mixed with the hands picking up all sorts of expressions that I oughtn't to have done; trouble is, now, I can't get out of the habit. Why; my dad always calls me "Bo'sun" even now." "Begad! that's a queer name" said Montie. "It means 'boat-swain' really," Burton explained, "It started when I was about three, and has stuck ever since. I don't remember my mother, and I am afraid dad has spoiled me."

"Well, come on 'Bosun' and you too Montie, we had better get back to the school, and I'll bet every one calls you that before long, except possibly Fullwood and Co. and those cads don't count anyway."

Meanwhile, Handy and Co. had taken one of the boats, and were rowing round the triangle. This, of course didn't suit the leader of study D, for long, and they got through the hedge, on to the playing fields, which was alright for a time. Then, after much argument and after almost capsizing the boat, they decided to row to meet Bennett and Co. and the new boy.

Before long they wander into the path of the river, and getting caught in the current, collide with a floating shed. They manage to scramble onto this, which is of course, heading downstream, where there is a weir.

McClure spots another boat in the distance, they start to wave, Handy jumps to his feet, and rocks the shed to such an extent that he almost falls in, and is saved just in time by his chums.

Bennett and Sir Montie with the new boy had returned to the boat, where Tommy Watson was waiting, and after introducing Burton to their pal, had commenced to row back, Bennett taking the oars again. Then the 'Bosun' noticed the floating shed, with the waving boys on it. Bennett stopped rowing, and the juniors all looked hard at the shed.

"It looks like Handy and Co." he said, "It's just like them." "What about the weir, it's not that far down" said Watson, "Here, let me have the oars", cried the new boy, "I don't want to brag, but I'm pretty good with oars", Bennett looked closely at him for a minute, "O.K. you take them, you're probably better than I am", and moved so that Burton could have his place.

The minute the new boy had the oars in his hands, his skill was apparent. The craft literally began to fly through the water, his movements were like clockwork, and the boat started to overhaul the shed rapidly.

Just as the boat was about to touch it the juniors moved, and the shed slowly began to overturn, throwing Handy and Co. into the water, but they were quickly pulled into the rescuing boat, which was now almost overloaded. The 'Bosun' now faced quite a task, in trying to edge the boat out of the mainstream current. It was a tough job, but the new boy proved equal to it, and before long the seven juniors were gliding over the meadows again, in comparative safety.

They had just reached the higher ground, and were about to land, when there was a crash, and the side of the boat hit a projecting rock, and began to sink. Fortunately the water was not very deep there, and the seven boys managed to get ashore without too much trouble. Poor Burton, who by this time was exhausted, just flopped on the grass, while the others dragged the boat out of the water.

It was not long, before the 'Bosun' began to take notice again. "It's barely 50 yards, to the mainland", he said; then, after inspecting the damage to the boat, "I reckon we can patch the old tub up enough to make it across, you chaps scout around, and find all the bits of stick you can". With that he started to pull at the floorboards, with an old screwdriver he found in the locker. He managed to wedge a couple of the bits of flooring across most of the hole, and proceeded to stick the twigs round the edges, forcing them tight with old bits of rope that were in the boat. By this time it was beginning to get dark, but there was enough moonlight for him to finish the work. At last the new junior pronounced himself satisfied with the repair, "If we take it steady, we should make it across," he said, so they towed the mended craft along the bank, until they were out of the worst of the current, and then very carefully got aboard, with Burton again at the oars.

"Shall I help row?" asked Bennett, "No. I think it will be better if I do it alone", Burton replied, "The least strain put on her the better". So they pushed off, with very gentle strokes. The patched boat neared the mainland. With about 18 yards to go, the water began to seep in through the patch, but Burton still rowed steadily on, until they were within a couple of feet of the bank. Then the patch completely gave way, and the boat sank like a stone but fortunately the water was not too deep and all the juniors scrambled ashore without too much trouble.

The party then skirted the wood and trotted off towards St. Frank's, trying to get as warm as possible, as by now the wind was getting up, and the rain was just beginning to fall. They crossed the meadows, which were just under water, without too much trouble, but the lane leading to the main road was like a young river. At last, however, they reached the school gates, which were still open.

As they splashed across the Triangle, the main doors opened and several figures appeared. They were Mr. Alvington and two or three prefects, who were just about to form a search party. When the Housemaster saw the juniors and realised that all the missing boys were present he was most relieved, and saw that all the boys were taken to the bathrooms, and given a good hot bath and a rub down. After that they were all given a check over, and when it was found that they were in good shape, with no apparent colds, etc. supper was the order of the day, at which the Headmaster and the Housemaster joined the juniors. After the meal, Bennett told the two Masters what had happened, and how the skill and courage of the new boy had saved them. This praise, and that of the Head and Mr. Alvington, made Burton feel quite uncomfortable, but, it was of no use, and the next day, the whole College heard of his heroism.

His queer method of speech and his rugged good humour, soon made him very popular, and he became one of the leading lights of the remove before very long.

* *

INSPECTOR FRENCH/ROBIN BRAND

by Ian Godden

The detective novelist Freeman Wills Crofts has been mentioned a time or two in the pages of C.D. Eric Fayne in his editorial in 445 said that the books of Crofts "...make excellent reading, even though some tend to be a trifle too technical" which is certainly true. Again, in his editorial in 338, Eric Fayne wrote that Crofts lived in Guildford at one time and "...loved the charm, peace and beauty of the Guildford he knew". Eric once lived there too and his reason for writing abut it here was the changes for the worse - which, "the planners and money-makers" had perpetrated.

The Guildford area, as it used to be in the good old days, was featured in various Crofts books such as *The Hog's Back Mystery* and *Crime At Guildford*, both splendid, if highly involved murder mysteries.

Freeman Wills Crofts was a railway engineer for many years until he retired to be a full-time writer. His books are still fairly popular today although they are not to the liking of all readers of detective fiction. The stories contain a wealth of detail with every single piece of an investigation, no matter how minor, given in full so they give the reader a very detailed account indeed of what an investigating detective actually does when confronted with a murder case. I find all of this detail extremely interesting, not to say fascinating, but those wanting action in a story may disagree.

Many of the detective novels written by Crofts feature the Scotland Yard detective Inspector French, a dour man with a keen mind. I think French is very much like what Crofts himself would have been had he been a detective.

In the mid 1940s the University of London Press published a series for young readers called Junior Novels By Famous Authors. These specially commissioned stories included books by such well-known authors as Manning Coles and Clifford Witting. Crofts contributed a book called Young Robin Brand Detective, in which the detectives are the schoolboys Robin Brand and his friend Jack Carr. Robin is spending the summer holidays with his friend Carr whose engineer father is in charge of the building of a railway viaduct at a town on the Cornish coast.

Robin Brand is interested in detection and this has earned him the name 'Cury' - short for curiosity of which he has a generous supply. Villains kidnap Carr's little sister for ransom and the boys are thus given an opportunity of putting their skills as detectives into practice.

One of the young engineers on the site is Cyril French, nephew of the famous Inspector, and he is able to arrange for the boys to meet the man about whom young Robin has read so much. French tells the enthralled boys about some of his cases and is able to offer advice in the kidnapping case which is soon resolved satisfactorily.

Crofts, in the course of this interesting story, gives the reader an account of how he writes his stories; "I begin with the important adventures or happenings and then I plan the recurring characters and situations and locations to enable these adventures to take place."

So now we know how it's done...

* *

CRIME AT CLIFF HOUSE by Margery Woods
Part 5 No One Spared!

One of the favourite plots in fiction has always centred on the shadow from the past or the skeleton in the family cupboard, both of which lend themselves to many variations and heartaches, blackmail, ruined careers and marriages --- the permutations are endless --- as the background secrets suddenly rear their heads to confront the good and the virtuous, not forgetting the snobs, and threaten all they hold dear.

While the Cliff House girls themselves were usually the leading protagonists in these conflicts the mistresses were certainly not exempt, and some of the most powerful and dramatic series were written round the problems they faced from family black sheep who were better relegated safely out of sight and sound of the school where their honourable kin led blameless lives. We have already heard how Miss Primrose herself, venerable head of the great school, nearly lost her career through a suspect relative-in-law, a selfish, wilful pupil and an unscrupulous man of power.

Then there was Miss Charmant, the young and immensely popular mistress of the Fourth. She had more than one baptism of fire! One with her supposed young sister and the shady characters who came out of the Canadian unknown to cause her endless trouble, and the other, quite the worst, with the nephew of the kindly couple who had adopted her as a child. Shaw Dennis, after being expelled from school and stealing from his uncle, was finally banished from the family portals to make his own way in the world, to emerge years later determined to avenge himself on the girl he believed had taken his rightful place in the affections of his uncle and aunt.

There is little more dangerous than a hatred that has simmered and been nursed for years. When his chance at last arrived and he found his way into a job at Cliff House, it boded ill for Valerie Charmant.

Shaw Dennis had a certain raffish charm that could deceive those who lacked sufficient perception to read the true character beneath the surface. In this series, NEW RULE AT CLIFF HOUSE, the characterization throughout is spot on and the emotional impact very strong. When it was all over and Shaw Dennis banished yet again, the reader knew that Miss Charmant would not forget her adoptive brother in a hurry, and there was always the possibility that the magazine might at a later date exploit the undoubted mileage still possible in these characters. This was not to be, so the eventual fate of Shaw Dennis was never to be known. Did he reform and cover himself with heroism and glory during the appalling conflictc that awaited the world a few short years later? This is doubtful. He would be more likely to discover some rich and foolish widow who would keep him in the luxury he considered was his due.

But the greatest surprise in the victim-of-crime stakes at Cliff House was the Bull!

Who would have dreamed that the stern, irascible upholder of discipline and monarch of correct behaviour would ever be involved in such a sordid predicament as that of having a criminal brother who was actually serving a prison term for forgery?

For the first time the reader is given a glimpse of the woman behind the tyrannical facade they all dreaded.

"...gone were the harsh lines on her face... the harsh lines had softened into thin grey folds, the grey green eyes were dim and the usually cold hard lips were trembling. There were tears in her eyes as she gazed at the photograph. Grant, her brother, the one being in the world whom this hard, middle-aged woman loved, on whom she had lavished every bit of the affection of which her nature was capable."

Grant Bullivant has written to his sister to tell her that he is planning to escape from Kenmarsh Prison to try to prove that he is innocent and the real wrongdoer is his partner, Edward Bell.

He succeeds. The clamour of the prison bell alerts the surrounding area. And now we find the reversal of roles in this strong series. Miss Bullivant now plays the role so often played by the girls. She is the one who hides the escapee, who takes food and clothing to her brother in the old quarry, to plan his getaway when the hunt for him moves on, and do everything she can to help prove his innocence. She it is who has to steal away furtively from the school on her mission of aid, and experience all the fear of discovery so often suffered by her pupils.

Bell is quite a common name, but of course it is the same family as that of Nancy Bell, one of the regular meanies of the Fourth, and Edward Bell is her older brother. This provides the second thread of the plot, interweaving to bind Miss Bullivant in an ever tightening web.

"DID you see these girls out of bounds?" Miss Primrose asked of Miss Bullivant. Miss Bullivant hesitated. She did not want to give Babs & Co. away, and yet—— But Babs herself stepped forward quickly. "Yes, Miss Bullivant did see us," she answered swiftly, and was amply rewarded by the look of gratitude which Miss Bullivant flashed her.

Right at the start of the story Nancy is up to her usual unpleasant ways, and chooses the wrong lesson, the wrong time and the wrong mistress for her ink-throwing little sortie which catches poor Bessie. Later, when summoned to the Bull's study for further reprimand, she accidentally slips, falls, and hits her head. Nancy is not stunned enough to fail to grasp this opportunity of avenging herself on the acidic mistress, whom she has always hated, and accuses the mistress of pushing her and causing her injury. The outcome is even better than Nancy hopes. Her father arrives, accompanied by one of the school governors and breathing fire and brimstone, and Miss Bullivant is humiliated by having to promise that poor little Nancy will not be victimised or badly treated ever again.

The chums become involved when they break bounds one night to collect a tuck hamper from the station. In pouring rain they encounter the Bull and their hearts sink, until they realise that the mistress does not seem to be any happier about the encounter. To their amazement she does not even reprimand them, instead tells them about her brother, who is innocent. Unfortunately, back at school, their absence had been discovered and Babs admits the bounds breaking and tells the Head that Miss Bullivant has reprimanded them about it.

Thus begins one of the strangest alliances ever known at Cliff House, with Babs and Co aiding the mistress in her fight to save her brother and taking over when the mistress becomes ill. Complications increase with the arrival of Edward Bell at the school and the involvement of Nancy, who is determined to betray Grant's whereabouts to the police. Excitement quickens when Grant manages to get to his erstwhile partner's office, break in, and discover papers which will prove Edward Bell's guilt. He gives them to Babs, and there is a race to get them to the solicitor before Nancy and her brother can betray Grant. After the setting of a clever trap by Clara Trevlyn the betrayal rebounds and Edward Bell is the one who is captured, promptly giving the whole game away in his alarm.

Once more the chums have succeeded. Nancy is brought to book, though in the inexplicable way of all baddies at Cliff House she misses being expelled, her rascally brother also manages to elude the police, but the main thing is the clearing of Grant's good name and the complete recovery of Miss Bullivant, who is exonerated of any blame for injuring Nancy and hiding a fugitive convict.

It would be nice to know that Miss Bullivant softened after that and retained the special affection she'd found for Babs and the chums after the way they had helped her. But the readers knew that the Bull would soon be on the rampage again! Leopards, if not bulls, do not change their spots, and there wouldn't have been half as much fun and half as much entertainment afterwards had the formidable Bull turned permanently soft.
(SCHOOLGIRL 216, 217, 218. September 1933 - Miss Bullivant series.)

(**Editor's Note**: It is interesting that 'the Bull' is shown in the 1933 *Schoolgirl* (presumably by John Wheway) as being dedicated to her brother, Grant, while in Magnets 1545-55 in 1937 Charles Hamilton reunites her with a much younger brother called 'Skip' who has also suffered severe misfortunes.)

* *

COLLECTORS CLEARANCE: all items Very Good or better except where noted otherwise. 62 Nelson Lees 1931 to 1933 range £55.00. 51 Nelson Lees (reading copies only) £20.00. 19 Sexton Blakes 1930/34 range, occasional sellotape reinforcement to top and bottom of spine £50.00. 43 Adventure March '51 to April' 52 punch holes top/bottom of spine not affecting text £25.00. 29 Adventure April '50 to May 51 £20.00. 15 Hotspur 1951 £10.00. 59 Rover Sept' 50 to January '52 £40.00. 56 Adventure - run 1280 (July '49) to 1336 (Aug. '50) lacks 1308 £45.00. 127 Wizard broken run 1180 (July '48) to 1324 (June '51) £75.00.
The above D.C.T. comics are mostly VG/Fine - odd copies have tears/creasing/age, darkening from storage and 'lots' are priced accordingly.
Professionally bound volumes. Magnets. 16 (issues (1643 - 1658) £35. 12 issues (1573-1584) £25. 26 issues (1585-1611) £50. 26 issues (1617-1642) £50.
Sun Comics 256 (Jan. '54) to 281 (June '54) £35. **Chick's Own** January to June 1956 (probably publishers file copy) £35. Please add £1.00 per 'lot' towards postage, but orders over £100 post free. John Beck, 29 Mill Road, Lewes, Sussex, BN7 2RU.

* *

WANTED: Books by Violet Needham, e.g. The Horn of Merlyns, The Stormy Petrel, among others. Good prices offered. Write to Miss J.A. Carver, 136 St. Mary's Road, Glossop, Derbyshire, SK13 8JB.

* *

NICHOLAS THOMAS

by Ian Johnson

I must have momentarily nodded over the June SPCD - otherwise how could I have missed Jim Lake's enquiry about Nicholas Thomas?

Nicholas Thomas has been part of my psyche since I first heard Kitty Styles' stories on Children's Hour in the late 1940s. I can still remember my whole family chuckling at the subtle blend of humour, astute characterisation and fantasy which were the main ingredients of Styles' tales about Nicholas.

Who was Nicholas Thomas? This is Styles' description at the start of *Nicholas Thomas in the Toffee Shop:*

"Once there was a bad black kitten whose name was Nicholas Thomas.

He had impertinent ears, an enquiring nose, and extremely inquisitive whiskers.

His round green eyes were wide with wondering why, and his curious tale was considerably crooked with questions.

He wore a bright blue bow on his white fur waistcoat and little white Wellington boots to keep his toes quite dry. (Mrs. Tilly Thomas -- she was his mother! -- was very particular about perfectly dry feet.)

Nicholas Thomas was full of good meals, and he had a terrible habit of getting into trouble. Just like this..."

It was Nicholas Thomas's curiosity which got him into the most unfortunate scrapes -- and his well-meaning parents, Mrs. Tilly and Mr. Thomas Thomas, like most parents found it difficult to find the right mix of indulgence and discipline.

Nicholas certainly had some endearing ways, such as kittenish mews of "Oh", "Me-oh" and "No" ("because," explains Styles, "he liked his own way"). It must have been in the later tales that he acquired his pet mouse Adolphus with its limited vocabulary ("Squee") and limitless loyalty.

The stories themselves were quite fantastic. In the *Toffee Shop* Nicholas falls into a dish of melted toffee and is put out for sale in the sweetshop window as a toffee cat. In other stories he becomes a waxworks Dick Whittington's Cat, digs a hole through to China, and goes to sea in a biscuit box. Styles had a very acute understanding of a child's (sorry kitten's) character and its day-dreams and fantasies.

The stories were delightfully read on the radio, but not by Styles as I remember; some research in *Radio Times* files would be appropriate. Of course I was thrilled to receive as presents two of the Sampson Low books to which Bill Lofts refers in the August C.D., and the vivid coloured illustrations by Mary Kendal Lee were a perfect complement to the broadcasts - Nicholas in his school cap, Mrs. Tilly Thomas in her flowery bonnet and Mr. Thomas Thomas in his top hat or smoking cap (remarkably anachronistic as well as anthropomorphic when one thinks about it).

I still have those two volumes (*Nicholas Thomas gets into Trouble* and *Nicholas Thomas the Naughty Kitten*), both rather battered as my own three children have also loved the stories. In fact when my youngest daughter (age 18) saw me leafing through them to write this letter, there was a moment of anxiety -- "You're not going to sell *them* are you Dad? They are special".

* *

CONTRASTING CHARACTERS ON THE GREYFRIARS SCENE

by Ted Baldock

Lord Mauleverer, 'Mauly' to his companions in the Greyfriars Remove. A scion of a noble and ancient house. 'His lazy Lordship', a familiar sobriquet, seemingly epitomizes his languid outlook and unflappable good nature. Distanced from his surroundings and the activities of his friends - of whom he may count practically every member of the form and beyond - he is in many ways in enigmatical figure. Various interpretations may be placed upon his seeming indifference to the prevailing climate around him. Past experience has proved that this outer manifestation of languidity is but a facade concealing an exceedingly alert and observant character.

To mention 'blue blood' in this prosaic age of levelling and social equality is, I am aware, a trifle out-moded. Nevertheless it may truly be stated that Mauly has by virtue of his ancestry inherited his full quota of this rarified fluid. And it is fairly obvious that he was reared largely upon the precepts expressed in the letters of Lord Chesterfield. Upon first impressions one tends to associate him with deep armchairs, sumptuous sofas - both prominent enough in his well appointed study - and carefully adjusted cushions to support the noble head; of silence and peace wherein he may slumber, far removed from the noisy proceedings and oft-times pandemonium from adjacent studies and passages. To a certain degree this is not an inaccurate picture, yet it is far from being a complete portrait. The broad canvas of Mauly's activities encompasses many surprises, some of which appear to be complete contradictions.

J.W. Riley has told us that "No boy knows when he goes to sleep". Thus, Mauly in the Remove form room on a drowsy summer afternoon following an adequate lunch, with the tones of Mr. Quelch (perhaps a shade less acid than usual - a tribute no doubt to the clement weather and also possibly to the lunch) droning monotonously on and finally overcoming his Lordship's already drifting senses. The noble head droops and nods and succumbs gracefully to the irresistible charms of Morpheus, until several earthquakes occur simultaneously. The Remove Master, becoming cognisant with the situation, descends with a tumultuous thunder clap, usually with somewhat painful results for Mauly.

Although Mauly is quite happy as a general rule to lounge on his sofa, to contemplate the embers of his study fire and ponder upon the amazing energy of his friends, it should not be assumed for an instant that he is lacking in any sense, courage or initiative should the occasion demand it. As witness his deeds of derring-do on Little Side should the Remove eleven be 'up against it', or for that matter, when he chooses to bestir himself in the gym. Not infrequently he has been observed to display a remarkable turn of speed when Billy Bunter has been spotted in the offing with a stony look about him. Languid he may appear to those unacquainted with his ways and habits, but this is a deception inherent in his character.

Observe Mauly in one of his more wakeful moments in the 'rag', weighing in quietly with a well considered opinion (which always seems to get to the heart of the matter) in some voluble dispute, and, despite the babble and uproar, he is listened to and his views are noted and respected. For Mauly possesses that unusual power to attract; he has some facet of character which commands attention, inherited from a long line of distinguished ancestors, from men who were born to lead and command. This characteristic is never obviously asserted but used quite naturally as being a part of his personality. Having dispensed his pearls of wisdom he will relapse into his usual state of languid indifference and, unless severely provoked, be heard no more.

In the annals of the school he has figured as the hero of many hard fought battles on Little Side, for 'Mauly' does 'come to' sufficiently to assure for himself a regular place in the Greyfriars junior eleven. Indeed he is famous for his 'do or die' solo sprints down the wing, the ball dancing at his feet and, at the last moment, centring with perfect precision to the waiting feet - or heads - of Harry Wharton or Vernon Smith who, more often than otherwise 'notch up' one more goal for Greyfriars.

Better and perhaps more easily recognised is the elegant white-clad figure lounging in a deck-chair by the pavilion during the summer term, drowsing happily in the sun, awaiting his call to proceed to the wicket, there to do his 'stint' for the junior school eleven against St. Jim's or Rookwood. Mauly fits perfectly and naturally into such a setting. Dignified leisure and quiet pursuits (especially dozing in the sun with the hectic and clamorous fever of commercialism a world away) are his long suit. Perhaps it ought to be said that there does exist one fly in the ointment, one which keeps his Lordship up to some degree of 'scratch'. This fly is epitomized in the Master of the Remove, who is responsible for the daunting task of imparting and hopefully implanting certain knowledge in the noble cranium. A task of no small magnitude, yet one which Mr. Quelch is eminently qualified to perform. All things considered, has he not splendid soil wherein to sow?

From classical times it has been inferred and recognised that rank imposes obligation. Noblesse oblige, and Lord Mauleverer has been bred against such a background, He may be safely designated a sterling character, a gentleman, a very decent fellow and a typical Greyfriars 'Man'.

****

Mr. Joseph Banks, fingered a large horseshoe tie-pin prominently displayed in his yellow cravat. Then he reached for the poker and stirred his fire into some semblance of life and warmth. Mr. Banks' 'office', a little room opening off the billiards saloon of the "Three Fishers", reflected fairly accurately the character of its occupant. It presented an extremely seedy appearance; untidy and somewhat short on cleanliness. Old sporting papers, many of a pinkish hue, and racing magazines littered the table and an old desk at which 'Joey' was wont to transact his admittedly lucrative 'business'. This, of course, consisted almost entirely of relieving certain 'wide awake' gentlemen of the neighbourhood, unhappily including a number of Greyfriars fellows, of sums of money on the strength of 'dead certs' and 'favourites to win', etc.

In the deeper recesses of a pigeon-hole in his desk Joey had secreted a number of slips of paper containing the signatures of those unfortunate individuals who had found themselves 'stony' when the day of reckoning made its inevitable appearance. Among these scribbled slips were to be found a number - far too many - of quite familiar names which, had they come to the august attention of Dr. Locke or any other master at Greyfriars, would have caused very unhappy repercussions - and very rapid exits. One of Mr. Banks' favourite and infallibly successful weapons was the threat of turning up at the school to see the young gentlemen about certain little business transactions if settlement was not forthcoming by a date set by him. A great sportsman was the insidious 'Joey'. The agonies experienced by these young gentlemen may be well imagined.

'Joey' (to his more intimate friends) was reclining in his ancient and creaky basket chair by the fire in a distinctly disgruntled frame of mind. Gerald Loder of the sixth form at Greyfriars had made an appointment, by telephone from his Master's study, which was now overdue by no less than two hours. Loder, being one of Joey's chief sources of income, was an important client and his non-appearance caused no small irritation. Time was money with the beery Banks, and it was in no jolly manner that he hurled a cigar butt into the ashy grate and gave vent to several unprintable expletives. The usually comforting click of billiard balls and chink of glasses from the adjoining room failed to lighten his increasing resentment.

Recently business had been far from booming. Certain 'Nags' had failed in their bounden duty of flashing past the winning post far ahead of the field according to Joey's expert calculations. Consequently finances were at a dismally low ebb. A far from satisfactory situation. Something to be reversed as soon as possible by any means, fair or otherwise. Loder's advent was quite crucial in the realising of this much to be desired state of affairs. Hence Joey's irritable anxiety. Certain 'gentlemen' of the racing fraternity were, quite heartlessly, asserting a most unwelcome pressure to settle some quite ancient debts. It was in Joey's scheme of things that Loder should provide substantial aid in this worthy cause.

Just one of a fascinating gallery of characters created by Charles Hamilton, Joseph Banks threads his insalubrious way through the Greyfriars odyssey, moving sometimes to the foreground in a way that is most disturbing to a small coterie of shady schoolboy types. Often absent for long periods from the main chain of events, as a figure of menace and alarm to the wrong-doers he has his moments of domination. Usually, and fortunately for the fellows concerned, retribution strikes and various unpleasant fates overtake Mr. Banks. Harry Wharton and Co. have, on occasion, so vigorously man-handled the wildly protesting Joey that he has perforce made the acquaintance of miry ditches and even less pleasant places. The waters of the Sark have also on occasion received his corpulent person. All of which salutary lessons do not deter the beery Banks from pursing the disreputable calling.

No picture is complete if it lacks darker hues. Thus we see from time to time the figure of 'Joey' emerging from obscurity to play his small yet not unimportant part in the Greyfriars story. A seedy part - but one which tends to throw into sharper focus the more acceptable conduct and customs of those who are associated with the famous school.

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MORCOVE MUSINGS
No. 2 of an occasional series

by Dennis L. Bird

Horace Phillips was a true Victorian. Born in Camberwell, London, in 1881, he was 20 when the Great Queen died, and his writings ever after exhibited the values that he had learned in his early life: earnestness, patriotism, respect for the aristocracy, a liking for melodramatic and sentimental stories, and what our Editor Mary Cadogan has called "hearty decency." He had a sense of humour - rather heavy-handed at times - and a fascination with the exotic which led him to set many stories in the Arabian desert or a romantic corner of Europe which he called Turania.

He became editor of "The Scout," "The Boys' Journal," and other papers in the early years of this century, and wrote women's stories for the "Sunday Companion" and "Sunday Circle." Then came his great opportunity to develop as a writer. When the weekly "School Friend" launched the Cliff House stories in May 1919, Charles Hamilton (as "Hilda Richards") was the original author, but the management soon removed him because the girls' stories were distracting him too much from his commitments to "The Magnet" and "The Gem". Horace Phillips was invited to become "Hilda Richards," and although he held the appointment for only a few months he was so successful that he boosted the "School Friend" circulation considerably. He was then offered the task of creating an entirely new set of school characters in the Amalgamated Press's latest venture, a 2d-a-week paper called "The Schoolgirls' Own". The first issue was dated February 5th, 1921; the cover was orange and blue - colours adopted the following year for "The Magnet" - and it featured the first of many attractive drawings by Leonard Shields. Both Phillips and Shields thought their new creation would prove ephemeral, but in fact their partnership was to continue for exactly 17 years, until the issue of "The Schoolgirl" dated February 5th, 1938. This was the saga of Morcove School.

Horace Phillips' first story in the "Schoolgirls' Own" covered 11 pages out of a total of 36. There were three other stories by different writers, and features on needlework, cookery, and Guides. The "SO" was a small journal, with a page size of only 6½ inches by 9 inches. The later Amalgamated Press papers ("The Schoolgirl", "Schoolgirls' Weekly" and "Girls' Crystal") were larger - 7½ inches by 11 inches. So Phillips' 11 pages in the first "SO" equated to only about 8 pages of the companion papers. But that was a substantial proportion of the weekly contents.

He wrote 789 episodes for the "SO", and when that closed in May 1936 there were another 89 in "The Schoolgirl" and 30 in annuals - a grand total of 908 tales. He also wrote under the name "Joy Phillips", but he is best remembered as "Marjorie Stanton," the memorialist of Morcove.

ENTER: BETTY

"Scorned by the School" was the title he gave to his first instalment, but it is eight pages before we get to Devon. He wanted to establish the personality and the family background of his heroine, Betty Barton. We meet her in her Council school on a pouring wet day in Lancashire; the very first words set the tone:

> "Just one little face at the schoolroom window, peering out at the pelting rain! Such a sweet, pretty face; but oh, how pale and thin, and with what a world of trouble in the bright blue eyes!"

A far cry, this, from the precincts of one of England's finest boarding schools, where she was soon to receive her education. This was Ribbleton (there is actually a place of that name - a suburb of Preston), and the Bartons lived there in desperate poverty.

Joe Barton worked in the mill, and was "worth his £5 a week before he got hurt by the machinery"; now he is lame, and is "very little use," earning a mere 18 shillings (90 pence) a week. His wife has to work as a charwoman, to keep the family going - for there are five

mouths to feed. Joe and Nell have three children: Betty, the eldest, and Doris and little Joe. To make matters worse, Mr. Barton is run over by a lorry and will be off work for weeks. The baker calls for the money owing, and the rent collector talks of giving the Bartons notice.

Horace Phillips gradually tightens the screw of grinding poverty, just as Charles Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell had done seventy years or so before him. In the cynical 1990s his style may seem sentimental and melodramatic, but taken in the context of his times he has a rather endearing earnestness and a very positive identification with his characters. He really feels for the Bartons in their distress. And he is (probably unconsciously) making quite a political point, for the family's troubles are due to economic circumstances in general and to the greed of one wealthy family in particular. Their name (as significant as any in a pantomime) is Grandways. Josiah Grandways, once poor himself, "had only acquired his wealth by profiteering during the war." Clearly he was one of those "hard-faced men who look as if they had done very well out of the war," in Stanley Baldwin's telling phrase. It was Grandways' mill where Joe Barton had been injured by inadequately-safeguarded machinery; it was Grandways' slum dwellings and rack-rents which bore so hardly upon the Bartons' living conditions. And it was Mrs. Grandways who paid Nell Barton a pittance for her hard work with the scrubbing-brush.

The Grandways' two girls, Cora and Judith, were no more attractive - young snobs who went to Ribbleton's "Private Academy for the Daughters of Gentlefolk," and who lost no opportunity to deride their charwoman's daughter.

"Never mind: I'll manage," was Betty's steadfast response to all life's ills and accidents (no, her middle name was not Pollyanna). She was consistently brave and cheerful, always ready to do the hard work about the house and to encourage her despondent siblings.

All this Horace Phillips conveys in his first seven pages, leading to a chapter predictably headed "The Darkest Hour". And then, rather as in one of the Victorian pantomimes of which he was probably fond, an unseen magic want is waved. A telegram arrives at the Bartons' squalid home. Joe Barton's brother George had gone to America five years before (1916) to seek his fortune, and Betty's "dad gave him £20 to emigrate with." Now he was back, "sun-tanned, well dressed, prosperous," driving his own car and, as he put it, "with my pockets stuffed full of money." At a stroke, the Bartons' problems are solved. Mr. Barton can have the best care and attention in hospital; his family move into "a fine mansion," and his eldest child is to go to one of the most exclusive schools in the country.

No wonder Betty set out for Morcove with "radiance rare and fathomless" and magic in her eyes (Thomas Hardy's words). Uncle George had warned her that there would be rich girls there, who might be a problem. "I'll manage!" she said. And her first impressions of Morcove were all she

SPLENDID NEWS FOR BETTY!

"Betty," said Uncle George, "I am going to send you to a big boarding school. Do you think you'll be happy?" "Oh, Uncle!" gasped Betty.

could have wished. The jovial school porter Steggles met her at the station, and at the school she was received by her form-mistress Miss Redgrave in most kindly fashion. "How tired you must be, Betty, after such a long journey... I come from the North myself." "Oh, do you?" exclaimed Betty, feeling drawn towards this beautiful young lady. (Horace Phillips was always inclined to make the relationships between his characters quite intense, even at first sight.) Betty is conducted to her new study, passing several girls "who gave her a friendly smile at once, and that did a great deal towards driving away her natural nervousness." What could possibly go wrong? We shall see.

(I am indebted to the writings of Mary Cadogan, Tommy Keen, and W.O.G. Lofts for the biographical information on Horace Phillips.)

* *

BOOKS

SEXTON BLAKE: A CELEBRATION OF THE GREAT DETECTIVE. By Norman Wright and David Ashford. Reviewed by Mary Cadogan.

Above: Eric Parker wittily draws himself sculpting the famous Sexton Blake bust for the title page of *Union Jack* 1169. Right: a photograph of the bust appeared on the cover of the same issue.

The authors and the publisher (John Wernham of the Museum Press) are to be congratulated on this large and finely produced book which fittingly celebrates the one-hundred-year literary life of Sexton Blake. Its 154 A4 sized pages cover virtually every aspect of the redoubtable saga, and its informative and entertaining text is studded with atmospheric illustrations - mostly by Eric R. Parker.

Sexton Blake: A Celebration of the Great Detective does indeed tell us everything we ever wanted to know about this publishing phenomenon. And there is much to tell. As Duncan Harper (the London O.B.B.C. Sexton Blake Librarian) says in an introduction to the book 'Stories of his adventures have appeared in over thirty different publications. How many detectives have been written about by over 150 authors? What other detective was still

tackling new cases eighty five years after his birth?' He points out that one reason for Blake's extraordinary resilience is his ability to move with the times, and this is something which, making excellent use of pictures and quotations, Norman Wright and David Ashford frequently emphasize.

They set the scene by suggesting that 1893 was 'a landmark in the annals of British crime fiction for two reasons'; it was in that year (in the *Strand Magazine*) that Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes - already a cult figure - fell to his (apparent) death in the Reichenbach Falls, while in the far less prestigious paper called the *Halfpenny Marvel* Sexton Blake made his debut.

As the chapter titles indicate, this book satisfyingly explores the many highways and byways of the Blakian saga: the chapters are: 'The Great Detective', 'Allies and Adversaries', 'The Femmes Fatales', 'The Contributors', 'Sexton Blake's Artist', 'Told in Pictures' (which deals with the sleuth's picture-strip exploits) and 'Star of Stage, Screen and Radio'.

In my view this book will appeal not only to Blake fans but to all enthusiasts for the detective story in general. It is a not-to-be-missed account of a large, cross-generational chunk of popular culture. *Sexton Blake, A Celebration of the Great Detective* can be ordered direct from the publisher - The Museum Press, 30 Tonbridge Road, Maidstone, Kent, ME16 8RT, at £12.00, which includes postage and packing.

LONDON - A LITERARY COMPANION. Recommended by John Bridgwater.

Scenes set in London appear in so many of our stories that it is probable many readers like me have developed considerable curiosity about all aspects of the city. Street maps and books explaining how the streets got their names have an unending fascination for me. So I would like to acquaint like-minded hobbyists with a really splendid anthology I discovered recently. "London - A Literary Companion" by Peter Vansittart (published by John Murray; priced £11.99).

The book contains "snapshots" and snippets of the London scene and life throughout the ages culled from over 270 sources from Caxton to the present day. They range across Hampton Court through Piccadilly, the City, East End, and Hampstead to surburbia. All linked into a fascinating narrative by the compiler's commentary. I cannot do better than quote from the publishers blurb which, for once, does not overstate the case: "...a delightful celebration of London in all its moods, of royal London, commercial London, criminal London, the crowds, the river, even the fog, all of them given immediacy and life by writers as diverse as Samuel Pepys and Martin Amis, Thakeray and V.S. Prichett. A treat not to be missed". In other words, a volume of endless enjoyment.

* *

WANTED: ENID BLYTON, W.E. JOHNS, CROMPTON. First editions in wrappers, and ALL ephemera related to these authors. ANY original artwork related to Bunter, Blyton, Biggles, Eagle or other British comics and boys papers. ALL Boys Friend Libraries by W.E. Johns and Rochester. Many "Thriller" issues and first editions in wrappers by Charteris required. NORMAN WRIGHT, 60 Eastbury Road, Watford, WD1 4JL. Tel. 0923 232383.

* *

FROM JOHN GEAL - Gems of Hamiltonia No. 8
William George Bunter MAGNET No. 1059

(Bunter has followed the Famous Five to Lantham, to scrounge tea at the Pagoda, but cannot find them.)

"Tea at the Pagoda tea-shop was exactly what he wanted - a good solid, substantial tea - something like a couple of lunches and a dinner rolled into one, which was what Bunter considered a real, genuine tea.

But Bunter's possessions, in the financial line, were limited to one penny; which was still in his possession because it was a French penny, and nobody would take it from Bunter as legal tender.

Bunter, in a burst of generosity, had nearly given that dix-centime piece to a blind beggar on one occasion - Bunter could be charitable. But he had prudently reflected that the French penny, though not legal tender, might be used in an automatic machine when no eye was upon him; and therefore it still reposed in his pocket. Swindling an automatic chocolate machine was not a matter to weigh heavily on Bunter's conscience - his fat conscience had much more serious matters than that to deal with, if it ever got active.

With a piece of ten centimes in his possession, merely that and nothing more, it was quite useless to present himself at the Pagoda, or any other tea shop in Lantham.

When Bunter dropped into a bun-shop, he liked to have a friend with him. Bunter knew the value of friendship - its cash value at least. But he was alone and friendless in Lantham now. Crowds of people passed him in Lantham High Street, and not one of them cared whether Bunter was hungry or not. The heartlessness of the world was borne in sadly upon Billy Bunter's mind. It was true that he did not bother to think whether there might be anything amiss with any of the passers-by. But that, of course, was quite a different matter. The beginning and end of all things in the universe, to William George Bunter, was W.G.B. A famine that might lay waste a continent was not of so much importance as the sinking feeling under his tight waistcoat.

The question was, what was do be done or who was to be done?"

* *

FORUM

From DENNIS BIRD:

Dennis Hilliard's 40-year search ("CD", Sept. p.30) stirred some distant memories. I too remember a treasure hunt story set in Derbyshire; I seem to recall that one of the clues featured the then popular Russian novel "And Quiet Flows the Don" by ? Sokolov. I have a firm belief that the book was by Geoffrey Trease before he turned (to my great regret) from present-day stories to historical ones. I think he wrote two M.E. Atkinson-type stories - the titles were something like "Mystery on the Moors" and "Detectives of the Dales". He seems to have regretted this part of his output, for I can find no mention of these books in the usual reference works nor in his own "Tales Out of School". Perhaps you know?

Editor's Note: This reply sent me to my copy of that most useful reference book from the St. James Press, TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHILDREN'S WRITERS, which has an interesting section on Geoffrey Trease. This lists amongst his many books those two titles. One or the other might well represent the end of Dennis Hilliard's long question. *Detective of the Dales* (1938) and *Mystery on the Moors* (1937) were both published by A. and C. Black. (See further note on page 28.)

From LAURENCE PRICE:

It was lovely to see the comments in CD 569 from George Beal about the Daily Mail annual and marvellous, of course that he was the editor at the time! It's nice how the C.D. draws all these strands of knowledge together.

From MARTIN WATERS:

I am interested in the actor Kynaston Reeves, who played Mr. Quelch in such a convincing fashion in the Greyfriars TV programmes back in the 1950s. I can only recollect ever seeing this actor in one other role - as Admiral Lord Hood, in the cinema version of Captain Hornblower's adventures, with Gregory Peck in the title role. Can anyone who is knowledgeable on cinema history tell me anything about the career of Mr. Reeves?

From J.E.M.:

In the August Digest, I especially enjoyed Messrs. Laskey's and Glynn's nostalgic musings - these are indeed the very stuff of our hobby. And I can only say 'hear hear' to the claim of Dennis Bird and yourself that Morcove has been neglected in recent years...

Mr. O'Leary's article about the sci-fi material in the D.C. Thomson papers deserves special mention. WIZARD, ROVER and the rest always managed to combine excitement with real imagination and, though generally aimed at a younger (and/or less literate) readership, these papers are not easily forgotten by old readers.

Forum goes from strength to strength and is surely now a favourite feature.

From CLARICE HARDING:

I was fascinated with "Morcove Musings", by Dennis Bird in the August C.D. I purchased *Schoolgirls' Own* from No. 1, and read and absorbed all information about Morcove, and the surrounding countryside! And, of course Betty Barton's arrival at School. Please let us have more of these delightful musings!

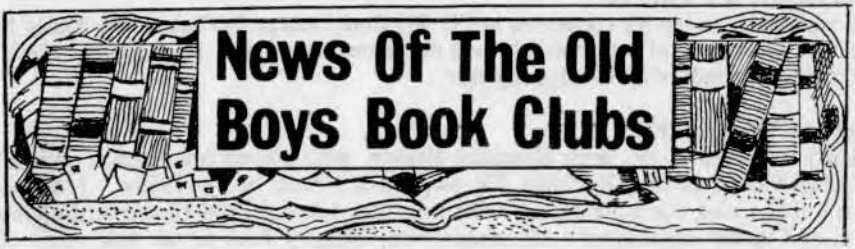
From JOHN LEWIS:

Further to Roger Jenkins' *Do You Remember?* article in C.D. 570 and my reply in *Forum* (C.D. 572), another villainous Dutchman was featured in Magnet 1186. He was Jan Vanderpeck, the mate of the *Sundabund,* who not only tried to murder his Captain, but also attempted to kill Ferrers Locke. (By the way, two mistakes were introduced in my Forum reply. It should have read: "Murderous Sea Captain van Dink".

From PETER BARNICOTT:

I am searching for a boys' weekly paper (I have forgotten its name) which was published in the late 1930s - perhaps 1938 or 1939. It may have been a new publication, and was printed on good quality paper with good illustrations. The series I am interested in concerned a trip to Mars. It was mere boys' fantasy in those days, but the scientific and other details were impressively accurate. The leader of the expedition was named Dale, and the story was set in what was, at that time, the future - in the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. The departure of the rocket was seen on television and commented on by a well-known announcer. The expedition finally landed on Mars and met a race of men who were dying out because they were being superseded by machines of their own making. The machines were shaped like coffins, ran about on little legs, and had tentacles, which they used for seizing and kidnapping the young hero. I found the story eerie and strangely prophetic. I still do. I wonder if any of CD's readers could help?

* *



CAMBRIDGE CLUB

For the first meeting in our 1994/95 season, we gathered at the Longstanton home of our secretary, Tony Cowley.

Firstly we held the Club's AGM, discussing at length some of the topics that we hope to feature, and appropriate venues in members' homes.

Tony then introduced two short nostalgic video excerpts: one was on an enthusiast's search for the 1951 Festival of Britain exhibition's Skylon metallic sculpture, and the second concerned a past and present look at the pre-war motor racetrack at Brooklands.

Keith Hodkinson introduced a video production he had prepared for the Club on "Children's stories which had been in the Cinema" such as *Treasure Island, Ivanhoe, 20,000 Leagues under the Sea, Little Women, The Railway Children, Captain Hornblower R.N.*, and *Robinson Crusoe.*

ADRIAN PERKINS

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

A good number attended our meeting on Saturday, 10th September. A report was given by three members who had recently attended the A.G.M. of THE FOLLOWERS OF RUPERT held in Barford near Warwick.

We discussed final plans for the annual luncheon on Saturday, 8th October to be held in Wakefield in the presence of our president and (hopefully) our vice-president.

Some new books were on display and dust wrappers for forthcoming publications were also on view.

Our paediatrician member, Dr. Nandu Thalange presented us with "Bunter's True Diagnosis". This proved to be a hilarious, tongue in cheek yet serious paper. Brilliant!

To round off the evening, Geoffrey regaled us with two amusing extracts from THE MAGNET which resulted in further discussion concerning Charles Hamilton's awareness of many modern things of life - as they were then.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

LONDON O.B.B.C.

Thirty-three members and guests attended our Sexton Blake Centenary lunch at the Carnarvon Hotel, Ealing Common, on 11th September. Our President, John Wernham, was with us to launch the Museum. Press's latest volume, SEXTON BLAKE, and members congratulated him and the two authors, Norman Wright and David Ashford, who were also present, on this excellent publication. After the most enjoyable lunch, members adjourned to Bill Bradford's home nearby for coffee, more conversation and two brain-teazing quizzes, followed by yet more refreshments (tea and cakes).

* *

IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR 'BLUEBELL' .....

(BRIAN DOYLE dips back into theatrical history with a hitherto 'never-written-before' account of a milestone Christmas musical for children (and grown-up children) which was produced in London a dozen times over a period of 36 years - 3rd only to "Peter Pan" and "Where the Rainbow Ends" in the golden league of most-revived and most-popular Christmas entertainments: "Bluebell in Fairyland".)

"The Bluebells are ringing,
The Children are singing,
The King is ruling,
The Jester's fooling,
The Princess is dancing,
The moon is enhancing,
The magical sight
Of Fairyland's Night."

Elyod Nairb,
"A Night in Fairyland" ('93)

If it hadn't been for 'Bluebell', we might never have had 'Peter Pan'...

In other words, if Sir James Barrie had not chanced to visit London's Vaudeville Theatre, in the Strand, in December, 1901, to see the original production of the soon-to-be-famous children's musical 'dream play' "Bluebell in Fairyland", he would not have been encouraged and stimulated to go home and begin writing that great children's play (and later book) "Peter Pan". He was so impressed and charmed with the show that the story he had had in his own mind for some time, about a boy who didn't want to grow up, and who could fly, came to fruition on paper, and subsequently in the theatre three years later, in 1904.

"Bluebell rubbed her eyes and looked again."

Like the immortal "Peter Pan", "Bluebell in Fairyland" was to be frequently revived on the London stage in the years to come (but not, of course, as frequently and regularly as "Peter Pan"). But what *was* "Bluebell in Fairland", I hear you cry. And *who* was 'Bluebell'? Not many will remember her now; you would have to be in your mid-60s to have seen her at all - and that in her final days. But she captured many hearts, many hundreds of thousands of hearts, and started many more singing, as we shall see, and she was probably never forgotten by all who saw her...

But let me explain...

Let's first place the opening of "Bluebell in Fairyland" in British history. It opened, as I've said, in December, 1901. Queen Victoria had recently died (in January, 1901) and the

Edwardian Era had been born, that Era when the sun always seemed to be shining. The British Empire was probably at its peak. The British Navy launched its first submarine. Kipling's "Kim" and Wells' "The First Men in the Moon" were published. The pound was worth a pound and the sovereign worth a sovereign. The sun was shining, as mentioned earlier, and shining on rich and poor (though the poor felt the cold rather more than the rich). It was an 'Upstairs, Downstairs' world, the London at the turn of the century, and it was the 'Upstairs' group who could afford a visit to the theatre (though the ones on the middle-landing sometimes gave themselves and their families a special treat at Christmas; and the 'Downstairs' lot popped along to the 'Pit' or the 'Gallery' of the local music-hall now and then). It was against this 'prosperous' background that 'Bluebell' was born.

SEYMOUR HICKS with Ellaline Terriss in a scene from the 1917 production of his play *Bluebell in Fairyland*. You will hear him this afternoon at 3.30 in scenes from some of his great successes.

"Bluebell in Fairyland" was a 'Musical Dream Play' written by Seymour Hicks (later Sir Seymour Hicks), who was one of the greatest and best-loved stars of the London theatre between 1900 and 1940. It was something of a theatrical landmark, since it was the *first* full-length, original children's play to be produced in London at Christmas; that is, it wasn't a pantomime, or adapted from a well-known children's book or story. It was an *original* children's play with music and songs and dances and comedy, written especially for children and their entertainment (and hopefully one that their parents might enjoy too!)

"Bluebell is Fairyland" had music by Walter Slaughter and lyrics by Aubrey Hopwood, and starred Seymour Hicks' beautiful actress-wife Ellaline Terris as 'Bluebell' (both she and Hicks were the same age, 30, at the time). The show marked the 4th of their 9 co-starring appearances together on the West End stage. Hicks and Terris were probably the best-loved and most-popular stage couple in London at that time (and for many years to come). In more modern terms, they could perhaps be described as the equivalent of, say, Jack Buchanan and Jessie Matthews in the 'thirties, or even of a more light-hearted and musical comedy version of Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh in the 'fifties. I can't really think of a current comparison; there aren't many true stars around in the 1990s, I'm afraid...

"Bluebell in Fairyland" tells the story of how pretty little Bluebell, a poor London flower-seller, is transported magically to the kingdom of the fairies, which is supposed to be ruled over by the Sleepy King, but who lies fast asleep in a cave as his royal place is taken by an interloper. Bluebell manages to return the King to his throne, finally awakening to find the whole thing has been a wonderful dream! But then all ends happily when Bluebell is saved from her poverty-stricken circumstances by a kind - and rich - old gentleman (with no strings attached, folks!). The story began in the Strand, where Bluebell sold her flowers to passers-by, and was often kept company by a friendly shoeblack-urchin named Dicky, then went on to her mean little garret in Drury Lane from whence she was

The Fairy of the Forest.

whisked, at midnight, to Fairyland and the gardens of the Royal castle.

The large cast included assorted animals and birds, fairies and flower girls, shoeblacks and pages, insects and fishes, as well as a dwarf, a policeman, an 'artful dodger', a Good Fairy, and Will o' the Wisp (and this ten years before the famous 'Will o' the Wisp' in "Where the Rainbow Ends"!). This particular Will was danced by little Dorothy Frostick, with great success. A popular feature at the Vaudeville, incidentally, was the showing of coloured magic lantern slides between the Acts.

Ellaline Terris came to "Bluebell" straight from her triumph in the title-role in her husband's production of "Alice in Wonderland" (in which he played the 'Mad Hatter'!) at the same theatre, which also had music by Walter Slaughter. Hicks himself played a double-role in his production of his own play, "Bluebell" - he was the likeable 'street arab', Dicky, who was Bluebell's shoeblack friend, who cheered her up when things looked bleak, and he was also the comic 'Sleepy King', later in the story. This tradition of the same actor appearing in both roles was maintained throughout later productions.

This first production of "Bluebell" was an enormous success and ran at the Vaudeville from December 1901, until June 1902 - nearly 300 performances. Not bad for a Christmas show!

There were many songs in the show, including 'Only a Penny, Sir', 'Maxims', 'Games', 'Amusements' and 'Dreamland'. But the biggest song-hits were two interpolated numbers by William H. Penn and Albert H. Fitz. One was called 'The Sunflower and the Sun'. And the other was 'The Honeysuckle and the Bee', which became one of the great hits of the period, of the decade, indeed, of the first half of the century! It is still heard occasionally today and surely everyone is familiar with the tune and at least the opening words: "You are my honey, honeysuckle, I am the bee..." It was sung in "Bluebell" by Ellaline Terris, who always had to stop the show to do an encore, or two, and she subsequently sang it in music-halls and variety theatres, and there were at least four different gramophone records made of it. It became Ellaline Terris's 'signature tune' from then onwards and it was sung and played and whistled everywhere; if there had been a Top Twenty Chart in those far-off days then 'The Honeysuckle and the Bee' would have topped it for many months.

There were also many dances in the show, including the 'Autumn Leaves Dance', the 'Dutch Sabre Dance' and the 'Yacht Dance' (!), as well as a lively 'Gavotte' and a 'Polka'.

"Bluebell" was one of the biggest hits of the London season. One critic wrote that 'Seymour Hicks played Dicky with a simple, joyous charm' And, of course, the beautiful, flaxen-haired Ellaline Terris was one of the adored 'darlings' of the West End.

Born in 1871, Ellaline Terris had, like her husband, a long and very successful stage career, as well as appearing in a few films. Her father was William Terris, a well-known actor of the time, who was murdered by a lunatic actor outside the stage-door of the Adelphi Theatre, in London, where his daughter was starring in "The Circus Girl" in December, 1897.

When she married Seymour Hicks, they became, as I've said, the most popular and happiest theatrical couple in London. And one of the most powerful too. Hicks generally wrote the musical comedies, they both starred in them, and often presented them and produced them at theatres which, as likely as not, Hicks owned or managed.

Hicks was a prolific writer of musical comedies, melodramas and straight plays, as well as "Bluebells", which, of course, he wrote with Ellaline and himself in mind. His shows included 'Talk of the Town', 'The Earl and the Girl', 'The Catch of the Season', 'The Cherry Girl', 'My Darling', 'The Gay Gordons', 'The Runaway girl' and 'The Beauty of Bath'. Titles which don't mean much today, but which were huge hits in their day, especially 'The

Catch of the Season'. Hicks had also been a leading man at London's famous Gaiety Theatre for several years.

During his remarkable career. Seymour Hicks actually built two of London's best-known theatres (both still going strong today). In 1905, he built (in association with the great America impresario Charles Frohman) the Aldwych Theatre, opening it with a revised production of his own "Bluebell in Fairyland" (called "Bluebell"); the story goes that, shortly before the theatre was completed, Hicks climbed out on to the roof and there, on the building's front, or fascia, wrote the name of his beloved wife, Ellaline, for luck. Perhaps it is still there today...

(To be concluded)

* *

AS WE GO TO PRESS

by Mary Cadogan

I am sure that many readers, after Dennis Hilliard's fervent request for help in identifying the book he has been searching for over so many years, will share my pleasure that his note in the C.D. about this has borne fruit. As well as Dennis Bird's letter in this month's FORUM, I heard from Ian Godden of Australia who was sure that the title in question was Geoffrey Trease's MYSTERY ON THE MOORS. To be absolutely sure, I wrote to Mr. Trease, and part of his reply is quoted below:

"The book Dennis Hilliard refers to is my *Mystery on the Moors* (A. & C. Black, 1937, reprinted 1941, but most unlikely ever to be reprinted again). It was inspired by my own boyhood explorations of Derbyshire, often alone. I lived in Nottingham nearby.

It is very heart-warming, in old age, to get all the letters I do from people with happy memories of reading my books thirty or forty years ago, sometimes even saying that their subsequent lives were significantly influenced. Some of my books are being reprinted - earlier this month Pan Macmillan brought out *Trumpets in the West* (originally Basil Blackwell, 1947, now thoroughly revised for the coming tercentenary of Purcell who figures in it). But I am also busy writing new ones (two due in November from Pan Macmillan and Walker Books respectively) and last week I finished another, which I am now revising, and which should bring my score, counting non-fiction and adult books, to 106."

I have long been an admirer of Geoffrey Trease's stories, and have recently acquired TRUMPETS IN THE WEST. I shall now look out for the two new books which he mentions - and I hope that at some time in the near future I will be able to read MYSTERY ON THE MOORS ...

An interesting snippet of information about another book featured in our pages has just reached me. Norman Wright and David Ashford sent a copy of their book SEXTON BLAKE to Leonard Berry, who was once a *Union Jack* sub-editor, and was the Editor of Detective Weekly in the mid 1930s.

Virtually by return they received a cable from Mr. Berry, who now lives in Toronto. He said DELIGHTED WITH BOOK. YOU HAVE DONE SEXTON BLAKE PROUD. WARMEST THANKS. Leonard Berry.

* *

CHANGING TIMES by Alan James

As a boy in the late 1940s, I was an avid reader of the Thomson Big Four, the *Skipper* having ceased to appear long before I graduated from the *Beano.* I read the *Wizard* every week, paid for by my father, who also read it, and had it delivered with the papers. I bought the *Rover* out of my pocket money and swapped the *Hotspur, Adventure*, and in fact the *Champion*, with my friends.

About 25 years ago, when my son at Christmas received his first Rupert Book, I began to collect children's annuals and comics and have now amassed some thousands of items. My children look upon my hobby as a harmless eccentricity of middle age, and, really by way of a joke, one of my daughters, at Christmas three years ago bought me "The Golden Years of Adventure Stories", a compilation of stories from the D.C. Thomson boys papers.

The book included an extract from a "Wilson" story, the text originally, I assume, from the *Wizard*, and several pages of picture strips from the *Hornet.* The "Wonder Athlete" had always been a great favourite, and reading about him again took me back 45 years or so in an instant.

Recently, after much searching, I obtained a Red Lion Library paperback, published I believe in the 1950s and called "The Truth about Wilson" by W.S.K. Webb. Only after reading it did I realise the updating which had taken place in the recent compilation. Although in the compilation much of the story was in picture strip form, the remainder (apart from omitting whole chunks of text) stuck reasonably faithfully to the original as printed in the paperback, with three very notable exceptions.

Wilson's lap times for the mile had been reduced from four at 57 seconds each, giving a time of 3 minutes 48 seconds in all to four laps at 45 seconds each, total 3 minutes dead. His high jump record of 7 feet dead had been increased to 7 feet 7 inches. Presumably, in these days of ever improving world records, the editor of the compilation considered that the original marks, despite having been set as long ago as 1938, according to "The Truth about Wilson", were not spectacular enough for today's readers.

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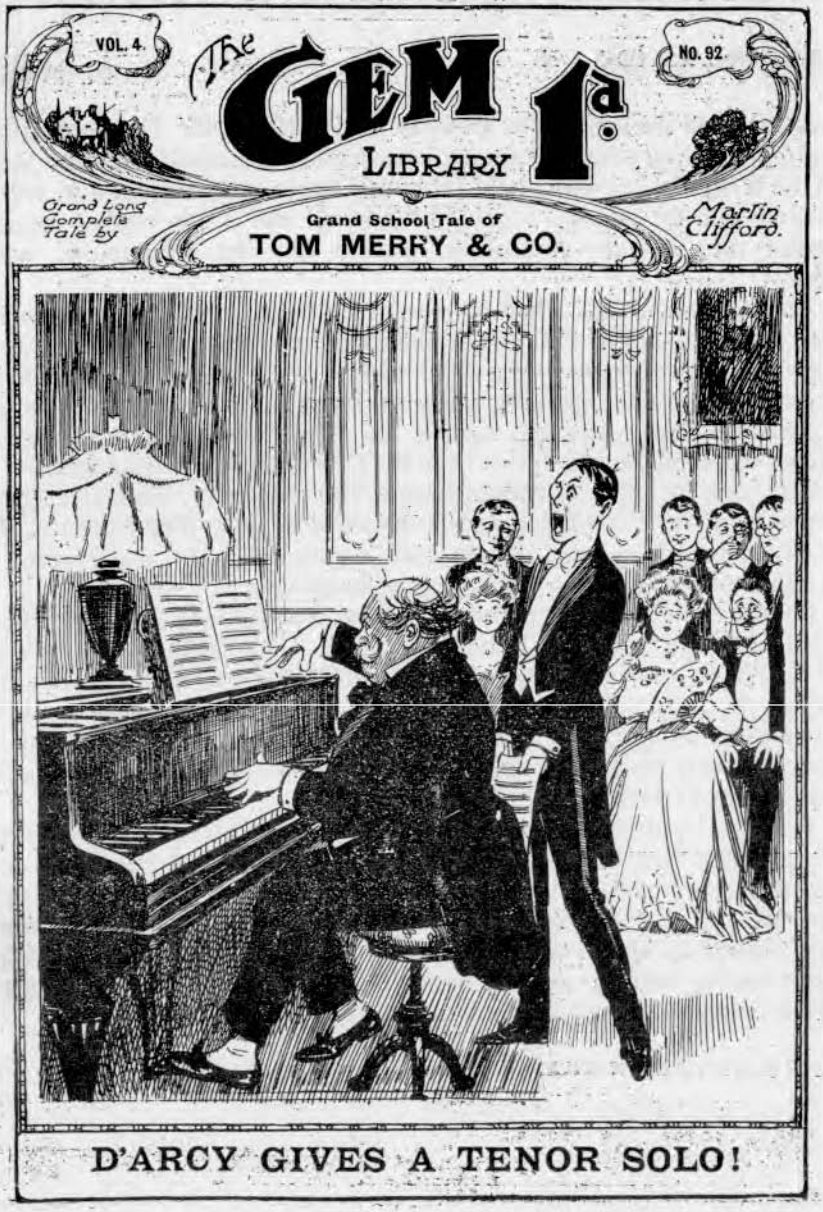

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(To be published at the end of October. Next month's C.D. will include further details.)

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