

THE
Story Paper Collector

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The "Magnet" Library

This poetical appreciation from a youthful supporter of the popular "Magnet" Library appeared in No. 249 of that paper, dated November 16th, 1912. Such enthusiasm among the readers accounts for the very long runs enjoyed by both the "Magnet" and "Gem" Libraries.

You ask me why I never find
The labour of the day tires;
Because, good friend, my youthful
mind
Is with the chums at Greyfriars.
I love St. Jim's, so full of glee,
I revel in Tom Merry;
But all the same I'd rather be
With Wharton and Bob
Cherry.

I've great regard for Johnny
Bull,
Mark Linley and Frank Nugent,
They take me back to my old
school—
Frank Richards, you're a
true gent!—
Oh, that your Greyfriars really
was!
Then Harrow School and Eton
Would bow their lordly heads,
because
By Greyfriars they'd be beaten.

Reprinted July 1945—76 copies.

For me, each single working day
Is fraught with one or two
fights;
Not physically, I may say,
Like those of the Removites,
But battles which I often fear
Are awkward to contend with;
I then recall the words of cheer
Frank Richards' stories end
with.

Dear Editor, if you but knew
The thoughts of each sup-
porter,
And how your book thrills
through and through
The globe in every quarter!
'Tis read by many a boy and man
On train-rides, trips and
tramways;
And I'll support it all I can
As sure as my name's Samways!

TWO POPULAR LIBRARIES

The "Magnet" and The "Gem" Libraries



By W. H. G.

OF all the weekly story papers for boys that were being published in Great Britain at the time of the outbreak of war in 1914—the Amalgamated Press alone had not less than ten—only two were still being issued when World War No. 2 broke upon us in 1939. (This does not take into account the "Scout" which is in a class by itself.)

These were the "Gem" and the "Magnet" Libraries, which paced along week by week with identical serial numbers from No. 1, February 15th, 1908, until the last issue of the "Gem," No. 1663, dated December 30th, 1939. The "Magnet" survived until the acute paper shortage in the spring of 1940 brought about its suspension with No. 1683, dated May 18th.

Actually, although the two papers carried the same number each week, the "Gem" was the older of the two, and enjoyed a slightly longer run. The first number of an earlier series was

dated March 16th, 1907, and for a while the paper featured adventure stories. The first one was titled "Scuttled!" But soon a series of school stories was started, dealing at first with "Clavering School." After a few weeks "St. Jim's" became the locale of the stories, the important characters being transferred to the new school. Yarns of St. Jim's (or, to use the correct name, St. James' Collegiate School) had appeared previously in "Pluck" Library, in 1906. These were by Charles Hamilton, whose writings were still appearing in Amalgamated Press boys' papers within the past two years. It has been suggested that he and Martin Clifford, under whose name the stories in the "Gem" were printed, were the same person.

From the time that the school stories started there was no looking back—the "Gem" had one in every issue for thirty-two years.

The first series sold at one

halfpenny, and proved sufficient-ly popular that after a little less than a year the price was raised to a penny—2c—and the pages increased from 16 and cover to 28 and cover. With this change

AN AWFUL CURSE

Serials by Sidney Drew, a very popular boys' writer of the time, were featured in the "Magnet" during its earlier years. The following "awful curse on Ching-Lung" is from the instalment of "Twice Around the Globe" in "Magnet" No. 261, Feb. 8, 1913:—

"May his whiskers turn blue,
 And his oiebrows red!
 May he niver sphake afther
 The moment he's dead!
 May he niver grow corrn
 On the ind of his nose,
 Or git dhrissed in the morn'n'
 Widout wearin' clothes!
 May food be his grub
 And liquors his dhrink!
 Av he dhrops overboard,
 And can't swim, may he sink!
 When he turruns up his toes,
 Lit us have the bells rung,
 And bury the blayguard
 Who's known as Ching-Lung!"

One does not need the explanation that it was only Barry O'Rooney who could thus hand-somely "curse" Prince Ching-Lung!

a new series was started, the first issue, as already stated, carrying the date of February 15th, 1908. The same week a new "companion paper" was started at a halfpenny. This was the "Magnet" Library, which from the first featured stories of "Greyfriars School," which is imagined to be in the county of Kent, near the village of Friar-dale, and not far from the sea shore. St. Jim's is placed in Sussex, near the village of Rylcombe.

The "Gem" in those days had "baby blue" cover pages and the "Magnet" covers usually referred to as red, though, compared with a crepe paper sample card, it appears to be apricot.

The title of the complete story in No. 1 of the "Magnet" was "The Making of Harry Wharton." It dealt with the sending away to school of a very spoilt, self-willed boy, an orphan, who has been raised by a doting elderly maiden aunt. The boy's uncle and guardian, Col. James Wharton, had come home from army duties to find that the boy had got entirely out of control. Thinking that to bring out the good in the lad it would be best to get him away from home surroundings, the Colonel decides to send Harry to his own old school, Greyfriars. The boy does not want to go, but is compelled to, and the first few stories deal

with the way he is "tamed down" and his true fine character is brought to light.

Harry showed himself to be a "born leader" and eventually became "head boy" of his class, the Remove, or Lower Fourth. Through the years he was a leading figure in no less than 1683 stories of Greyfriars that appeared in the "Magnet," plus other stories in the "Penny Popular," in "Chuckles," and in the "Boys' Friend Library."

His closest chums were Frank Nugent, already at Greyfriars when Harry arrived, Bob Cherry, Hurree Janset Ram Singh, from India and popularly known as "Inky," and Johnny Bull. They formed a group known as the "Famous Five."

So popular did the "Gem" and "Magnet" stories become that many of them were reprinted later in other papers, including the "Penny Popular,"—later the "Popular"—the "Dreadnought," the "Triumph," the "Schoolboys' Own Library," and also in the "Holiday Annual," which has been issued every year since 1920.

Two years passed after the starting of the "Magnet" and the time was then considered right for another "companion paper." And so was commenced the "Empire" Library. It had a pink

cover, and No. 1 was dated February 19th, 1910. Commencing with No. 106, same date, the "Magnet" was increased to 28 pages, the price being raised to one penny; it was now the same size and price as the "Gem," the new paper having 16 pages and cover for a halfpenny.

The "Empire" featured stories of Rylcombe Grammar School, supposed to be located near St. Jim's. The leading characters were Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, and Wootton Major and Minor. They also appeared at times in the "Gem" stories and less frequently in the "Magnet." The stories in the new paper were by Prosper Howard.

This new venture was not a success; soon the school stories were replaced by tales of business life. After about six months the paper was changed to "Boys' Friend" size pages, eight of them, with a program of short stories and serials. And after less than another year it was discontinued.

The "Gem" and the "Magnet," however, continued successfully, and they were both issued until as recently as 1939 and 1940, respectively. Even then it took a World War to stop them.

We have now got to the point where the two papers were well established. Little real change

was made in either through the years. About the only difference between a copy dated, say, 1912, and one issued twenty-five years later is the difference in style of type and make-up. The front page shows changes on just a

TOM MERRY & JACK BLAKE

In the stories of St. Jim's in the "Gem" Tom Merry and his friends Monty Lowther and Harry Manners usually play a leading part, with Jack Blake, George Herries, Robert Digby and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy having slightly less important roles. 'Twas not ever so, as the following quotation from the "St. Jim's Who's Who" in the 1923 "Greyfriars Holiday Annual" shows:

"BLAKE, JOHN— . . . If Jack were given his due, he would be in Tom Merry's place. Mr. Martin Clifford's first yarn opened with 'Jack Blake at St. Jim's,' and for well over a year Jack continued as the central character of St. Jim's. . . ."

No doubt the stories with Jack Blake as the leading character were those that appeared in the old "Pluck" Library in 1906, "by Charles Hamilton." Tom Merry was the central character from the first in the "Gem" stories.

few occasions. Consistently through the years the program has included one long school story, plus one or two short stories or features, or a serial—a program that appealed to a large number of boys—and girls—all over the world.

The outbreak of war in 1914 brought to the "Magnet" a war serial, "A World at Stake," by W. B. Home-Gall, starting in No. 343, September 5th. In the "Gem" at the time there was running "A Bid for a Throne," a Tale of Adventure and International Intrigue, by Clive R. Fenn. This soon became—in No. 344—a "Thrilling War Story," with war action being introduced. After about six months war serials were dropped, but the school-boys had their weekly adventures amidst war-time conditions.

A feature of some of the holiday double numbers in 1914-15 were supplements in the form of a copy of the "Greyfriars Herald" or "Tom Merry's Weekly," the little journals supposed to have been published by the boys of Greyfriars and St. Jim's respectively. The "Greyfriars Herald" has appeared in different forms several times through the years. It was issued as a separate paper late in 1915, but only ran about four months; the paper shortage caused its suspension. It was revived in 1919, ran for a year or

two, and was then changed to "Boys' Herald," the "Greyfriars Herald" being included in the "Magnet" as a weekly supplement. As such it has since run through three "series" at different times.

No. 396 of the "Magnet," September 11th, 1915, was the last issue with the "red" cover. The "Gem" dropped its blue cover after No. 436, June 17, 1916. For more than twenty years both papers appeared with cover pages of white paper.

Somewhen before the outbreak of the war the two papers, together with another companion paper started in 1912, "Penny Popular," had been placed under the editorial control of Mr. H. A. Hinton, who was mentioned in our first issue in connection with the "Boys' Friend." He continued in control, except for the period he was in the army, until 1921. Only during the years covered by his occupation of the editorial chair were readers permitted to learn the name of the Editor through the columns of the papers.

The growing paper shortage caused a reduction in pages to 20 and cover in 1916, and to 16 including cover early in the next year, while in 1918 the price was raised to three-halfpence (3c.). After the war ended the pages

were increased to 20; in 1922 there was another increase to 28, this time the price being raised to twopence, with the front page printed in two colors instead of one.

For many years after this there is little to record. Both papers missed one week's issue during the general strike in 1926. The 1000th numbers of both were published April 2nd, 1927.

Starting with "Gem" No. 1221, July 11th, 1931, the stories from the earliest "Gems" were reprinted, with Tom Merry arriving at Clavering as a new boy, and then going to St. Jim's.

From 1936 to 1938 the Greyfriars tales from the earliest "Magnets" were reprinted in the "Gem."

Late in 1937 changes were made in the appearance of both papers. The "Magnet" adopted a cover of colored paper with No. 1553, November 20th; this a sort of peach shade, printed in blue. The change in the "Gem" was more drastic. The pages were smaller, and increased to 36, the cover becoming buff, printed in blue. This change took effect with No. 1557, December 18th.

Commencing with No. 1625, April 8th, 1939, the stories in the "Gem" are again original, being described as "new."

The outbreak of war in Sep-

tember, 1939, was followed in a few weeks with warnings in both the papers to "order your copy in advance to avoid disappointment," and soon the adventures of Tom Merry & Co. and Harry Wharton & Co. were again amidst war conditions.

War proved to be disastrous to boys' papers, as to many others, and No. 1663 of the "Gem," dated December 30th, 1939, carried the announcement that commencing the next week the paper would be combined with the "Triumph." In this

paper there appeared from then on abbreviated reprints of early "Gem" stories. The "Triumph" was itself suspended the following May.

The "Magnet" carried on by itself, the other weekly companion paper of recent years, "Modern Boy," having suspended publication with the issue dated October 14th, 1939.

The issue of the "Magnet" No. 1683, May 18th, 1940, had editorial comment to the effect that, although the paper now had fewer pages it would still

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continue to appear regularly; the fact was mentioned that during the last war the paper was even smaller, but lost none of its popularity, and predicted that it wouldn't do so this time.

But, sad to say, it didn't have the chance to prove it. That number was the last one issued, due to the sudden shortage of paper, even though the next week's story, "The Battle of the Beaks," was announced—"Beaks" meaning, of course, Schoolmasters.



That about brings the history of these two old favorites down to date. Lots could be written about the various characters in the stories, about the artists and authors, about the different supplementary features that have come and gone. Perhaps these

subjects will be dealt with in a future number.



The "Gem" and the "Magnet" and their several "companion papers" make an interesting field for the collector, though the most likely place for coming in contact with them—Great Britain—is now about closed to us on this side of the Atlantic. Collectors over there have other things to occupy their time.

Those of us who have a soft spot in our hearts for these papers have an additional reason to look forward to the time when peace returns once more—the hope that both will be revived to amuse and interest the young people and bring back pleasant memories to those of us who are not so young any longer.

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DEATH OF BARRY ONO

"PENNY DREADFUL" COLLECTION IS PRESENTED TO BRITISH MUSEUM

News came from London recently of the death of Barry Ono, Music Hall artist, in everyday life Ex-Councillor Fred Harrison of Camberwell, London, at one time proprietor of six book shops in London.

Mr. Ono left his vast collection of "Penny Dreadfuls" of the nineteenth century to the British Museum.

As a boy at the age of 12, he used to bind his "Boys' Standards" and "Sweeny Todds" in brown paper covered volumes of twelve numbers, and rent them out at a penny a week. Then he sold that early collection for four pounds (\$20.00), and did not become active again until about 1912.

The rooms of Mr. Ono's house in Clapham were stacked with luridly illustrated tales of pirates, highwaymen and Red Indians.

When the blitz began last year he shipped his collection to the country.

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PERIODICALS OF 1900-12

By ARTHUR L. BUDGE

(Reprinted from "Vanity Fair," No. 18, January, 1926)

A LITERARY feast and a great period of boys' publications. . . . What fine penny and halfpenny papers they were, too; 16 to 32 pages in each, good paper, clear large type, all for the benefit of the boys of 20 years ago. (Note: this article was written in 1925.)

These great journals, in their way, were equal if not superior to the old time "Boy's Standard" and others of fifty years back. Clean, healthy and thrilling serials and complete stories, with characters and interest alive from start to finish; pithy short complete articles on all sports, hobbies and pastimes; how to do this and that, how to become proficient and expert in the many occupations of life. . . .

"Big Budget," "Boys' Leader," "Boys' Herald," "Boys' Friend" and "Boys' Realm"; "Empire," "Marvel," "Pluck," and "Union Jack" Libraries; "Boys of the Empire," "Surprise," "Nuggets," and many others. (Including "Gem" and "Magnet."—W.H.G.)

Who can deny the superb writing qualities of authors like

David Goodwin, Sydney Drew, Hamilton Edwards, Henry Farmer, Henry St. John, Maxwell Scott, T. C. Bridges, John Tregellis, and others?

Also the artists who introduced their readers to such famous funniosities as Airy Alf, Happy Ike, Gloomy Gus, Cokee Bill, and last, but not least, our immortal friends Weary Willie and Tired Tim of "Chips."

Look at some of the great serials . . . Rajah Dick, Val the Boy Acrobat, Trapper Dan, . . . Wings of Gold, An Eye for an Eye, The Missing Heir, The Silver Dwarf, Guy Prescott's Trust, Gilbert Nameless, and the fine Boys of St. Basil's series by Henry St. John. Also we must not pass over S. Clarke Hook's famous trio Jack, Sam and Pete—not omitting Algy and the dog Rory.

The Aldine "Dick Turpin Library"—Nos. 1 to 182—were a glorious set . . . The escapes and adventures of Dick, Blue-skin, Tom King & Co., against the Bow Street Runners, were thrilling, with Beetles and Peters supplying the humorous items.

: : NOTES : :

The article on page 18, "Periodicals of 1900-12," taken from "Vanity Fair," deals, as may be gathered, with boys' papers published in England during that period. "Vanity Fair" was a little amateur magazine published by Joseph Parks, of Saltburn-by-the-Sea, Yorkshire, England, from about 1917 until 1927. In 1928 it was replaced by "Collector's Miscellany." Both magazines dealt very largely with various phases of collecting.



I must say "Thanks!" for the letters of appreciation that have come from some who received a copy of No. 1 of "S.P.C." It's good to know one's efforts, even though modest, are appreciated.

To the one or two who inquired: There are no subscription rates. Producing the little

magazine is a "labor of love," and grows out of my interest in the old British weeklies, and also partly from the hope that through it I may be able to contact other collectors who have copies to spare that I need. So no subscriptions are invited or expected.

Besides, if there were subs., there would have to be a regular publishing schedule, and that would make it a less pleasant task.



It's amazing! I mean the way the British publishers are able to produce some boys' papers still, in spite of being right in the front line. Shortage of paper and rising costs make an advance in price almost certain. Nearly all other weekly story papers are now dearer.—W.H.G.

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