

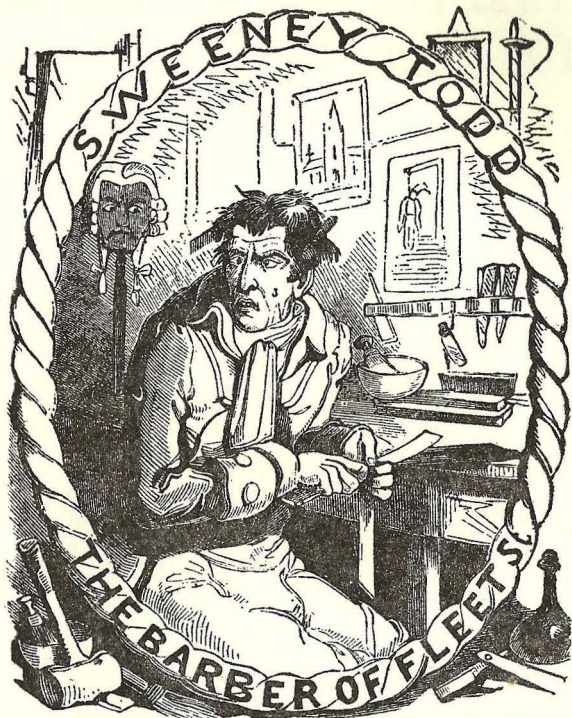
THE STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

JANUARY 1956

No. 57 :: Vol. 3



7th Christmas Issue, *The Magnet*, No. 357, December 12th, 1914



[FROM A RARE OLD PAINTING BY READING, IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM.]

Illustration from "The String of Pearls"

The Story Paper Collector

No. 57—Vol. 3

Priceless

WAS THERE A SWEENEY TODD?

By CHARLES W. DANIEL

THE TRADITION of Sweeney Todd is generally believed to have originated with the publication of Lloyd's penny dreadful "The String of Pearls" in 1850.

As commonly told, Thomas Prest, the author, obtained his inspiration from a story which appeared in a London magazine *The Tell-Tale*, in 1825, under the title of "A Terrific Story of the Rue de la Harpe, Paris." This story, in turn, was taken from an account of a series of murders by a barber in Paris in 1800, given with lurid details in Fouche's "Archives of the Police." Prest is also credited with the invention of Sweeney Todd.

As a matter of fact, if we accept the statement that this character was an invention, the credit must go to George Macfarren, who wrote the first

chapters but was unable to carry on owing to failing eyesight. Prest then took over and finished the story. There also appears to be some doubt of the date when the account appeared in *The Tell-Tale*; I believe it was 1804.

Thus, from the above particulars it would seem that the tradition really owes its origin to the story related by Fouche. I have not seen a copy of his book, but one must admit that its title gives the impression that it is authoritative, and I would hesitate to doubt this particular account, but for the fact that at least one book published as by Fouche has been proved to have been written by another person. This, coupled with an anecdote I discovered in an early number of a once popular Victorian journal, *The Leisure Hour*, seems to give one

the right to question its reliability. The anecdote is as follows:

In a small provincial town, many miles from Paris, a man left his home stating that he would be back by sundown. He was accompanied by his dog, and carried a fair sum of money. He failed to return, and a search was instituted without satisfactory result. On the following day his dog was found in the vicinity of a barber's shop, and though the barber tried to drive it away, it refused to go. It was caught and taken home, but broke away and returned to the shop. Suspicion was aroused, the shop was searched and the body of the missing man was found buried beneath the cellar. Upon being arrested the barber confessed he had murdered the man for his money. The writer went on to say that this story reached Paris at a later date, where it was altered, and printed as having happened in that city.

From the concluding words, I am led to wonder if this is not the source of the story in the "Archives."

SOME YEARS AGO I corresponded with a fellow collector who spent much of his spare time in literary research. In response to an enquiry, he sent me a foolscap sheet torn from a manuscript book. One side of

the paper had a number of notes relative to the matter I had in hand, and it was for this reason he had forwarded it. The other side contained items of information concerning various stories. I quote one:

Sweeney Todd. From an account published about the middle of the 18th century: While an empty shop in Fleet Street was undergoing repairs the workmen discovered several bodies buried beneath the cellar flooring. The man who had occupied the premises had recently died. He was a barber named Todd.

At the time I had no interest in this character, and now it is too late. Of course I am quite willing to admit that such evidence as this would carry little weight in a court of law, but it does seem to fit in with an observation made by Summers in his "A Gothic Bibliography" which reads:

There is a tradition that there was a Sweeney Todd in Fleet Street, and there is a substratum of truth.

Is it unreasonable to suppose that the *substratum of truth* is embodied in the above note? It would also explain why there are no official records of Todd, for you cannot put a dead man on trial for murder.

This is the earliest reference to the Demon Barber that I have

THE INN OF A 1,000 SECRETS Starts To-day!

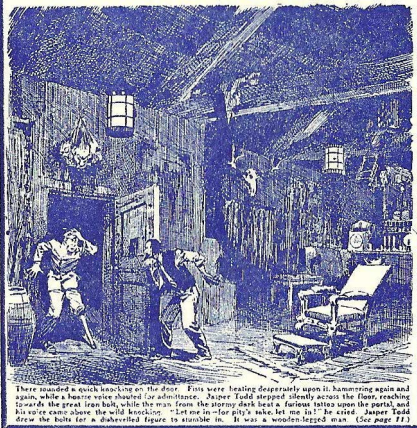


No. 92, Vol. 4

Week Ending October 22nd, 1932

TWOPENCE

THE INN OF A 1,000 SECRETS!



There sounded a quick knocking on the door. Fists were beating desperately upon it, hammering again and again, while a hoarse voice shouted for admittance. Jasper Todd stopped suddenly across the floor, reaching towards the great iron ball, while the man from the stony desk beat a furious tattoo upon the portal, and his voice came above the wild knocking. "Let me in—'for pity's sake, let me in!" he cried. Jasper Todd drew the bolts for a dithered figure to stumble in. It was a wooden-legged man. (See page 71)

No. 92 of *The Bullseye*, October 22nd, 1932

See overleaf.]

[Facing page 90

A Latter-Day Todd With A Revolving Chair

THAT WAS JASPER TODD, mine ungenial host of The Red Fox Inn, whose exploits were related in a series of stories that commenced in *The Bullseye* No. 92. For a more squeamish generation of readers "veal" pies were too strong meat, so Jasper's victims—we learned in the final story—were not murdered. They were dumped into the cellar by the chair, robbed of their possessions, and then imprisoned in an underground cavern. There they were forced to weave the beautiful rugs hung on the Inn walls. No stories in *The Bullseye* carried "by-lines." Does anyone know who the authors were?

been able to trace, and if true, it seems the most probable source of the tradition.

As regards the French stories, there may have been one, or even two, barbers in that country ready to augment their income by murder, but it would be somewhat of a coincidence to find another of the same type in England.

Alternatively, the account may have been taken from England in the first place, and after gathering gruesome additions on its travels, eventually found its way back from France via *The Tell-Tale*.

The story of the owner of a pie-shop being in collusion with the barber, and the suggestion that the meat from which the pies were made came from a source best left to the imagination, is typically French, and I should say belongs more to fiction than to fact, although it is given in the "Archives" as the latter.

I have in mind a way in which the truth of the tradition might gain some support. I say might, for it is by no means certain. It is not unlikely that there are, in the British Museum or City of London Guild Hall libraries, copies of old directories. That such had been published at an early period I have ample proof, for I possess a copy of the first

"London Directory," which appeared in 1677. It would certainly repay the trouble of a search if some such entry as this met the eye: *Sweeney Todd, Barber. To be found two doors from a Goldsmith's in Fleet Street.*

SINCE WRITING the above I have received a letter from the Superintendent of the British Museum. As will be seen there is a statement beneath the picture of Sweeney Todd that it is from a painting in the Museum. I wrote in reference to this, and received the following courteous reply:

In reply to your letter I regret that the British Museum does not possess a painting of Sweeney Todd nor, despite an exhaustive search, have we been able to trace any engraved portraits of this character in any dictionary of Engravers or works relating to him. The following paragraph which appears in Notes and Queries 9th series, volume 7, page 508 may be of interest to you:

"No record of such personage or crime exists in criminal annals. A drama called 'The String of Pearls; or, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street,' was popular at the East-End theatres, and was played so recently as 1878 at the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton. A belief that its story was true, and that the criminal was executed at Tyburn, long prevailed, but it is apparently unfounded. The crime

has some analogy with that of Sawney Bean in Scotland, which took place more than three hundred years ago. A similar history is related by M. Lurine in 'Les Rues de Paris' as having occurred in the Rue des Marmouzets. M. Lurine adds: 'Le temps n'effaca pas le souvenir du patissier homicide qui sert encore d'epouvantail aux petits enfants de la Rue des Marmouzets.'

Unfortunately this communication does not clear up the mystery, but rather adds to it where the picture is concerned. It is difficult to judge, from the few facts I have been able to collect, if there is a case for the

existence of a Sweeney Todd, but there does seem to be something in favour of it.

Walking down Fleet Street not so many years ago, I was amused to see a large signboard placed on the front of a building. It read:

SWEENEY TODD. BARBER.

I am now waiting to hear of a Mrs. Lovett's pie shop in Bell Yard, but I am afraid it is unlikely, for if I remember correctly this place is now given over to the legal profession, and in any case it is ominously close to the Royal Courts of Justice.

The Nick Carter Weekly Became The New Story Paper

FROM SEVERAL short items sent us by Bill Lofts, for use in S. P. C. No. 56 we had to choose the one which is not entirely accurate, and it was printed shortly before the additional information arrived. Instead of *The Nick Carter Weekly* ceasing publication at No. 7, as assumed in the paragraph on page 86, it was continued as *The New Story Paper*. The change was made without any notice being given. Details regarding it under the new name: No. 8, January

10th, 1912, to No. 22, April 17th, 1912, after which publication was discontinued. There was no announcement of suspension, but some sort of clue is given in a serial story, "Jessop Junior," by T. C. Bridges, the reader being told to read the continuation of this fine story in the next issue of *Boy's Best Story Paper*. Mr. Lofts has received from George Newnes Ltd. confirmation that they were the publishers of *The Nick Carter Weekly*.

DOCTOR GORDON STABLES, C.M., M.D., R.N.

By ANTHONY P. BAKER

IF YOU WANT the perfect example of a typical patriotic Victorian Britisher, you will find him incarnate in Doctor William Gordon Stables, one of the most picturesque, fascinating, and neglected men ever associated with boys' papers. He was a Scotsman, and proud of it; photos show him as a magnificent figure in full Highland costume, with a flowing moustache that seemed to flow to even greater lengths as the years progressed. Born in the 1840's, he went to Aberdeen University and studied medicine.

With a deep love for "the brine and the breeze" that he was so fond of writing about, he went on a voyage to the Arctic. There his ship was frozen up and, back in Scotland, believed lost. When he eventually returned, he was met by his father and sister, both dressed in deep mourning. "Which of the family," he asked, "is dead?" "You are," was the reply. Nothing daunted, the good Doctor sallied forth again on a second voyage to the Arctic in a whaler. Later, he was a doctor in the

Royal Navy for nine years, while his vessel was slaver-hunting off West Africa, providing him with plenty of adventure.

Invalided home, he struck up with the recently-launched *Boy's Own Paper* a connection which was not severed until his death thirty years later. For the first of his nineteen serials, "The Cruise of the *Snowbird*," he chose an Arctic setting. Later tales dealt with every aspect of adventure, though his favourite background was always that of naval life. One can always tell a Stables story by the title: "Just Like Jack; A Story of the Brine and the Breeze" is a typical one.

And what grand stories they were! Admittedly, the Doctor's hearty Victorianism is an acquired taste; one gets the impression that all his heroes gained their prowess from having cold baths and oatmeal porridge every morning; one has to accept sentences like *Jack stirred the fire with a right merry will*; and one has to be prepared for a chapter to begin with *Why should I, Murdoch M'Crimman of Coila be condemned to the drudgery of the*

desk's dull wood? But once past those, Dr. Stables certainly knew how to write. The obvious answer to the charge that *The Boy's Own Paper* was priggish is to read Stables. No blood and thunder, but plenty of thrill and adventure, all through those nineteen long serials, whether you are reading "The Cruise of the *Snowbird*" in Volume 3 or "From Fisher Lad to Fleet Surgeon" in Volume 31.

IF WE READ only Stables' fictional output, we are missing half of his work, for between 1880 and 1910 he had an absolutely colossal output in articles for B.O.P. His knowledge about different pets and hobbies was enormous. Dogs, cats, canaries, parrots, poultry, pheasants, bees, goats, rabbits, and, most important, The Boy Himself, all came under the Doctor's eagle eye. He tackled everything in the same vein of horribly hearty and healthy enthusiasm. As early as Volume 3 of B.O.P., in "The Boy's Own Museum," he was writing:

I have stuffed birds and beasts in almost every country of the world, and I can recommend the art as one of the most charming and pleasurable that a boy can learn.

This, despite the information that the brains can be carefully

scooped out, and, for removing the eye,

. . . place the point of the knife well under, and use the thumb to assist, but do not let the knife cut the eye through. It should now be scooped and pulled out . . .

His "Doings for the Month" commenced in Volume 4, and appeared practically every month until January, 1910. These articles contained regular information on everything from egg-bound chickens to bug-infested roses. Did you know, for instance, that *A senna leaf or two in water* helps members of your aviary in the moulting season? On the other hand, poultry in the same state should have *a little beer mixed with the food*.

Amusing though some of it may seem, Stables really did know what he was talking about, and his articles must have gained for him a tremendous following. He was not above showing that he had some classical knowledge, either. One celebrated "Doings for the Month" began:

"Eheu! fugaces labuntur anni." That is a morsel of Latin, my lads.

Most important to the Doctor was "The Boy Himself." He treated *The Cold Tub* and *Oatmeal Porridge* as being the only means of saving England from the pit into which she had

apparently fallen. For example, in an article, "Straight Legs and Shapely Feet," Stables asks:

Can a boy do anything towards straightening his own legs? It really does seem a pity, he continues in feeling tone, that any lad should grow up with bent legs.

The cure, as always,

A minimum allowance of sleep on a hard mattress and a cold bath every morning.

The Doctor laid it on really hot and strong:

Thousands, ay, tens of thousands of boys, he roared in 1894, ruin themselves by evil practices and want of obedience to the laws of health. This is not going to be a health sermon . . .

However, he goes on to give his Ten Points, which are worth quoting:

1. *Touch neither alcohol nor tobacco till thirty years of age . . .*
4. *Not to wear night-caps, and not to drink them.*
5. *To look upon sunlight and fresh air as life itself, and to carry open ports in all weather, night and day . . .*
7. *If cycling, record-breaking to be abjured. Record-breaking and heart-breaking are synonymous terms . . .*
9. *The morning tub all the year round.*
10. *A pure mind in a pure body.*

Despite all his Victorianism, one feels that Doctor Stables

really had something for his readers. But perhaps he rather overdid it in one case. After curtly telling one reader that *Smoking under 21 is murder for the heart*, his reply to his next correspondent was:

You poor little white-faced thing. What a useless, nerveless nincompoop you will be when a man. "Man!" did I say? I pity this land of ours if our army were composed of such men as you will make.

At least Stables had the courtesy to tell the remedy to Frank, who said he cannot reform, though it was a somewhat familiar recipe:

Give the cold morning tub a trial, and the dumbell exercise regularly, twice a day at least; if possible have good oatmeal porridge for breakfast and supper.

TEN, twenty, thirty years rolled by. The Doctor, who always tried to practice what he preached, lived a comparatively spartan life in summer, touring the country in a massive caravan called *The Wanderer*. But at length he died, on May 10th, 1910, deeply mourned by all B.O.P. readers, who paid homage to him, not only for his fine serials and articles on pets, but also for the advice on "The Boy Himself."

I venture to say, wrote one reader, there is no one who has

read the *Doctor* at all, but has been encouraged and helped in the battle of life.

Maybe this twentieth century would be better if it had a few forthright men like *Doctor Gordon Stables* around.

DOCTOR STABLES wrote almost entirely for *The Boy's Own Paper*, although he had at least one serial and one short story in *The Captain*. This is a list, with the volume numbers, of his *Boy's Own Paper* serials:

- 3—*The Cruise of the Snowbird.*
- 4—*Wild Adventures Round the Pole; or, The Cruise of the Arrandon.*
- 5—*Stanley O'Grahame: Boy and Man.*
- 7—*On Special Service: A Naval Story.*
- 10—*For England, Home and Beauty: A Tale of the Navy Ninety Years Ago.*
- 12—*Our Home in the Silver West.*
- 14—*Just Like Jack: A Story of the Brine and the Breeze.*
- 17—*In the Land of the Lion and Ostrich: A Tale of Struggle and Adventure.*
- 18—*The Cruise of the Good Ship Boreas: A Story of the Brine and the Breeze.*
- 19—*Frank Hardinge; or, From Torrid Zones to Regions of Perpetual Snow.*
- 21—*Allan Adair; or, Here and There in Many Lands.*
- 23—*The Cruise of the Arctic Fox in Icy Seas Around the Pole.*
- 24—*The Shell-Hunters—Their Wild Adventures by Sea and Land.*
- 25—*Chris Cunningham: A Story of the Stirring Days of Nelson.*
- 27—*The Butterfly Hunters: A Story of Adventure and Peril.*
- 28—*The Voyage of the Blue Vega: A Story of Arctic Adventure.*
- 29—*From the Slums to the Quarterdeck: The Story of a Lad of Grit.*
- 30—*The Ivory Hunters: A Story of Wild Adventure by Land and Sea.*
- 31—*From Fisher Lad to Fleet Surgeon: A Story of Struggle and Adventure.*



PHANTOMS WE HAVE LOVED

By BERNARD THORNE

THE HOWLING of the gale outside the ancient stone walls; the flickering candlelight that threw grotesque and menacing shadows on the oak panelling; the dull tolling of the clock in the tower heralding the birth of Christmas Day; and, as the last stroke vibrated on the frosty air, the vague intangible shape that glided silently along the moonlit corridors! How well we recall the scenes that described the Christmas adventures of our favourite schoolboy characters in the Amalgamated Press papers!

Rarely did our authors disappoint us. *The Gem* and *The Magnet*, *The Nelson Lee* and *The Boys' Friend* literally bristled with phantoms: Roundhead and Cavalier, pirate and smuggler, Scottish laird and mail-clad knight—they all appeared with unfailing regularity each year in castle and cavern, mansion and mill. And always the weather was kind and seasonable, and there was snow and ice in plenty!

Our first introduction to the A.P. Christmas fare was in 1923. We were confined to bed with a severe attack of bronchial asthma, when a doting aunt

deposited grapes and No. 828 of *The Magnet* at our bedside. We read *The Magnet* with relish and awaited the arrival of Nos. 829 and 830 with ill-concealed impatience.

It is strange how the little things of life remain with us in retrospect through the years. Whilst we were ensconced in our bedroom before a blazing fire, following Harry Wharton & Co.'s tussle with the Wraith of Lochmuir, a party was in progress downstairs, and the haunting melody of Irving Berlin's "Wonderful One" came to us above the laughter and conversation. And although to this day we have not been fortunate enough to acquire copies of those three *Magnets*, the refrain of "Wonderful One" continues to evoke with startling clarity the details of that thrilling Christmas tale.

The cheery chums of Greyfriars were not alone in their ghost-hunting adventures. Tom Merry & Co. also experienced hair-raising moments. Christmas of 1926 found them at Drere Manor laying the spirit of an eighteenth century buccaneer who bore a strong resemblance

to Sir James Barrie's Cap'n Hook. The following year while enjoying the Yuletide festivities at Gussy's home, Eastwood House, they had the startling experience of meeting the White Cavalier, Sir Fulke D'Arcy.

In 1928 Eastwood House produced another phantom, Sir Ralph D'Arcy, who was also a cavalier. We presume that these two noble ancestors of Gussy must have been on speaking terms during their lifetime; we wonder did they, while haunting the many rooms and corridors of Eastwood House, ever meet! —and, *en passant*, exchange the time of day (or night)! Sir Ralph, the legend stated, would be responsible for the deaths of the thirteenth generation of the D'Arcys. Arthur Augustus was one of that generation, and a thrilling time was spent by the youthful houseparty before

Gussy's *bete noir* was finally vanquished.

At the same time, in a castle at Market Donning in Sussex, a party of St. Frank's juniors, invited to spend the holiday there by the castle's new owner, Reggie Pitt, were faced with the mystery of the furniture that

moved without human agency, of falling pictures, and apparitions that took the form of ogres, witches, and fairies.

A year later Nipper, Handforth and company spent Christmas at Handy's ancestral home, Travis Dene, where they were greeted by the customary Yuletide mysteries. Junior after junior disappeared from the library without trace; an underground vault was discovered complete with mouldering skeleton; and only the masterly deductions of that great (?) detective, Nelson Lee, prevented the kidnapping of Molly Dare, niece of Eileen Dare, celebrated girl detective.

DESPITE THESE many reverses the spirit kingdom was not deterred. At Mauleverer Towers Harry Wharton and Co., at the invitation of Mauly, had the dubious pleasure of meeting the shade of an earlier member of his noble family, none other than Sir (you've guessed it!) Fulke Mauleverer. Sir Fulke almost succeeded in frightening Mauly to death before Jack Drake, the detective, revealed the phantom to be Mauly's rascally cousin, Brian.

Eastwood House, in the meantime, was producing phantoms with the speed and efficiency of an American motor car factory. A new spectral presence came



off the assembly line—this time my Lord Eastwood who, it appeared, had been found centuries before, in the Painted Room, dead from a sword thrust. The dastardly rogue responsible for the D'Arcy spectre proved to be Pilkington, the butler. (Charles Hamilton's rascally butlers were as numerous as Gussy's ghosts!) Thanks to Kerr, the Scottish boy, Pilkington went where all wicked butlers go.

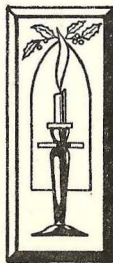
Back to St. Frank's and the famous barring-out in the Modern House. Christmas found the junior school holding out against the ex-army school governor, General Carfax. Undeterred by having to spend the holiday under siege, Nipper & Co. prepared to make the best of their position. Then mysterious music was heard in the rooms and dormitories—the weird strains of a clavichord, followed by the mournful tolling of a bell and a voice that came out of the empty air. Only the calm leadership of Nipper, Handy, Reggie Pitt, and Buster Boots prevented the wholesale capitulation of the rebels.

The mystery was finally solved when the figure of a monk was seen and tackled by the boys. Their captive proved to be a young wireless engineer in the General's employ who, with the

aid of microphones and a transmitting set, had produced the various eerie sound effects that had so nearly brought about the end of the barring-out.

ONE OF THE best of the Christmas tales written by Edwy Searles Brooks appeared in 1926. Edward Oswald Handforth with a crowd of juniors and Moor View girls was invited to spend the holiday at his uncle's home, Handforth Towers. But his uncle and his brother had conspired to pull off the hoax of the year. Willy Handforth led the party to the old Handforth Towers, a ruined and derelict mediaeval pile some half mile from its modern namesake. There, mysterious voices were heard; the girls disappeared (they were taken by coach to their proper destination unbeknown to the boys); spectral ladies and other special effects were laid on by the plotters, and even Nipper was hoodwinked before the truth was revealed.

But some strange happenings remained unexplained, and in the following issue of *The Nelson Lee Library* an expedition by the boys to the



derelict ruins revealed an old crypt with another of those mouldering skeletons so beloved by schoolboys. Hidden treasure and yet another phantom were encountered. But the story ended happily with the unmasking of the ghost who hoped to decamp with the treasure. It proved to be, amazingly enough, none other than Rodd, the trusted butler. *Et tu, Mr. Brooks!*

TO WIND UP we return to Eastwood House and the inimitable Gussy. It is Christmas, 1933, and night time. Tom Merry & Co. have turned in hours before, but Tom is awakened by a slight sound, and sees

dimly a figure at his bedside—a figure draped in white! The Presence speaks:

“Beware!”

It is a deep, thrilling voice. The phantom speaks again:

“Take warnin’ from me, weckless youth—leave the woof of this house at your pevil!”

And so we leave the ghosts of Greyfriars, the phantoms of St. Frank’s, and the wraiths of Rookwood and St. Jim’s, and return, rather regretfully, to this age of thermosonic and atomic marvels where no self-respecting spectre, be he cavalier or caitiff, dare move a manacled limb!

The Unclear Made Clear

IN THE PIECE about *The Bull’s-Eye* in S.P.C. No. 56 there is, on page 81, a sentence that does not give a clear meaning. It is in the second column and begins: *Not having read the story, I can’t report on it, but on the first page there are seven human bodies, This can be read to suggest that there is a picture*

depicting such gory details. This is not the case. The mutilated bodies are found in the story, but are not pictured.

WORD IS SENT by Charles W. Daniel that the serial in *The Bull’s-Eye*, “The Boys of Fengate School,” was written by E. Harcourt Burrage.

100pp. plus of Volume Three!!

THE STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

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