

THE STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

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WHEN PLUCK PREDOMINATED!

IT IS FAIRLY SAFE TO assume that no readers of *The Story Paper Collector* are drawing a *Pluck* pension. Indeed, most of them are unlikely to have ever heard of such pensions, but the fact remains that on March 26th, 1897, the halfpenny *Pluck* announced that pensions and 250 other prizes would be offered in the issue of April 10th.

No details of the value of the pensions involved are given in the *Pluck* I possess, but there are several announcements of "big money prizes" given away by the paper's companion journal, *Comic Home*, another halfpenny weekly.

£1 a week for six months was to be won, with 63 other prizes, and £1 a week was a handy sum in Victorian times.

No less a person than the Reverend Henry Acock, of 27 Windsor Road, Ealing, proclaimed on *Pluck's* yellow front cover that "*Pluck* is a splendid paper that kills the 'penny dreadful.'"

The picture below that statement gives some cause for doubts about the matter, however. It is a drawing of fierce-looking Turkish soldiers applying a torch to a body stiffly hanging from a balcony. In red ink below are the words, "How the Turks torture their prisoners of war."

It is an illustration to a story, *For Liberty*, by Captain Maurice Clarke, a yarn that reads today as pure unadulterated jingoism.

Pluck must surely have had the longest sub-title of any boys' paper ever printed. It reads: *A High Class Weekly Library of Adventure at Home and Abroad, on Land and Sea, being the Daring Deeds of Plucky Sailors, Plucky Soldiers, Plucky Firemen, Plucky Explorers, Plucky Detectives, Plucky Railwaymen, and all Sorts and Conditions of British Heroes.*

It could be that the Editor had some doubts about how his readers would accept Captain Clarke's contribution, because on almost every page he

promised "a detective story next week."

It was, he declared, "in response to an almost universal appeal from readers" and would feature "the world-famous detective, Nelson Lee . . ." Perhaps if I had a copy of the issue with that story in it my opinion of *Pluck* fiction would be far more favourable.

—O. W. WADHAM

Bring Them Back!

I THINK we are all going to miss Sexton Blake more than will be immediately evident. In fact, I would not be surprised if a movement begins in a year or two to have the great detective and his cohorts brought back. If this is not possible in a two-a-month magazine, how about monthly, or even quarterly? Perhaps the latter might be preferable. I visualize a larger format with three or four stories, nice illustrations, and of course an enlarged readers/collectors/club department. I would even settle for an Annual! I cannot help thinking of the adverse effect the closing of *Sexton Blake Library* must have had on the many writers . . . Ah, me! The sweeping change of the times! Turn back the clock!

—ALVIN FICK

London O. B. B. C.

Hamiltonian Library

¶ There are still a few copies of the printed and illustrated Catalogue of the Hamiltonian Library available free to enquirers who enclose two 3d. stamps for postage.

¶ A further increase in stocks makes it possible to accept one or two additional postal members. Full details of our postal service is to be found in the Introduction to the Catalogue.

¶ The following books are urgently needed to complete series for the Library: *Magnet* Nos. 751, 984, 1032; *Gem* No. 755; *Schoolboys' Own Library* No. 169.

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THE LOWER BRANCHES

By TOM HOPPERTON

THERE WERE NOT many weeklies which claimed to be "The All-School Story Paper," and as Sidney Drew's Calcroft stories boosted *The Marvel* into this rivalry with the Companion Papers their author is worth more than a passing glance.

Drew was both versatile and prolific, so much so that C. M. Down's remarks about him in S. P. C. Number 77 left me considerably puzzled. He said: "He was a bachelor . . . and his wants were few. He liked to work only when it was necessary to earn some money. Having delivered the MS. of a commissioned serial and received the money for it he would disappear for about three months."

A serial would net about £50 and if Drew was content with the income from four a year his wants must have been simple indeed. The explanation may be that even if Drew disappeared from Mr. Down's ken it did not mean that he had no other irons in the fire. At one time and

another he worked for all the Amalgamated Press boys' papers besides some of their comics, and he was not exclusively an A.P. writer. I feel positive that a check list of his tales would show that his output was much above the 6,000 words a week that Mr. Down suggests.

He was certainly capable of it. During Calcroft's *Marvel* run he was turning in about 28,000 words a week for that, regardless of other commitments, which is not bad going for hand-written copy. Maurice Kutner gave a long and entertaining account of the Calcroft *Marvels* in S. P. C. Number 75, but Calcroft was not like St. Jim's, Greyfriars, and St. Frank's, a special creation for a new series. The school had made intermittent appearances for nearly twenty years.

One of its claims to fame was that no less a personage than Charles Spencer Chaplin was an *alumnus* of it, although I very much doubt that he has ever been aware of the "fact." Before the 1914 war Charlie Chaplin

had not arrived at the eminence where he could spend years in artistic brooding between pictures. He kept up a steady flow of two-reel comedies and Drew shared the job—with Jack Lewis and Langford Reed—of turning them into stories (for lack of a better word) for *Pluck*.

With this apprenticeship safely behind him, Drew next aspired to the more original *Charlie Chaplin's Schooldays*, which began late in 1915 in *The Boys' Realm*, and its sequel *His Second Term*. Drew's job was to transport Charlie minus only the "tash" into the Third Form of Calcroft School. He showed marked ingenuity in keeping Chaplin equipped with baggy trousers, bowler hat, and penny cane against the efforts of authority to jam him into Etons.

THAT WAS NOT his biggest problem. Chaplin's pantomime was purely visual humour and the editor set Drew a heavy task in translating it to print. He had one marked advantage. His audience, almost to a boy, would be seeing the comedian's antics more or less weekly at their local flea-pits, and could easily visualise for themselves Drew's valiant attempt to put across the staggering, splay-footed run, the balancing on one foot when

Charlie rounded a corner, and the way in which the cane kept getting mixed up with other people's legs.

Bits of the stories are very funny even now. In the main they fell aptly into the usual ramshackle structure of the Calcroft tales and the weakest point—to me—is that Drew decided to make Chaplin talk like one half of a comic paper cross-talk column. They make an interesting and revealing contrast with what happened when Frank Richards was asked to tackle a similar assignment with the *Will Hay at Ben Dover* series.

Sidney Drew's versatility was not reflected in his school stories, which were largely humorous. This helps to make him almost certainly the most difficult of the old writers for an adult to assess. He had a rich vein of comic inventiveness which in the type of yarn he was producing linked naturally with scrappy slapstick and unfailing facetiousness, devices which the grown-up is apt to find tedious or exasperating in large doses, but which the boys of the period presumably found uproariously funny.

We know that he was highly popular, or he would never have got the series to begin at all, and it would be interesting to know whether Calcroft finished in

The Marvel because enthusiasm waned or because Drew could not maintain delivery.

While I have a soft corner for Drew and his mission to bring glee into a gloomy world, his limitations for carrying on a weekly single-handed are obvious. If a more universal author — and preferably Goodwin — had been engaged for this all-school story venture, Frank Richards would have had much hotter competition and the outcome been more in doubt. There is no reason, of course, to suppose that the editor of *The Marvel* wished for or envisaged a head-on conflict with *The Magnet*, and not only because the two papers were stable-companions. The mainstay of *The Marvel* for many years had been Jack, Sam, and Pete. Now that their popularity was declining and a replacement had to be sought, the editor would consider with much justification that in view of the tastes and mentality of his readers Calcroft provided the logical successor to Clarke Hook's slapstick trio.

DREW'S MIND had an unusual slant. His normal characters were mere outlines, the most sketchily produced of any in the A.P. parade. If it were not for the odd surname dotted about, it would be impossible

to tell by dialogue or narrative which of Calcroft's Fighting Four occupied the limelight at the moment. This was not because he was deficient in the ability, as he proved by the unstinted care he lavished on the portraits of his eccentrics. The nominal heroes were to him only pegs on which he hung the comedians, freaks, and oddities who were his real love and whom he put through some remarkable antics.

The inexhaustibility of his comic gift probably shows up most strongly with the House Dame's yellow tom-cat Cornelius, alias the Calcroft Nightingale. Mrs. Kebble's cat at Greyfriars was a vague, shadowy animal existing only as a Bunterish excuse for missing pies. Cornelius was a feline fiend who kept Calcroft in a bigger uproar than ever the Green Triangle did St. Frank's.

He had neither morals nor scruples: every hand and every boot was raised against him and with devilish cunning he mocked at all his assailants. He kept Nathaniel Pycroft, M.A., on the verge of a nervous breakdown with midnight caterwauling and malignant persecution of which one sample was secreting such delicacies as half-eaten raw rabbits in his bed. The number of situations, even to

parading the tiles as his own ghost, into which Drew contrived to work the melodious moggie almost baffles belief.

No-one ever ruptured his intellect struggling with profundities in Drew. His target was exclusively the funny-bone, and he really should have looked like some modern Silenus. Even here he did not comply with the obvious, being a long, thin, melancholy-looking chap with a beer-filter moustache. Yes, Sidney Drew was unique, and it was fortunate that no editor ever had to seek a substitute for him. There would have been some weird travesties in *The Marvel* far outdoing anything that appeared in *The Gem* and *The Magnet*.

WHO NEXT? There were dozens of others making greater or lesser contributions to the ever-moving A.P. caravan, but if all their stories and writers were to be treated in detail I can envisage Bill Gander setting type on his hundredth birthday and mumbling with MacBeth: "Start, eyes! What! Will the line stretch out to the crack of doom?" Still, from our peak in Transcona let us stare at a few others—not, I hope, with a wild surmise.

The death of *The Boys' Friend* marked the end of an era. Time

was already eroding the fame of the earlier stalwarts. Clarke Hook was no longer given credit for Jack, Sam, and Pete, and three of Henry St. John's serials were reprinted without a by-line—a slur on an old war-horse made worse in the second series *Boys' Friend Library* when *Chums of Greyminster* reappeared as by St. John Watson.

The school story could hardly stand still in a changing world. This second series was fed by papers and stories which increasingly reflected the bizarre influence of the Thomson competition, until such stuff as *The Schoolboy Cannibal Earl*, by Tex Rivers, became commonplace. *The Nelson Lee Library* departed this life, helped on its way perhaps by inept editing, leaving only Frank Richards, the Hans Brinker of Fleetway House, who gallantly stuffed his finger into the hole in the dyke wall and kept it there until Hitler pushed it out and released the flood which submerged the traditional school story.

THE CHANGES of the late 'twenties and the 'thirties, however, are a subject in themselves. Confining ourselves to the earlier men, the one who came nearest to treading in Drew's footsteps was Duncan Storm, whose school-ship, *The*

Bombay Castle, steamed merrily through *The Boys' Friend* for many years. This was an astute idea for a series, allowing him to draw on the dual worlds of school and travel. Horace the Goat was a relation of Cornelius the Cat—spiritually, not zoologically—and Mr. Lal Tata was a sort of academic Gan Waga, backed up by Dick Dorrington and his Glory Hole Gang, the usual cads and bullies, and an unusual assortment of characters possible only because they came in as seamen, greasers, and animals.

If Storm did not carve an imperishable name on the rocks of time, his flow of breezy, bouncing, knockabout humour was a joy to thousands. His summing-up would be even higher if the peak of his popularity had not happened to coincide with the 1914 War. The shrieking patriotism of tales of the period, their spy-catching, white feathers for men in civvies and their hysteria about conscientious objectors all read strangely nowadays, and when Storm turned his usual gift of exaggeration into *The Boys Who Beat the Kaiser* and *The Boys Who Caught the Kaiser* he must have achieved the ultimate in wartime balderdash. If he didn't, I hope I never have to read the stories which outdo his.

HORACE PHILLIPS was one author who demonstrated that he could fill a school-story weekly single-handed, although he did not get the chance to do it for boys. It would have been a bold and far-sighted editor who would have taken such a risk on the evidence of his early stories. Such serials as *Cast Out by the School*, *The Four B's*, and *The Worst Fellow at Burnside*, while acceptable in their way, convey a vivid impression of an old-fashioned Victorian making a desperate and not too-convincing attempt to adjust himself to changing tastes and new ideas. This was the exact reverse of the truth, as he was a young man striving to find his metier, but the impression was so strong on me that out of curiosity I read a couple of copies of *The Schoolgirls' Own*. From these it is clear that somewhere on the road from Burnside to Morcove he did what very few men could do—he radically revised both his style and approach and so achieved a lasting and deserved success with Betty Barton and Co.

A MAN OF GREAT ability, Henry T. Johnson really was what Phillips only appeared to be. Editors heaped encomiums on him, and he sold freely to the A. P. as well as

Aldine and a variety of other publishers. With all his merits, he was deeply rooted in tradition and reads as if he would have been most at home in penning melodrama of the *Maria Marten*; or, *The Murder in the Red Barn* order. So much of his more dramatic dialogue seems just that—ready-made for mouthing over the footlights of the local Blood Tub. He was not particularly interested in school and our interest lies not so much in the quantity as in seeing how a writer of his qualities responded to the subject. The answer is that he did very well, although his very titles such as *The Drudge of Draycott School* (naturally a missing heir!) and *The Black Sheep of the School* show that he still hung about the fringes of his tried and trusted melodrama.

ignored in *The Boys' Friend Library*. *The School in the Backwoods* in the early days of *The Boys' Realm* used a Canadian school long before Cedar Creek was thought of. There must have been some external influence which decided Frank Richards to transport his youthful self to Canada for his fictional education—there was nothing in his real life to suggest it—and it seems a pity that we shall never know whether or not it was Blair's example which prompted him. Blair's only other reprinted school serial seems to be *The Muff of Melthorpe College*, which was used as the opening story in *The Realm*, and the two of them only whet the appetite for the further treat he could surely have produced and unfortunately never did.

WHY ALLAN BLAIR was so neglected by the A. P. re-printers remains something of a mystery. He was long a top-liner, yet he was virtually



*The Concluding Part Will
Appear In Number 88*

Scottish Boys' Papers

IN S.P.C. NUMBER 85 O. W. Wadham asked if there had been any boys' papers published in Scotland. We have been supplied by W.O.G.Lofts with the names of

some: *Hardy Scot* (1920); *Young Scot* (1928); *Young Scotland* (year not known); *Young Scotland*, new series (1928); and *Claymore* (1933). The lengths of the various runs are not known at present. +

STORY PAPER MEMORIES

By HENRY ADAMS PUCKRIN

A CERTAIN HISTORICAL work* has been called "something more than a political pamphlet in three volumes." This statement could well be adapted to *The Story Paper Collector*, for with its varied contents it is certainly "something more" than a mere news-sheet to be read and then left by the wayside.

It may seem strange for so many to be writing so much about the "penny dreadfuls," so-called, but when they have been read and studied with care it is seen that most aspects of life, good, bad, and indifferent, have been faithfully portrayed in them.

This fact is a tribute to the many authors who wrote for the old story papers, so perhaps the recalling of some memories will not be out of place and may bring back to older readers recollections of the long-dead past. Many such memories have gone from this writer for ever. Some of those that remain are concerned with the exploits and actions of various characters.

* *History of the Rebellion*, by Edward Hyde, 1st Earl of Clarendon.

It is not easy to know where to start, but as humour is regarded as the spice of life the famous trio of *The Marvel*, Jack, Sam, and Pete, can well head the list. The good-natured Pete with his fund of practical jokes takes first place, with his companions, Jack and Sam, trying to keep him in hand. They went all over the world and got into all sorts of situations, but pluck and a measure of common-sense got them out of their difficulties.

One such incident, portrayed in a front-cover illustration, depicted Pete in the act of stopping a huge flywheel in a cotton mill which the comrades were visiting. Whether such a thing could actually be done is open to question, but taken with many other acts of a similar nature it showed that Pete, while being a lover of practical jokes, had a warm heart and a genuine sympathy for the underdog.

Another story, called *The Skull Orchid*, featured in an early issue of *Union Jack Library*, dealt with a search for a rare and beautiful specimen of orchid bearing a peculiar marking. Whilst crossing the Atlantic a waterspout, which had come

dangerously close to the ship, was destroyed by a well-placed shot from the ship's signal-gun. Needless to say, the story had a triumphant ending, bringing fame and fortune to all members of the expedition.

The war between Russia and Japan in 1904-05 caused the writing of numerous stories about it, some of which are still to be found. An unusual and daring incident portrayed in one story showed a Britisher whose sympathies were with Japan struggling in the water, having been thrown from a torpedoed ship. Noticing a Russian torpedo approaching, he threw himself on it and diverted its course, avoiding a terrible disaster.

MANY OTHER STORIES of a like nature range from preventing railway disasters and foiling the efforts of anarchists, to labour troubles and amateur detective work, all of which kept the many readers enthralled and ready for more.

This article can be brought to a close with a reference to the famous Harry Belbin trio in *Pluck*, the Captain, the Cook, and the Engineer. These three, while providing lots of fun for readers, did many a good deed—most of which, unfortunately, the writer cannot remember. One, however, does stand out in

his memory: a widow, applying for legal aid to secure an inheritance, was told by the magistrate hearing the case that hers was a "cock-and-bull story," and to apply to the "poor box" for relief. As he was, in Northern parlance, "as blind as a bat, as daft as a brush, and as deaf as a post," such a decision was not surprising.

Happening to be in the Court during the hearing and being touched by the widow's distress, the famous trio took an interest in the case and after a series of adventures grave and gay, they obtained for the widow her just dues.

THESE FEW remembered incidents out of many will serve to show that the love of right and justice is not the privilege of any one class of society and that, to quote Goethe:

*Thus in our booth's contracted
sphere,
The circle of Creation will
appear.*

It Wasn't All That Funny!

WHY is *The Magnet* like Gosling's nose?—Because it is "red" to the very end.—*Magnet* # 1550.

WHY is *The Magnet* like Gosling's nose?—Because it is "red" to the very end.—*Magnet* # 1554.

J. J. WILSON'S OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

SOON AFTER my article, *Collecting Old Boys' Books: Not "A New Craze,"* was printed (S. P. C. Number 83), I realized that when one attempts to write an article of that kind one should first attend diligently to one's homework. The first result of a little more study was the short paragraph on page 156 of the same issue, in which was quoted the late Barry Ono's statement about J. J. Wilson's Old Boys' Book Club: that it was entirely mythical.

Later, looking through *The Collectors' Digest* starting at Number 1 dated back in 1946—something I had not done for a long time—I soon began receiving little shocks as I realized how many years had gone by since well-remembered events were reported and less-well-remembered articles were featured in its pages.

There is a lot of information filed away in those pages, and some of that which I found was in an article written by John Medcraft, *The Original Old Boys' Book Club*, in Number 28, April, 1949. In that article Mr. Medcraft wrote about J. J. Wilson's Old Boys' Book Club, and as

there may be many present readers of S.P.C. who have not had an opportunity of reading it, part of it will be reprinted here. In the first paragraph Mr. Medcraft referred to the present O.B.B.C. being so ably organized and controlled and then he continued:

But, contrary to general belief, it was not the first of its kind, for about 40 years ago the late J. J. Wilson, a Londoner resident in Liverpool, started the original Old Boys' Book Club. No high ideals inspired the formation for the Club was merely a cloak for a book trading venture, genuine enough as such, but controlled and officered solely by Jimmy Wilson himself.

The firm of Edwin J. Brett had recently closed down and their remainders were flooding the market, reviving interest in the old Victorian boys' papers. Taking tide at the flood, Wilson purchased large quantities, marked them with the familiar rubber stamp of the Old Boys' Book Club and listed them under this heading to the many collectors and sentimentalists whose interest had awakened.

When the huge remainder stocks of Hogarth House were released a few years later, Wilson bought extensively and re-sold via the Old Boys' Book Club. He used to point proudly to his fine Liverpool house and declare that it was bought out

of the profits on the Brett and Hogarth House remainders, and here I am convinced that he spoke truly.

Reading about those Brett and Hogarth House "remainders" that Mr. Wilson acquired reminds us that other, later publishers did not carry large stocks of back numbers in order to meet future demands. That being so, no-one is ever going to build a house with the profits from the sale of any such "remainder" stocks of *The Magnet*, *The Gem*, *Union Jack*, *Nelson Lee Library*, and the like.

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IN *Collectors' Digest* Number 50, February, 1951, there is another, longer, very readable and informative article by Mr. Medcraft, *Pioneers of Juvenalia*, which is well worth re-reading. It begins:

Old Boys' Book collecting is no new cult originating in the demise of *The Magnet* and other worthwhile boys' papers in 1940, or inspired by E. S. Turner's *Boys Will Be Boys* and sponsored by the *Old Boys' Book Clubs*, but is now nearing its century as a hobby.

From this it will be seen that it had all been done before and I was just twelve years late when I picked up the theme.

- W. H. G.

JOHN P. NIX

By ALMON HORTON

FOR THE SAKE of historical accuracy, I should like to explain that Part Three of my *Illustrated International History of Amateur Journalism* from the earliest times gives the following information:

- 1) John P. Nix was the son of old-timer John Nix of Edinburgh who was active in the hobby in the early 1870s.
- 2) John P. Nix resided at Birmingham, England, in 1901 and in the January 1901 issue of *The Amateur Litterateur* he, along with Miss Edith Young, also of Birmingham (who became Alfred Henry Pierce's wife eventually), were recorded as having become members.
- 3) John P. Nix was elected a Councillor of the British Amateur Literary Association for the 1901-1902 session.
- 4) John P. Nix was elected Assistant Editor for the 1902-1903 and 1903-1904 session. Then residing at London, he attended the Association's 1902 Manchester Convention.
- 5) On November 10th, 1910, John P. Nix wrote to his old friend Alfred Henry Pierce: "I

was most delighted to hear from you again. I often think of the old British Amateur Literary Association days and of the many friends I made amongst its members. . . . What a joy it must be to each to have a sympathetic and appreciative partner always on hand. . . . The dear old Association justified its existence when it brought you and your wife together, and on that single score, apart from all else, it deserves a laudatory epitaph."

6) John P. Nix became a Goldsmith, Silvermith and Jeweller at Eastbourne.

* *

¶ IN VIEW OF the foregoing information and especially the final paragraph, the possibility of John P. Nix having been John Nix Pentelow grows markedly less and probably fades away completely.

¶ THERE ARE STILL available, Mr. Horton states, some copies of Part One of the History—*The Hobby of Amateur Journalism*—at 6/6d or \$1 post free. Address: Mr. Almon Horton, 10 Warwick Grove, Audenshaw, Manchester, England.

—W.H.G.

¶ NOT THAT IT matters much except to those who live there, but Buxted is in Sussex, not in Surrey as stated on page 210 of S. P. C. Number 86. +

TYPOGRAPHICAL ERRORS

"THE CONTENTS of *Tryout* are good, but I find numerous typographical errors," writes a reader. If the contents of *Tryout* are good, why worry about the errors? *Tryout* is catering to a rather intelligent class of readers, who possess sufficient mentally to correct my typographical sins of "commission and omission." Why not you?

—C. W. Smith, *Haverhill, Mass.*, in Number 6, Volume 19, of his amateur magazine *The Tryout*, September, 1938, when he was well into his 8th decade.

THE WORLD'S WORST Proof Reader (we still hold the title) is well aware of the typographical errors in this issue.

—Willard B. Savory, then of *Wilmington, Mass.*, in Number 7, Volume 3, of his amateur magazine *The Polystich* (pronounced *Polystik*), dated December, 1954.

BEING NEITHER in my eighth decade nor the World's 2nd-Worst Proof Reader—I hope—I try to avoid typographical errors, but they still elude me until it is too late—until, that is, the type is being "dissed" back into the type-cases.

The latest to come to my attention is in the final paragraph, column 2, page 231, this issue, where *were* unaccountably

turned into *mere*. I read that page several times, at least once with a reading-glass which enlarges the 8-point type into a lovely elongated 14-point. The explanation may be that in reading we tend to think we see what we expect to see.

To soothe my ruffled feelings I now print a contribution on the subject of typographical errors.

— W. H. C.

* *

THEY ALL MAKE MISTAKES!

WHEN QUITE recently our worthy Editor wrote to me expressing concern at the typographical errors that crop up in *The Story Paper Collector*, one could understand his annoyance. It is probable that a good proof-reader would have eliminated some of them, but when it is considered that our Editor has to do every job connected with the production of *S. P. C.* for our enjoyment it is a wonder that more do not slip by.

It can be of some consolation that even mighty publishing firms with their numerous sub-editors, proof-readers, and printing staffs, still find errors in their finished product. Indeed, some national newspapers cash in on

this by having small columns headed *Pardon My Slip* or *Old Ads*, giving amusing misprints, usually of advertisements that have completely different phrasing than what was intended.

Boys' papers have not been exempt from mis-spelling. I well remember a former sub-editor of *The Magnet* telling me how, in one of his substitute stories of Greyfriars a misprint ascribed to Harold Skinner of the Remove something totally different from what was intended by the writer.

A New Zealand newspaper once printed "the detective branch of the police force" as "the defective branch of the police farce," much to the annoyance of the local police chief. Probably the greatest "bloomer" was made when a New York paper, threatened with a libel action for having referred to a well-known Civil War general as "a battle-scared veteran," made things worse when, trying to make amends, they apologised for "the most unfortunate misprint, which should of course have been 'bottle-scarred.'"

YES, THEY ALL make mistakes, and I don't mind how many there are in *S. P. C.* I feel sure that most of the readers don't mind, either! — W. O. G. LOFTS

A MIXED LOT: 6 . . .

Tales of Tug Wilson, Detective

NEVER SO POPULAR as the long-lived Sexton Blake, there were nevertheless many other detectives in the golden years of story papers who became quite popular in their respective spheres of juvenile fiction.

Recently I renewed acquaintance with one of them: Tug Wilson, 'tec, and his assistant, Constable Harry Screams.

Their adventures, complete each week, were a feature of *Chips* in the later years of its good old halfpenny period.

Just how long stories of them appeared I cannot recall, but they were in the first number of *Chips* for 1916 and were still going strong in the last issue for that year.

Comedy played a prominent part in Tug Wilson's adventures and it was truly amazing the number of crooks who were described as "shabbily-dressed gentlemen"—how very different today!

P. C. Harry Screams might well have been mistaken for the village idiot if his likeness at the masthead of the stories

was anything to judge by, but actually he was quite a bright and likable character.

'Tec Tug Wilson and Police Constable Harry Screams must have been popular: theirs were the only complete stories in *Chips* in 1916. It would be interesting to learn how many weeks they held that distinction.

—O. W. WADHAM

* * *

Twenty-five Years Of The Beano

WHILE THERE has been the occasional dropping-out along the way among them, the D. C. Thomson juvenile weeklies do seem, in the main, to have discovered the secret of longevity. As proof of this there is *The Beano* which, starting with Number 1 on July 26th, 1938, celebrated its 25th anniversary with Number 1097 on July 27th of last year.

There have been more than 1097 weeks since July 26th, 1938, but the discrepancy is accounted for by issues having been published less often than once a week during the years of paper shortage.

Looking at a copy of Number 1097, I wonder a little just what is the secret of its long life. Being all-picture no doubt has something to do with it; and

the part-colour-printing. The price, too, which was still only threepence in a day of fivepenny and sixpenny weeklies.

The art-work does not appear to be out of the top cartooning drawer. The humour is nothing to rave about. The adventure-picture-stories — there may be more to these than strikes the eye of a casual peruser: one might need to follow them to know how good they are.

The Beano does not seem to this observer to be better than were *Film Fun* or *Knockout*, *T. V. Comic* or *Radio Fun* — but these four are now no more than memories while *The Beano* continues to march on.

* * *

The Old Jokes Section

SCHOOLMASTER: "Jones, spell the word weather."

Jones: "If you please, sir, 'Wheatther.'"

Schoolmaster: "Well, Jones, I must say that is the worst spell of weather we've had for a long time!"

—From *The Boys' Herald*, London, Number 110, December 3rd, 1921.

TEACHER: "Spell 'weather.'"

Jack: "W-e-t-t-h-u-r."

Teacher: "That's just about

the worst spell of weather we've had in a long, long time."

—From *The Wolverine*, Number 5, February, 1964 — an amateur magazine published in Laingsburg, Mich., U. S. A.

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Amateur Paper Titles Pre-dated Pro.

AMATEUR PUBLISHERS have been, generally, original in the choice of titles for their magazines, and the professional press have never been averse to copying such titles. Thus it is that *Chums*, *Magnet*, *Gem*, *Union Jack*, and others were well-known titles of amateur magazines years before professional publishers adopted them for their magazines.

—ARTHUR HARRIS

* * *

Stories by Brenda Girvin: A Query

A FAVOURITE story of mine is one that appeared in *Chatterbox* for 1914, *The Harum-Scarum Karls*. It was written under the name of Brenda Girvin. I have searched all the volumes of *Chatterbox* from the year 1900 on and I cannot find anything else written under this name. This seems strange, as other writers appeared frequently in the various volumes. I wonder if anyone can inform me of

other stories for children were written by Brenda Girvin since 1900, and in what papers or books they are to be found.

—TOM ARMITAGE

205 Batley Road, Alverthorpe,
Wakefield, Yorks.

* * *

Arthur Courtney and Frank Courtenay

IN THE THIRD instalment of his *The Lower Branches* (S.P.C. Number 85) Tom Hopperton comments upon the *Magnet* story, *A Very Gallant Gentleman*, by J. N. Pentelow (*Magnet* Number 520), and readers who could not distinguish between Arthur Courtney, the Greyfriars Sixth-form prefect, and Frank Courtenay, of the Highcliffe Fourth form.

On the same subject, the Editorial paragraph in *Magnet* Number 528 is of some interest. In part it reads:

A Recent "Magnet" Story

"*A Very Gallant Gentleman*" brought me more letters than any other yarn published in this paper for years past has done.

Most of them were couched in terms of the highest praise. . .

But a few of the letters raised strong objections to the end, and some of my correspondents were quite abusive about it. Mr. Richards

had no right to do it, they said. . . One, who knew so much about Arthur Courtney that he actually wrote about the death of Frank Courtenay, quite another person . . .

As *The Magnet* had only sixteen pages at the time, it may be assumed that Mr. Pentelow was not just cobbling together a paragraph, in praise of a story he himself wrote, to fill a bit of space. It was seldom that he found occasion or need to refer to earlier stories. That he did so this time may be taken as evidence that more readers than usual did write in regarding the tale. And one of them could not distinguish between Arthur Courtney and Frank Courtenay.

* * *

Billy Bunter In Newnes Encyclopaedia

BUNTER, BILLY, the cowardly fat boy of Greyfriars School, a character in Frank Richard's [sic] school stories in *The Magnet* and other [sic] comics.

—From *Newnes Popular Encyclopaedia*, Part 6, page 465.

We can regard this entry only with sadness, in spite of our gratification that Billy Bunter has gained recognition in an encyclopaedia. (Is this the first time?) Could not something

besides his cowardice have been mentioned? His famous postal order is far funnier, and so are his fumbling fibs.

What is more, we have an encyclopaedia helping to perpetuate the myth that *The Magnet* was a "comic": "*The Magnet* and other comics." And finally, that misplaced apostrophe!

When this item was written, parts of the *Encyclopaedia* as far as Number 19 had been received. The name of Charles Hamilton does not appear in the *H* section. We have yet to see whether Mr. Hamilton will be included as "Frank Richards" under *R*. If he is not, then we will have the fictional character considered worthy of inclusion in an encyclopaedia while the creator of the character is omitted.

* * *

Not the Red Inn!

IT IS NOT VERY often that a collector of old boys' publications walks past a movie theatre and is carried back in memory many years by the film title displayed. Passing the Paramount International Cinema in Wellington, New Zealand, recently, I saw a poster proclaiming:

THE RED INN

*The Inn That Nobody Leaves
Alive!*

Naturally, my mind went back to that famous *Chips* serial, *The Red Inn*, and its villainous landlord Jasper Todd, so many of whose guests did not depart alive.

Looking closer at the posters I found that *The Red Inn* was a daring French comedy, "banned, even in London." It was further described as "killingly funny" and "the comedy classic of all time."

It certainly had no connection with the comic paper classic of more than fifty years ago—that is certain!

—O. W. WADHAM

Lower Hutt, New Zealand.
November 22nd, 1963.

* * *

J. N. P.=J. P. N.? Arthur Harris's Comment

A proof of Almon Horton's contribution to the Pentelow/Nix discussion (pp. 232-3) was airmailed to Arthur Harris. His comment follows:

THANK YOU, Bill; but I cannot see that this solves the question of whether or not John Nix Pentelow and John P. Nix were one and the same person. It seems merely to show two errors that unfortunately occurred in my letter to you. [S.P.C. #86.]

"For the sake of historical accuracy":

2) My letter gave "Jan." as the month of John P. Nix joining the amateur press association. It was obviously a printer's error—or my hurried handwriting—that made it appear as "June." I followed on with the account of Nix's poem appearing in the *March* issue of the official organ and, of course, there wasn't an official organ issued in *June*.

4) John P. Nix was elected as assistant editor in September, 1902, and re-elected in September, 1903.

What to me seems remarkable is, that Pentelow's mother's maiden name was Nix!

(By the way, my amateur magazine *Interesting Items* reached its Diamond Jubilee this month and was on television on March 5th—its birthday—in *Wales Today*.)

—ARTHUR HARRIS
March 9th, 1964.

* * *

Robin Hood Stories

THE STORIES [in the Amalgamated Press *Robin Hood Library*, 1919-20] were all written by R. Coutts Armour, an Australian who wrote *Sexton Blakes* under his more familiar pen-names of Coutts Brisbane and Reid Whitley. I was told this by H. W. Twyman, who was running the similar-type paper *Detective Library*, and it has also been

confirmed by an official source.

My information is that Len Pratt was the Editor of the A.P. *Robin Hood Library* before taking full control of *Sexton Blake Library*, which he ran for so many years. But I do not challenge Tom Hopperton's statement that John Nix Pentelow started this group of similar-type Libraries.

—W. O. G. LOFTS

* *

WE LOOKED UP the 1½d *Robin Hood Library* that came out in the middle of 1919: three copies, Numbers 5, 6, 28 (5 and 6 are undated, but 28 is dated December 29th, 1919—that shows they were weeklies, or very soon became weeklies). And indeed they were published by The Amalgamated Press.

Then we looked at the 2d *Robin Hood Library*: these were published by Aldine.

So there were three different series: the penny Aldine, 1902 onwards; the 1½d Amalgamated Press starting in 1919; and the twopenny Aldine, publication of which quickly followed on the demise of the A.P. series.

I am sorry I tripped up, causing you and your correspondents unnecessary work. [It wasn't really work!—w.h.g.] When I read what your contributors had said on the subject I looked at my twopenny Aldines and simply thought that they had run

on from the 1½d ones and were the same. What sleuths some of the collectors are!

—JACK OVERHILL
Trumpington, Cambridge.

* * *

Mauleverer: One Of The Oddities? No!

FOLLOWING the excellent series of articles, *The Lower Branches*, with interest and appreciation, I venture to disagree with the statement, in Part 4, that Mauleverer was one of the five oddities in the Remove Form at Greyfriars.

No doubt Mr. Hopperton has a sound basis for the statement and it could be connected with the early days at Greyfriars, my own acquaintance with Mauly being confined to the late 1920s onward.

The elegant lord endeared himself to us by his placid, easy-going nature. Friend and foe could rely on sage advice and assistance when in need, and the High Oaks and Popper's Island rebellions are recalled as but two examples of the sterling quality of leadership that Mauly could assert when occasion demanded.

Unlike Bunter and Vernon-Smith, Charles Hamilton gave us no surfeit of Mauleverer, but when, under protest, he was

persuaded to leave the long-suffering sofa, and featured in the action, we were assured of entertaining and delightful reading of a character, lovable and real, with no suggestion of oddity.

—JOHN TROVELL
Colchester, Essex.

* * *

S. B. L.s Wanted!

A CONTRIBUTOR to these pages, Alvin Fick, Fort Johnson, New York 12070, U.S.A. (that is sufficient address, New York being the state, not the city) would like to purchase *Sexton Blake Library*: numbers before 351 of the final series and 352 to 367, 369 to 436, 438; any in the 2nd and 1st series; and S.B.L. original cover art work.

* * *

This Small Space . .

—Is ALL THAT remains to be filled and I have been puzzling for two days over what to use in it. But now I need concern myself with it no more.—W.H.G.

.....

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