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Comment On Recent Topics

Leslie Charteris

THE SHORT PIECE by Albert Watkins about Leslie Charteris, the world-famous creator of the Saint [in S. P. C. Number 86: "Thriller" No. 5] was of great interest to me. By one of those coincidences, I had only recently been in correspondence with Mr. Charteris in Florida about an article I was writing for Fleetway Publications under the title of *The Saint at Fleetway*.

I don't doubt in the least that the Editor—Len Pratt, who also ran *Sexton Blake Library*—received letters in praise of Mr. Charteris's story—at, however, a later date than a week after publication. Copy for each issue went to the printers three weeks before publication day.

Mr. Charteris, whom I am to meet soon in London, seems to be a person equally as nice as his character, the Saint, and

richly deserves all the fame that has come his way.

Of interest to collectors of *Chums* is the fact that Leslie Charteris, after dropping his first "toddler" heroes, Tiger Tim and the Bruin Boys, was an avid reader of the famous Cassell paper till about 1919.

I sent him a bound volume and he told me that he had been delightedly thumbing through its pages and it was a most nostalgic reminder of his youthful days, adding:

A serial by Captain Frank Shaw about "the vast alliance between the Bolsheviks and China's hidden millions," . . . seemed a remarkable prophecy for those days.

The Earlier Greyfriars

THE EARLIER Greyfriars story [An *Earlier Greyfriars* in S. P. C. Number 86] referred to in *Girl's Own Paper* was not about a school. It was a very girlish story of an old house built of warm red sandstone which originally was a monastery.

Running from Number 563, October 11th, 1890, to Number

1886, March 21st, 1891, when the leading heroine, Esther, leaves the house at the conclusion of the story she says:

"And you must not think I have been unhappy here. I had my cares and anxieties of course, but I should have had them anywhere. I do not think I ever spent a more interesting, or on the whole a more happy year than this last one, which has been when my home has been at Greyfriars!"

Surely this is a comment which would have been endorsed by almost any boy who was leaving Frank Richards' famous school!

John Nix Pentelow

TOM HOPPERTON's two articles on John Nix Pentelow [in S. P. C. Numbers 85, 86] were brilliantly written. It is a fact that Pentelow's stories were being accepted and published years after he had ceased to be Editor of *The Gem* and *The Magnet*.

An author who worked under Pentelow as junior sub-editor during the first World War recently gave me some comments which may be of interest:

Pentelow was one of the old school; his writing lacked the sparkle and humour of Charles Hamilton's. He was always extremely conscious of the need for good moral tone and uplift, and his stories

in general had the Victorian/Edwardian tone. He had a habit in conferences of talking almost non-stop for an hour or more, recounting past adventures—mainly cricket subjects, on which he was an expert.

He was also, unfortunately, extremely deaf and would not use a hearing-aid. When the listener started to talk, Pentelow would suddenly lose interest in the conversation. Readers of Frank Richards' autobiography can well imagine the difficulties these two people had when they met for "editorial chats": Pentelow talking and not listening, and Hamilton working out chess problems in his head—not talking or listening!

Pentelow had to be shouted at to make him hear, and after a chat with him people used to shout at one another for at least ten minutes until sufficiently reminded and rebuked.

Mr. Pentelow certainly never objected in the least to Charles Hamilton writing about Dutton's deafness. People seem to get the wrong point about this. Deafness is only a joke when the deaf one mishears. It is not the deafness one laughs at, but the vanity of the deaf person who refuses to admit deafness, refuses hearing-aids, and guesses at what people are saying. "I'm not really deaf—just hard of hearing."

—W. O. G. LOFTS

April 4th, 1964.

THE LOWER BRANCHES

By TOM HOPPERTON

EVERYONE has a literary blind spot, and mine is Samuel Clarke Hook. I could never work up any enthusiasm about Jack, Sam, and Pete when I was a lad, and although I keep dibbling in them on and off, I still cannot imagine why they were so wildly popular. This is very much a minority view: Hook carried *The Marvel* on his back for twenty years, and he was easily the top scorer in the *Boys' Friend Library* reprints.

The trouble with Clarke Hook is just about crystalised in a story with some such title as *The Mystery of White Island*. This far-away island is littered with huge statues which turn out to be the work of a one-armed sculptor. A one-armed sculptor! This revelation threw me into such a fever that I do not recall finishing the story. A one-armed painter is neither here nor there; a one-armed paper-hanger could manage at a pinch, but how the devil does a one-armed sculptor operate? I am proud to say that after profound

cogitation I solved the problem. *He grips the chisel in his teeth and hits himself on the back of the head with the mallet.* And it is a good thing that it was I who thought of this and not Clarke Hook, or he would have worked it off in all seriousness in the story.

It would be uncharitable to suppose that he had a sardonic sense of humour or an infinite contempt for his readers' intellects. There is much too much of this sort of thing in his works: he tosses in all sorts of startling effects without bothering to consider their relevancy, and the explanation seems to be that he was too busy writing to have time to stop and think. Hook claimed that he could deliver 70,000 words a week, *writing by hand*. Anyone who cares to accept an imposition of a hundred lines from an imaginary Mr. Quelch and to time himself during the writing will decide forthwith that the claim was so much hot air and the thing is impossible. I agree that it is impossible, and the only thing I

have to add is that the mere incidence of Hook's stories shows that he not only achieved the impossible but he did so over quite extended periods.

Pete's Schooldays showed that Pete at fifteen was just the same as Pete at whatever age he was supposed to be in *The Marvel*, complete with a beautiful singing voice and his marvellous ventriloquism, so if you like Pete you will enjoy his schooldays and if you don't—well, what is one more piece of piffle in the world? I learned two things from it: that Pete was a native of Zanzibar, which I do not recall seeing elsewhere, and that a Public school education is not all it is cracked up to be. It never did a thing for Pete's English.

Over eighty years ago, one boy in Brett's *The Travelling School-boys* warned his mates not to call his black servant "a nigger." The warning was a long time reaching Fleetway House. Pete and such characters generally referred to themselves as "Dis ya nigger," and as late as 1925 Duncan Storm seemed unaware that there was any synonym for the word. The most restrained of the A. P. men was Frank Richards, but then he was a singularly inoffensive writer—to everyone except socialists, suffragettes, evolutionists, and

determinists! When Hurree Singh arrived at Greyfriars in 1908 only Bulstrode abused him as a nigger and through the years the word only cropped up when used in malice or ignorance by Skinner and Bunter.

There is one thing to be said about the "formula" of the school story. When Clarke Hook was shackled in it, it restrained the more absurd aspect of his exhuberance and he turned out some entertaining stories. One of these, *The Boys of Ravenswood College*, seems to have been written specially for the *B.F.L.* and was not printed anywhere else.

Dick Clare was a real Victorian practical joker with unlimited cash. He nearly wore out both himself and the reader with his japes, and the story really needs reading in conjunction with Richards' Carboy series in *The Magnet*, when they provide an object lesson in the essential differences between the two men who were easily the most prolific workers the Amalgamated Press ever had.

IF HOOK HAD never written a school story it would not have mattered much. Michael Storm wrote just sufficient to make one regret that the combination of his short life and his restless versatility kept down

his contributions to this field. The Abbotsrag and Ravenscar stories which originally ran in *Pluck* were conceived in the grand manner.

Ravenscar was another of those grammar schools founded by Edward VI and Dr. John Manners (D.D.) could have given tips on the inspiring of awe to Canon Leveson or Dr. Locke. Storm was a singularly polished writer with a distinctly adult style. There was no writing down to his audience and he was impeccable in plotting, characterisation, and atmosphere. He even managed to make his topography interesting.

If anyone is in any doubt as to whether he could bear to begin re-reading school stories, by all means let him begin with Michael Storm and he will end by sharing with me the opinion that if Storm had been kept out of *Answers* and similar papers he would have built himself a more enduring memorial in the school story.

THE WORK of the A. P. authors could hardly present a wider or more varied array. The boarding-school story already seemed well winnowed by 1895, yet they took it up and by sheer excellence of writing extended its active life by another 45 years. There is,

of course, another factor. Even the technical skill of Frank Richards, St. John, Goodwin, and the rest would have been of little avail without the inherent vitality of the subject. Mrs. Fisher, who so summarily dismisses the classical, Public-school story, recognises this. *Intent Upon Reading* says: *Children will always want school stories: their appeal is universal.*

Practically the sole point in question, then, is whether the profound social changes of the last quarter of a century have destroyed the appeal of the school story as we, and Frank Richards and his colleagues, believed it best handled. As Mrs. Fisher is convinced that they have, what pointer has she to offer for the future?

E. W. Hildick has given a good shake to the drooping form of the boys' school story. Jim Starling is certainly a pleasant change from the usual straw-hatted hero, just as Cement Street Secondary Modern School for Boys in the town of Smogbury is a pleasant change from the ancient walls of St. Boniface. The novelty of Hildick's setting and of his working-class characters, etc., etc., etc.

Novelty? Well, well! In 1907, Frank Richards tried to establish Jack Stanhope, a Board School boy, in *The Vanguard*

and received so little encouragement that he reverted to the usual form in that paper. I had a vague idea that I read such stories in some comic or other, and on consulting my good friend Gerry Allison, who is so much better versed in comics than I, he kindly lent me a substantial batch of books and papers to supplement my own of the period. Among them was a complete run of *The School Bell*.

THIS FAMOUS STORY by H. L. Garrish first appeared in *Chips*. The A. P. did not think much of the fiction in their comics, and when they did try reprinting in *The Wonder Library* in 1915, the public indicated its similar disinterest by letting the series collapse at Number 14, notwithstanding that it contained such literal long-runners as E. Newton Bungalow's Red Rovers, who chased a football through *Comic Cuts* for thirty years.

This total of 14 seems even more meagre when compared with the memorable 1488 of *The Boys' Friend Library*. *The School Bell* was exceptional. It was reprinted twice, first in the 1920 *Young Britain* (as *Just Boys and Girls*, by "Jack Fordwich") and again in 1927 when it was practically the sole support of the

decrepit old age of *The Boys' Friend*.

Gerry said: "This story is the most evocative of my own boyhood I have ever read. We had a confectioner's shop which was almost a replica of that run by Mrs. Tidy. Our 'gang' would congregate round the brightly-lit window—in those days we kept open till late at night—and our fun and games were very similar to those of Joe Peters. I think you will enjoy the story."

I did, and I have to share his opinion of its memory-rousing qualities. Bernard Street School for Boys, Girls, and Infants is at times almost painfully reminiscent of that school where I entered public life under the delightful and, unfortunately, only too-descriptive label of a "Mixed Infant." (In mind, not sex!) Here are no missing heirs; trips to China and the South Seas are not even dreamed of, and one of Gussy's fivers would have kept Mrs. Peters and Joe for more than a month. It kept carrying my mind back to people and places I have not seen or thought of for over forty years. I could fit a face to every name, and see every brick in my mind's eye.

The refreshment room at Mrs. Tidy's particularly reminded me of Dave Williams' Ice Cream and Hot Drink Emporium. We

took a dubious ease on wooden benches at oilcloth-covered tables, surrounded by fly-blown mirrors advertising Rowntree's Elect Cocoa and Fry's Five Boys Chocolate, and Dave's coffee came, a very small teaspoonful at a time, out of a Camp Coffee Essence bottle. It cost 2d a cup, and it was quite impossible to tell by sight, smell, or taste whether you were drinking coffee or weak ox-tail soup. For reasons of both taste and economy, I preferred hot peppermint at a penny a glass. At that price there was no need to suffer from wind, and I believe I swilled enough of the stuff to ensure that I never shall.

Poor old Dave. His eyes would have bulged alarmingly at the sight of a modern Espresso bar, and the mere thought of working lads paying 9d for a cup of coffee-flavoured froth would have hurled him into a delirium.

It was probably *The School Bell's* Black Hand Gang who were responsible for a craze for daubing people's faces with soot, a dirty game in which I was both sooter and sootee. The trick was to do it undetected during general horseplay, when it led to some quite comical results. I recall my mother's horror when she came across me playing in the street, blissfully unaware

that some Black-Hander had turned me piebald.

SO THE STORY goes on, stirring up long-submerged memories, but while it is all very well for a couple of greying codgers to wax sentimentally enthusiastic about the tale, what was the response of Joe's contemporaries, attending reasonable facsimiles of Bernard Street School? It must have been lukewarm, or, in such an imitative world, *The School Bell* would have started a wave of similar stories and not remained an isolated and forlorn essay in realism.

We know that boys will identify themselves for months or years on end with a Wharton, a Merry, or a Vernon-Smith, but despite the current vogue of kitchen-sink drama and novels I shall take some convincing that boys want to read continually about themselves as themselves.

The odd thing about this is, while I had often seen references to *The School Bell*, I had absolutely no recollection of having read it. Before many pages, it dawned on me that I had and, in fact, it must have been the first "realistic" school story that I did read.

Similarly, I had long been under the impression that I originally met Harry Wharton and

Co. in the first issue of *The Greyfriars Herald* in 1915. Not so! From Gerry's *Chuckles*, I see that I read of them a year earlier, and in the unusual role of playing second-fiddle to Dick Trumper, Wickers, and Grahame of Courtfield County Council School.

Frank Richards always claimed reality for his tales, although not *grim* reality. He told George Orwell: "Happiness is the best preparation for misery, if misery must come," and his work reflected this view. The Courtfield stories were not like Caledonia, stern and wild, but they were at least about working-class lads, and Richards laboured vainly for forty weeks to establish the characters.

Alas for working-class solidarity! Here we have Trumper and Co. in *Chuckles* boosting proletarian morale by taking the shine out of them there plutocrats at the Public school, and the ungrateful proletariat preferred to spend its pennies on *The Magnet* and read about how Greyfriars squashed Trumper and Co.

AND NOW we have Cement Street being touted as the way forward. Ah, well! Excuse me if I push past you to the exit. This was where I came in.

THE END

A Comp's Problem

ONE OF THE THINGS that bother a compositor—or should—is finding that the word which begins, or ends, one line is repeated in the same position in the next line. When he finds the same thing happening in the third line he is—or should be—just a bit dismayed.

There may be nothing really wrong with it, but it doesn't look right. When it happens in three lines, a conscientious comp who takes some pride in his work will look for a way to make a change.

If he is setting something he himself wrote, making a change may be easy or it may not. But it should be easier than when he is setting something written by someone who is four thousand miles away.

I wonder how the compositor in the Amalgamated Press printing works felt, back in 1920, when he found that in setting a 12-line paragraph he had seven of the lines ending with "the"—and six of them in sequence! (Editorial, *Magnet* Number 662.)

Operating a Linotype, he may not have noticed it, but surely the proofreader did. It seems that he did nothing about it; I wouldn't be writing this if he had done something. +

CHUMS: A PENNY WELL SPENT!

By ALVIN FICK

WHEN I promised—or threatened—might be a more appropriate word—to write an article on *Chums* for the Editor of *The Story Paper Collector*, I was perplexed about a method of approaching the vast adventure-land of prose represented by my three bound volumes of that fine old paper.

Its long successful run is indicative of the acumen with which *Chums* was edited. One need not strain his cranium unduly to find a word to convey the flavor of a year's run of this long-time favorite. And it is the same word which I trust will keynote this rambling report of an old friend revisited. For the essence of *Chums* is variety.

"Something for everybody" is a vital target for the editors laboring behind the scenes of any publication designed to appeal to a general market. When this is applied to a boys' paper it becomes doubly important, for boys have notoriously insatiable appetites for all sorts of things. They have not become jaded by life. An essential part of boyhood is an all-encompassing

curiosity and an adventurous spirit. To exploit these characteristics the editors of *Chums* diligently applied themselves.

Let us look at a typical issue of *Chums*—and then perhaps bemoan the fact it is no longer with us.

OPENING MY oldest volume at random I come to Number 658 for April 19th, 1905. The front cover depicts in a snowy woods scene an imperiled lad who has lost his balance and is falling backward under the attack of six wolves. A companion levels his rifle in the background. The top of the page announces "New Serial and a Free Wheel Bicycle This Week."

The long lead story, complete in this issue, is *The Scalp Belt of "Black Bear"* by L. J. Beeston. It is an exciting tale of Indian fighting at the head waters of the Missouri River, and is subtitled *Pierre's Ruse to Save the Settlement*. Could you read this random part and resist reading the rest of the story?

The Cree was Black Bear, whose belt was adorned with nineteen scalps. He was a little too eager to secure the coveted twentieth. His lunge fell short by a couple of inches. Before he could recover his balance Ronald had leaped forward, and exerting all his strength he

plunged his own weapon into the painted throat.

An awful scream rang through the woods as *Black Bear*, hurt to the death, fell backward upon the snow. It was answered by a score of yells.

"Now for it!" gasped Ronald.

Away he went, running as fast as he could upon the soft surface. Suddenly three Indians appeared in his path. He turned off. Another Indian rose before him. He turned again, and, acting in a frenzy of despair, leaped high at the branch of a great tree. His aim was sure. He drew himself up and commenced to climb, face downward, toward the trunk of the tree.

Had he been observed? Or had that sudden spring saved him?

Next in order is a page devoted to contest news, some short humorous items, and a department titled *On the Watch Tower*. From the latter I can not resist quoting one of its typical brief entries:

—All With Red Locks. Of four small boys who recently appeared at a London police-court to answer a charge of stealing wood, it was noticed that each had red hair. The coincidence did not save them from the birch.

Beware of redheads!

"'E were drawed alive out of 'is nay-tive sea, and my 'ands drawed 'im."

Thus begins *Decoyed Across the Seas*, Chapter I of a new serial by Robert Overton, a story of the sea and Australia. Inset in one of its columns is a photo of Lord Avebury, one of a long line in "Chums" Portrait Gallery.

OTHER SHORT ITEMS in issue 658 include *More Stories of Japanese Bravery*; a department, *Five Minutes With the Famous*; another page with cartoons and fillers; a "Chums" Own Budget page with *That Tube of Bottled Earthquake* (this is an exciting story about nitroglycerin and drilling for oil in Pennsylvania); "*Old and Ugly*"; *Scapegraces* (conclusion of a *School Yarn of the Upper Fourth*); *Training a Circus Rider*; *Charged by Seal-Killers*; some puzzles; a department, *The Editor to His Chums*.

Next we have an article illustrated by photos titled *A Visit to the Bluecoat School*, followed by a humorous story in *The Troubles of Tutt, Bunny, and Quipp* series.

More? Yes, more! There remains an installment of a "school yarn of danger and treachery," this being *Tom Durncombe's Peril* by H. Barrow-North. Need one add that the artists added immeasurably to a boy's pleasure with their illustrations? And there still remains the advertising to tempt and tantalize:

books, bikes, candy (tuck?!), guns, stamps, cameras, and steam engines!

Whew! Small wonder someone once labeled *Chums* a warm swamp of prose.

Although in quality of paper

and printing my 1905 volume of *Chums* is not up to the standard of the 1902 *Boy's Own Annual* in my collection, it can hold its own in any company when judged in the light of high adventure reading.

HERBERT STRANG'S ANNUAL

By RON GALLOWAY

BYOND QUESTION, and particularly during the very early years of this century, *Herbert Strang's Annual* was a boys' publication of an extremely high standard. It was an Annual in the true sense of the word, being published only at the festive season, as distinct from *Boy's Own Paper*, *The Captain*, and *Chums*, which consisted of 52 weekly or 12 monthly parts bound together in a beautiful and ornate stiff cover.

Its contributors were all of top calibre, as is evidenced by such writers as John Aston, Leslie Beresford, Desmond Coke, Charles Gilson, John S. Martin, and Walter Rhoades. In each volume there were a number of striking coloured plates and profuse black and white illustra-

tions by C. E. Brock, Christopher Clarke, Cyrus Cuneo, Howard Elcock, Frank Mason, T. H. Robinson, H. Shindler, and other artists. A full-length yarn was always contributed by the maestro himself, Herbert Strang.

The year of publication could always be identified by Roman numerals on the inside cover whilst publication was carried on by Hodder and Stoughton, but this helpful asset appeared to be dropped when the Oxford Press took over publication, probably in 1915 and most certainly in 1916.

As I write, I have the *Annual* for 1912 before me, still in a remarkable state of preservation in spite of the passing of more than fifty years. Some of this may be due to the fact that it is an especially valued treasure, a Christmas gift from much-loved parents.

Walter Rhoades — a school writer who does not, in my

opinion, occupy as large a niche in the hall of fame as he justly deserves — contributed a little gem of a school story, although the action takes place without the school precincts, entitled *Jimmy Nobody*. C. E. Brock, incidentally, illustrated this story beautifully in both colour and black and white. As the title implies, the yarn centres around Jimmy, whose real name is Norbury, which, with typical school-boy candour, his chums soon translated into Nobody.

Jimmy appears to have been of a quiet, unassuming disposition and was remarkable for not being a success at anything, at least until something happened to prove otherwise. Jimmy was always to be found in the company of another boy, named Sefton, who was of the pushing, "get things done" type, and as such a complete foil to the younger lad.

JIMMY AND SEFTON were holidaying during the summer at a quiet Cornish coast resort when they met two other lads from their school. The holiday simply raced along with Sefton's dynamic organisation of fun and games on the sands.

Shortly before the end of the holidays Sefton, who had had the misfortune to injure a hand, heard of a cave a few miles

further down the coast, and it was decided that it should be explored the following day. After breakfast the boys, having filled a picnic basket, sped off on their cycles and soon arrived at the spot in glorious sunshine.

A friendly farmer's wife allowed them to park their cycles and told one of the hands to point out a precarious descent down the 400-foot cliffs to the sands, where they safely arrived after much slipping and sliding. The cave was voted an interesting show, and then healthy appetites began to suggest that inroads should be made on the contents of the luncheon basket. Some little way from the beach, seawards, a large rock was seen, about thirty feet high with a saucer-like depression at the top. This suggested itself as an ideal spot to have lunch and while away the afternoon yarning.

The lads were soon ensconced and tucking away into sandwiches and hot coffee. The sun beat down warmly, and the exercise of the morning and the meal had a soporific effect, so much so that the passage of time was lost.

Quite suddenly Sefton, who had been unashamedly asleep, imagined that the sea was making a lot more noise than it had done, and on leaping to the parapet of the depression he

was horrified to find that a seething mass of white-capped waves lay between them and the beach. Worse still, he remembered the farmer's wife saying something about today's spring tide being higher than normal.

Will they be seen from the cliff top, or will their worst experience be a lonely and hungry night until the tide again recedes? The lads notice that Sefton is unusually thoughtful and is interested in some bunches of seaweed growing just inside the crater. This seems to be damp instead of dry, and the horrid truth is borne in upon them that at full tide the top is under water and that if they are not rescued they will eventually be washed off.

Sefton considers making an effort to swim the gap, even with his game wrist, but Jimmy forestalls him by climbing down the rock face and, after awaiting a suitable opportunity, diving into the boiling surf. He proves a capital swimmer, much to his friends' surprise, and after some trouble and manoeuvring is cast against a jutting shelf of rock, from where he can make his way ashore for help.

They see, however, that he has been injured, because blood is flowing down his face, but they do not know until afterwards that in being flung against

the rock he had also two ribs broken.

To what the edge of the anxiety of the three left on the rock, up which the incoming tide is creeping remorselessly, a thick sea mist springs up apparently from nowhere and shuts off visibility both from the shore and seawards.

However, just as the sea is beginning to lap over the edge of the crater and they realise they have no choice but to dive into the maelstrom, a hail comes from the shore and out of the mist snakes a line which Sefton firmly knots to a jutting rock. He sends the youngest member of the party along the rope, hand over hand, often more in the sea than out of it, until a coastguard grips his collar and hauls him to safety.

All are safely brought over, and when they reach the farmhouse it is to find Jimmy—now a hero—lying in bed in bandages. No-one calls him Jimmy. Nobody any more. Somehow it hardly fits.

WALTER RHOADES contributed another grand yarn, called *The Slacker*, a sculling story, towards the end of the Annual. Captain Charles Gilson's effort, as may be expected, deals with Army life and is called *The Drums of the Twenty-*

fourth. The events surrounding Isandhlwana and Rorke's Drift in the Zulu War are thrillingly narrated, Drummer Boys Mockett and Way covering themselves with glory.

A. L. Haydon, who later became Editor of *B. O. P.*, served up an interesting article about the work of the Canadian R.N.W.M.P., while R.I. Lusignan graphically described a day in a midshipman's life. Stacey Blake had a racy yarn called *An Arctic Bonanza*, the treasure sought being mammoth ivory.

John Aston re-lived the great events of exactly one hundred years before, in Napoleon's disastrous march upon and retreat from Moscow. Fiction is further served by other grand yarns: Desmond Coke's *Rule 16: A Story of Wyston School*, J. S. Martin's *The Mammoth Tooth*, George Atwater's *Jim Brewer's Adventure*, Basil Watt's *The Fire Doll*, and Leslie Beresford's *The One Eye of Narain Khan*.

Finally, there is Mr. Strang's own contribution, *The Castle in the Lake*, an extra long story of the adventures of Christopher Rudd, Elizabethan soldier of fortune.

Interesting scientific articles were written by Claude Graham-White and Henry Harper, *War in the Air*; Captain Matthew, *Coast Defence*; Rev. J. R. How-

den, *Problems of Winter Travel*; Arthur Cooke, *The Goodwins and "The Gull"*; I. Owen, *The Motive Power of the Future*; Captain Matthew, *The Torpedo*; and Frank Mason, *Plimsoll's Eye*. A. G. Johnson wrote interestingly on *The Greek Games of Old*, and Dr. Sphinx propounded a number of interesting scientific experiments.

Altogether, a Christmas "feast" calculated to satisfy any healthy British boy.



Jack Harkaway?---We Prefer Bob Cherry!

EACH PART of Tom Hopper-ton's *The Lower Branches* has been read with enjoyment and found most interesting, especially Part 5, which dealt with Sidney Drew's high-spirited boys of Calcroft School.

We like to read about a boy with high spirits. Bob Cherry is one of that happy breed. Cheerful and genuine, perhaps a little awkward and clumsy, sometimes a little too virile and active for those who come into contact with him, his stentorian voice and happy nature permeate the pages of *The Magnet* like a crisp spring morning.

Bob's boundless vitality and whole-hearted capacity for the

schoolboy jape lacks any tinge of meanness and we are never left with the uncomfortable feeling that his "victim" has really been hurt, or that an unfair advantage has been taken.

In these days a certain type of youth gives full rein to his high spirits for what he terms "a giggle" or "kicks." The form and extent of these activities purely for a giggle are rarely the innocent and harmless surplus energy of a healthy mind and body, such as is Bob Cherry's case, but a much more degrading and psychopathic element, and exists mainly in the world of the lout and hoodlum.

There was one schoolboy hero who, in his day, was as much beloved as Bob Cherry was—and is—in ours. Jack Harkaway was his name, and his high spirits were indulged to the full in an age when such healthy activities were usually met with condign punishment, at a time when punishment was really carried out with a viciousness unheard of in the schools of today.

Let us consider just one or two aspects of this one-time popular schoolboy hero, culled from Edwin J. Brett's publication, *Jack Harkaway's Schooldays*.

Jack, like most popular schoolboy heroes, was an all round sportsman, although not always as modest about his attainments

as popular heroes are supposed to be.

A grand boxer (bare-knuckle style), he stood up to, and succoured the weak in their struggle against, the eternal bully. Tale-bearing and sneaking were no part of his nature, and much trouble did these virtues bring him. What faults he had were mainly part and parcel of his times, when little condemnation was given to the idea of a schoolboy drinking. The youthful reader apparently never recoiled in horror, feigned or otherwise, when Jack Harkaway on one occasion not only drank himself under the table, but indulged in a form of high spirits (of which we shall proceed with little further ado to give a faithful example) never connected with Bob Cherry.

WHEN WE ARE first introduced to Jack he is still living with his adoptive parents, Mr. and Mrs. Scratchley. It is Mrs. Scratchley who first suggests to her lord and master that Jack should be sent away to a school capable of keeping some control on his wild propensities.

Jack's latest prank, the culminating point of a series of senseless japes, had brought Mrs. Scratchley to a point where she could stand no more. Jack's

latest had been to "half-poodle" her favourite cat. The process of "half-poodling" consisted of a cat, a pair of scissors, and the cutting of "all the fur close to the skin, legs, tail and all," and leaving a fluffiness "about the head and shoulders, and shorn like a lamb behind."

Mrs. Scratchley remarks at one stage that she hates the sight of the boy. It is quite possible that the youthful reader wondered why.

So Jack is sent away to Pomona House School, and there is the occasion when he and his new-found friend Harvey find themselves in a country lane after having "dished" some boys of a neighbouring rival school. Harvey is thrilled with this confident new boy who is obviously a boy of spirit and leader of men.

"What a fellow you are!" observed Harvey, lost in admiration.

"Wait till I develop. I'll show you some fun before I've been here long. Do you see that bird?" said Jack, pointing to a chaffinch in the hedge.

"Yes."

"What's the odds I don't pick him off?"

"Ten to one," said Harvey.

"All right, I'll take you; ten to one I don't knock him off his perch."

He picked up a small round stone.

"Now for it," said Jack. He let fly; and the bird fluttered its wings, and flew off just as Jack hurled the missile at it.

"Missed, by George!" he exclaimed, in a tone of disappointment.

Yes! We prefer Bob Cherry!

—MAURICE KUTNER

"Sidney Drew"

I CAN CONFIRM Tom Hopper-ton's remarks (S.P.C. Number 87, *The Lower Branches*) that "Sidney Drew" had a very prolific output. He certainly wrote far more stories than C.M. Down had, probably, believed. Editors in the earlier days at The Amalgamated Press had what were called, in the words of a former Editor of *Union Jack*, "water-tight compartments," in that they did not co-operate with the other editors of boys' papers as they should have done with regard to authors (i.e., Charles Hamilton and the papers he wrote for).

Sidney Drew wrote for the following papers, at least: *Marvel*, *Dreadnought*, *Popular*, *Detective Library*, *Cheer Boys Cheer*, *Boys' Herald*, *Boys' Friend*, *Magnet*, *Gem*, *Sexton Blake Library*, *Pluck*, *Champion*, and *Union Jack*. He

very probably had other "irons in the fire" as well. "Dorothy Drew" and "Maude Drew" were almost certainly pen-names used by him in girls' papers.

As already well-known, Drew wrote all his copy in small, round, neat, almost microscopic handwriting. An editor friend, who remembers accepting his stories, had to take the manuscripts home for his wife to read, as his eyes were not all that good!

Another memory of this well-known author was his squeaky boots. It has been said that an editor could always know of the approach of Sidney Drew by his loud squeak. He dressed in an old-fashioned manner, and had a slight stutter.

There is no record as to when he ceased to write stories. Reprints of his tales were published long after his alleged departure from this life.

—W. O. G. LOFTS

April 14th, 1964.

A Cap That Didn't Fit!

To a more-recent collector a copy of School Cap, that ill-fated school story paper of more than ten years ago, may come as a surprise. His reaction to it might be of interest to

those who knew School Cap when it was being issued. Here are the reactions of one such collector.

SCHOOL CAPS have seldom been popular with carefree college boys. In New Zealand attempts have been made at various times to have them abolished as part of college dress, but these have so far failed in the majority of the schools.

New Zealand college lads, even hefty 18-year-olds, all wear shorts as part of their school uniform.* A poll taken among them at the big Hutt Valley High School showed that the boys preferred "shorts" to "longs." I am willing to wager, from what lads have told me, that the elusive little college cap would be "voted out" if it was introduced as an issue for voting upon.

Through the kindness of another collector I have been introduced to a story paper that surely chose the wrong name to make itself popular with collegians particular about their headwear.

Proclaimed as "The World's Greatest School Story Magazine," *School Cap* commenced its short

*Shorts! If it were suggested to Canadian high school lads—or indeed any boys more than just old enough to walk—that they wear shorts for anything but the beach and sunbathing, or sports and gymnastics, they would say something like "You must be nuts!"—Editor.

life in September of 1953. It could have been a publication intended to fill the gap left by *The Magnet* and *The Gem* more than thirteen years earlier.

School Cap had 32 pages that were, after the first issue, somewhat larger than *Magnet* size, and it was priced at sixpence. A fortnightly, it was published by Charles Buchan's Publications, Ltd., The Strand, London.

The 20-page main story in the copy I have is titled *Kick Me Out I'm Crackers*, written by Basil Storey, and concerns Bats Belfry, "world's craziest schoolboy," and the lads of Rockcliffe School.

Caps are conspicuous in nearly all the illustrations. On page 12 one character is shown wearing his cap in class. There are pictures of caps hanging on hooks, others of boys' cap-clad heads, and of masters with mortar-boarded domes.

Besides the long school story there is an "amazing serial" by Clive Benton titled *Streak Storm, Space Detective*.

The Editor's Chat is written in bright, slangy style by author Basil Storey and headed *Editor Baz Wants To Be Bawled Out!*

Well, he was—or bowled out—all too soon perhaps, and little wonder, with all that emphasis on school caps. There were only ten issues. —O. W. WADHAM
Lower Hutt, New Zealand.

It Just Grewed!

THIS ISSUE of S.P.C. was begun with only the final part of *The Lower Branches* on hand—plus a few short items—and it seemed to be an opportunity to hold the pages down to 16 and save a bit on paper to offset the higher cost of printed-matter mailing. (It is up from 2¢ to 3¢.) But what happened? Contributions flowed in, two pages were added at nearly the last moment, and several pieces had to be held over for Number 89. —W. H. G.

I Wish to Purchase . . .

—*Jack Harkaway's Schooldays*, the first volume of the Harkaway series, in bound form or separate numbers.—George Sahr, 7001-31st Avenue, Kenosha, Wisconsin 53140, U. S. A.

—*Famous Fights*; I have the companion volumes, *Famous Crimes*.—Tom Langley, 57 Sandgate Road, Hall Green, Birmingham 28, England.

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