THE STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

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That Hardiest Annual Of All . .

CHATTERBOX

TO FIND a jumping-off spot for this short article we go back a long way, to *The Collectors' Digest Annual* for 1953. In it Gerry Allison has a very interesting account of *The Hardiest Annual of All*, which was about that good old "Annual" *Chatterbox*. In it we read:

In 1907 the paper had been made into a monthly instead of a weekly publication, whilst after 1916 it was issued as a Christmas Annual only.

We keep watch in secondhand bookstores for *Chatterbox* as well as for other books and have found several copies. The earliest was one for 1895 in the British edition, while we have found several of the early 1920s in the U.S.A. edition. (The latter are dated one year after the British edition.)

Now we have one which, while carrying no year-date, appears from internal evidence (a closing date for a competition: March 3rd, 1931) to be for 1930. It is Volume 63, and it might be considered a Canadian edition, for printed on the title page is:

Published for The Chatterbox Company, Ltd., London, England, by The Ryerson Press, Toronto.

The old title page design is not used, but like the copy of the 1934 edition which Gerry Allison had, there is a miniature reproduction of it.

The publisher had done with *Chatterbox* what had been done with *The Holiday Annual*: printed

it on heavier and coarser paper so that the book is half as thick again as before. Unlike the *H. A.*, the pages are no fewer than several years earlier: 316. If the thinner paper had been used, the book would be much like the earlier issues.

Looking through this volume, we saw something which reminded us of Mr. Allison's statement that monthly publication was dropped after 1916. It is a crossword competition:

Results will be announced on the cover of the May issue of "Chatterbox."

And again:

Every entry must be accompanied by a coupon (entry form) cut either from the wrapper of "Chatterbox" monthly part for December, 1930, or from the Sixty-third Volume itself (see table of Contents in the volume).

It appears that monthly publication must have been resumed for a time.

Chatterbox is the only Annual of any interest we have found in secondhand bookshops in recent years. On the day the 1930 volume was bought we saw five copies of *The Woman's Magazine* Annual for various years in the 1930s, in excellent condition—but who wants those?

—W.H.G.

Wry Humour

NUMBER 90 of *The Story Paper Collector* is, as usual, full of good things. The article, *Looking at "The Boy's Friend" of 1865*, was most interesting. Whenever I open volumes for boys and girls of the nineteenth century, the first things I go for are the "answers to correspondents" columns. The modern mind finds so much wry humour, and often heart-breaking advice, in them that those columns are "worth a guinea a box"!

—MAURICE KUTNER

Other Detectives

A FIELD which I think could be explored further: that of the private detective in boys' fiction. I enjoyed Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee in my day, but I think that more could be written about Tubby Haig and his assistant Ruggles, Dixon Hawke and Tommy Burke, Falcon Swift, and the Aldine detective, Joe Pickford. All of these gave me much pleasure, and Lee and Blake were not the only pebbles on my detective beach.

Scotland. —J. A. WARK

But who among us knows enough about the other detectives to write of them?

THEY WILL NOT RETURN!

By W. O. G. LOFTS

"NO, I'M AFRAID it's 'thumbs down' for the old type of boys' papers," said Mr. Leonard Matthews, Director of Fleetway's Juvenile Publications, in a recent T.V. programme, in which I was also privileged to appear. He was replying to the interviewer's question as to whether he would consider re-publishing such pre-war boys' papers as *The Magnet* and *The Gem*, and on this point I feel I must agree with Mr. Matthews.

This remark may seem strange, coming from such an ardent enthusiast of the old boys' papers as myself, but, as most readers know, I believe in letting hard facts speak for themselves. Although nothing would please me more than to see *The Magnet* and *The Gem* revived, on the evidence as shown in this article I must bow to the wishes of the present generation of juvenile readers. After all, boys' papers were intended to be read by boys and not (as one former editor described us) by "pedantic adults, who should not dissect and criticise stories which were written for the juvenile market."

Probably the most consistent query and biggest topic of conversation among collectors is, why Fleetway Publications do not publish these papers again. Indeed, it is probably the most consistent question contained in letters received by various Fleetway editors during past years. As you will perhaps gather, most of the correspondents were "old boys" who remembered such papers in their youth. These letter writers, although no doubt writing in good faith and with sincere beliefs, were unhappily quite ignorant of Fleetway's side of the matter.

Mainly they base the popularity of the Greyfriars and St. Jim's stories on the figure of about one thousand collectors who cherish and read these stories today. At intervals the press, T.V., and radio mention these pre-war papers and the brief publicity brings a host of nostalgic memories of Billy Bunter, Tom Merry and Co.—but whether these enthusiasts would buy and support a new paper is a totally different matter.

It would be foolish of me to say that *The Magnet* and *The Gem* were not successful in pre-war days. Both papers were money-spinners for The Amalgamated Press, as it was then. But were they all that popular and did they enjoy vast circulations, as compared with other boys' papers? Circulation figures are, of course, the private concern of the publishers, but in the circumstances I feel justified in quoting figures in order to prove my point.

CONTRARY TO BELIEF, both *The Magnet* and *The Gem*, after peak circulations fluctuating around 200,000 copies a week, dropped alarmingly in the early 1920s, mainly through the strong challenge from D. C. Thomson of Dundee, who had ventured into juvenile literature. The circulation dropped still further in the 1930s. Mr. C. M. Down, Controlling Editor of *The Magnet* and *The Gem*, told me some years ago that the declining figures were always of great concern.

When *The Gem* slumped to the danger point of only 33,000 copies a week in 1939 it was amalgamated with *The Triumph*, and certainly did not close down through paper shortage, as some believe. (One has only to look at the last issue to prove this statement.) It must be admitted that the great number of stories which were written by stand-ins for "Martin Clifford" may have lost the paper a lot of readers—though even this point is debatable. Many collectors of old boys' papers say that they enjoyed the yarns as boys without caring who wrote them!

The Magnet had a much larger weekly circulation of around 75,000 prior to being closed down through paper shortage in 1940. But *The Champion* had double this sale each week, while comics such as *Chips*, *Larks*, *Funny Wonder*, *Comic Cuts*—which were known to the trade as "Penny Blacks"—enjoyed a sale of nearly 250,000 copies each every week.

The circulation figures of the Thomson papers—*The Wizard* especially—were very high, many over the 200,000 mark. Statistics published prior to the second World War on "What Children Read" showed *The Magnet* and *The Gem* were well down on the list of popular papers, with *The Boy's Own Paper* at the foot of the ladder.

It is quite likely that my figures may still be doubted by some collectors, and if they are I can only say that they were given to me by a former Head, now retired, of the Fleetway Printing Works. He was in direct control of the number of copies of *The*

Magnet and *The Gem* produced each week and I do not think his figures can be disputed.

Mainly because of high production costs and especially the sharp rise in the cost of newsprint, it would be a sheer impossibility today to run such papers on low circulations. It is untrue to say that boys' papers are dying out. On the contrary, those published today enjoy nearly three times the circulation of those published in pre-war days.

If popularity polls conducted by editors prove that readers want picture-story features instead of written stories, then they must provide what their readers want, and I feel one must leave it to the experts to decide. You may take it from me, however, that if statistics proved that there *was* a potential money-spinning market for a new "Billy Bunter" magazine, Fleetway Publications would not hesitate to produce such a paper.

I HAVE ALWAYS thought it unfair of collectors to say that Fleetway Publications have never tried to reproduce the old school stories in order to judge readers' reactions to them. For the record, they have, since 1949, reprinted stories of four of the most famous schools in fiction and they should be given credit for those experiments.

The stories which were reprinted, and the papers in which they appeared, are:

Comet, 1949-51—Stories of Greyfriars (many original) by the genuine "Frank Richards."

Sun, 1952-53—Stories of St. Jim's, starting from the first Tom Merry tale, re-written slightly by the Editor, Alf Wallace.

Knockout, 1960-61—Stories of Rookwood.

Film Fun, 1961—Stories of St. Frank's, re-written.

Look and Learn, 1963—Stories of Greyfriars.

It may rightly be argued that many of the stories were mere travesties of the originals and to the old readers this obviously was true. But the only letters received about them were from the "old boys," criticising the "New Look" and giving suggestions as to what favourite stories they would like to see printed. The boys and girls for whom the papers were intended were simply not interested—though on the other hand the Billy Bunter comic strips which appeared in *Comet*, *Knockout*, and *Valiant* proved very popular, according to readers' letters.

It can, of course, be said that the "Billy Bunter books" must always have sold well, and still do, or Cassell & Co., Ltd., would

not still be publishing them. It is true that they are popular with children at the public libraries, but there is a vast difference between producing a bound book every six months (which I strongly suspect parents buy for their children—or to read themselves!) having a sale of perhaps 10,000 copies, and a weekly paper which needs a circulation of at least 150,000 copies to make it pay.

Another important factor, not generally considered, is that, sad to say, "Frank Richards" is no longer with us and all stories published would necessarily have to be reprints. These would in many cases have to be altered by sub-editors to comply with present-day requirements and to bring them "up to date." This, again, would not suit the "old boys," and a new "Frank Richards" would be quite out of the question. In my own opinion—and here I agree with all the Greyfriars adherants—nobody could ever pen the stories as well as Charles Hamilton.

WHAT, INDEED, has been the fate of school story papers produced since the end of *The Magnet* and *The Gem*? Several enterprising publishers have hoped to cash in on this market, but all have ended in financial failure—*School Yarn Magazine*, *School Cap*, *Mascot Series*, *Sparshott Series*, and also the *Goldhawk* and other books. With regard to the *Goldhawk* books, the writer saw hundreds of unsold copies on sale at a third of the price in Woolworth's. Another "failure" was a mystery/school paper called *Arrow*, and there were other boys' magazines moulded on the old style which died unlamented deaths.

To emphasise how reading fashions and tastes change through the years I would mention the sad fate of the latest Fleetway Publications comic, *The Big One*. This had all the old favourite comic characters which had appeared in such comics as *Film Fun*, *Radio Fun*, *Funny Wonder*, and *Knockout*—a very real attempt to bring them to the present-day juvenile reader. Following a good start the circulation dropped to such an extent that after only nineteen issues it was merged with *Buster*, its only distinction being that it has the record of the shortest run of any Fleetway or Amalgamated Press comic.

So, ON THE FACTS as presented in this article, I feel that we must face reality and accept with resignation and regret the cold, hard truth—that *The Magnet* and *The Gem* will never come back.

THE COMIC WORLD

By MAURICE KUTNER

THE SPECIAL APPEAL of the Comics of our youth was that the very young could enjoy them without being able to read. Whether one could read or not, a whole new world was discovered, the pages appeared so very large, and when new were permeated with the smell of printer's ink.

As the title-headings changed with the seasons the artists were given the opportunity to entwine and interlace the chief characters with the titles, the motifs varying from bathing belles to holly, mistletoe, and plum pudding, and from sunny seaside cavortings to snow, icicles, and church bells.

This Comic World had a language of its own. Characters rarely spoke with normal articulation; they tootled, chortled, wuffled, twittered, or warbled, except the villain who, resplendent in morning suit, shiny topper, and waxed moustache, forever gnashing his teeth, doing his dentures a bit of no good in the process, expressed himself with a continuous flow of hisses.

The young reader, we hope, soon learned the slang terms and form of language which played such a major part of this Comic World and was part and parcel of the fun. Trousers were known as reach-me-downs, shoes were tootsies or corn-cases, while a single shoe was an offside trotter-case. One's head was referred to as marble top, memoriser, or idea cabinet, bad eggs were called tired hen fruit, and the angler's art was known as worm dangling.

The reader was expected to translate into English the sentence, "There's shop-soiled doings at the intersecting avenues." He also accepted Flor de Cabbage or Havabanana as being the choicest of cigars, more suited to the top hat, spats, and ample waistline, while the lesser breed contented itself with gaspers and the fragrant Wild Woodbine. Another side issue was the use of puns which, although not exactly subtle, created comical situations such as the complications caused by mistaking steel nuts for edible nuts.

HAVING GOT OVER the picturesque language problem, if problem it was, the young reader was a fully paid up spectator of this Comic World, a

world teeming with action and incident, and could observe the passing scene which could be as exciting as a runaway horse, a mad dog, or an escaped animal from the local menagery, or as humorous as someone walking under a ladder with a pot of paint descending or, funnier still, painter and paint-pot both at one and the same time obeying the law of gravity.

The inhabitants could be observed going about their business, from the snail-like errand boys to the bad boys catapulting birds or kicking balls through windows. There were "knuts" and lady-killers, dressed in extravagant style, chimney sweeps with their sooty brushes, and builders' labourers with their long planks of wood, menaces to all in the immediate vicinity.

The parade included sandwich-board men, village idiots, whimsical waiters, homeless dogs, and office boys "employed" on the editorial staff to plague the reader with a weekly column of mis-spelling. These office boys were really fifty years ahead of their time with their "new spelling," which is at long last being seriously accepted by our modern educationists.

There were market porters with piles of baskets perched perilously on their heads, swaying with a foreboding of imminent disaster, and for the gourmand and gourmet there were pie-men, pastry-cooks (male and female) who made the most succulent steaming pies, and muffin-men advertising their wares by the strenuous ringing of hand-bells, recalling to this very day sumptuous cosy Sunday toasted teas.

OLD CLO' MEN, usually Hebrew gentlemen, did their business of sale and exchange at the street corner, crowned in the traditional manner with piles of old hats. Corduroy-trousered navvies with pickaxe or shovel graced the scene with the swaggering gait which illustrated so well the independent nature of working men, with eternal inverted clay pipes stuck out at aggressive angles above goatee beards.

Before calling a halt to this short catalogue of those on parade let us not forget the bill-posters, their paste often causing as much calamity as the decorator's pot of paint, the main difference being that paste was, in the words of our modern

politicians and generals, "the cleaner deterrent."

There were certain benighted souls who actually fell asleep in broad daylight, and not always was a secluded spot chosen for this pastime. A dust-bin or an unoccupied front door step would suit the purpose. The depth and sweetness of this mid-day cat-nap would be indicated by the traditional repetition of the letter Z, or more succinctly SNORE, or a saw cutting through a log of wood would be depicted, like a halo, above the sleeper's head. As the "forty-winker" may have been a wrong-doer, a pie-pincher or a poultry-pilferer, this stragetem was forced upon him by the script-writer, enabling the pursuer to catch up. A literal case of caught napping.

READY-MADE SOURCES of supply in the search for new characters were the popular variety artists and film stars. Being household names, and with many youthful fans among the readers, the Comics gave them due prominence, a few periodicals even being devoted entirely to their nimble, merry foolery.

In days when the sun never set on the British Empire the inhabitant of the Comic World was little loath to call a spade a spade and free speech was one's right even at the risk of causing mental pain to one's neighbour. So picaninnies were patronisingly called "little nigs," while adult coloured gentlemen were just plain "niggers" who, of course, abounded on South Sea isles or in Darkest Africa.

Resplendent in war paint, spears, and assegais, they were the stage back-cloth, as it were, to the activities of white explorers whose life-expectancy lasted from week to week. Hungry lions and tigers licked their anticipatory chops and put our white brethren to the chase and dire peril fortnightly, while big chief Bumbumba, already dressed in anticipation for dinner in formal dress of battered top hat, spats, and bare midriff, and his clan of spear-shakers (all being very partial to white meat) had our now whiter than white brethren cooking away merrily in a huge pot every alternate week. Those who carried the white man's burden lived to cook another day—but only just!

Comic situations were many and varied but pretty elementary, rangingfrom the time-honoured one of slipping on a banana

skin to being blown sky-high by a barrel of gunpowder, from umbrellas being blown inside out at gusty corners to their being given a rise in life by becoming attached to a moving crane-hook.

Hats being blown and chased along a windy street with the attendant dangers and complications were as funny to the young reader as entanglement with a newly-tarred road surface. A removed manhole cover and the sudden disappearance from human ken of the unsuspecting promenader, an angry swarm of bees chasing the object of their disaffection, or the sight of an eccentric old gentleman fishing down a drain, were all delightful.

ON A HIGHER PLANE was the game of hide and seek between the panting tailor, forever flourishing the overdue and unpaid account, and the elusive, well-dressed but impecunious, account-dodger.

There were moments of pathos, too. The pathetic belief in hair restorer for bald heads was as sorrowful as the inability to pay the rent. The awful spectre of the broker's man loomed large indeed.

Nothing was impossible. Simple elastic braces could be used for catapulting enormous weights to unbelievable distances. If no braces were available, trees could easily be bent (by even the smallest child) to serve the purpose. Ordinary penny balloons could lift heavy loads to such heights that one wonders whether the cumbersome air liners of our modern world need ever have been invented.

There were happy events, such as the gift of a fistful of pound notes by a grateful donor for being saved physically from fire or flood, or from the indignity of having his watch and chain lifted by the ubiquitous footpad. Sometimes the rescuer would be given the full civic V. I. P. treatment, headed by the Mayor in full regalia of office, and a great feast (at the cost of the local rate-payer) as the main attraction.

The female sex reacted differently to being "saved." In the case of a winsome wench being saved from a terrifying experience in a sinking boat there was no doling out of money by the fistful; a dimpled smile or two, but nary a red cent. Instead, and perhaps more compensatory, the last picture usually showed a romantic scene of Winsome Winnie and our hero whispering sweet nothings

in splendid isolation by the light of a full moon.

FOOD, OR RATHER the absence of it, was the great leveller, as it always has been in the world of reality. Faced with this problem the various characters found their solutions each according to his ingenuity, opportunity, and native wit. In this respect the policeman was the more fortunate and had fewer problems. The most luscious pies were presented to him frequently as of right by the cook who resided on his beat, a culinary female whose heart missed a beat at the very sound of his ponderous flat feet.

The fortunate object of her more pleasant dreams waddled around the neighborhood, notebook and pencil at the ready, a keen eye alert for the pillar-box pilferer or chicken-lifter, or the appearance of the already-mentioned pie. Nearly always he had the natural talent of being able to make a noise like a real policeman when making an arrest, thereby instantly turning into a craven the most violent thug.

Handcuffs would suddenly appear from nowhere, the cop shop often being conveniently just around the corner with the Inspector of Police in person waiting upon the front step to welcome our hero captor and his unwilling prize. Sometimes a bulging canvas bag marked REWARD would figure prominently in these proceedings.

At one time or another a mistake was made. The policeman would on an off day inadvertently aid the burglar, or would approach the criminal fleeing with the loot and with "Here, you dropped this!" offer a diamond scarf-pin to the escaping felon. Despite these human failings the cook never failed to pass the steaming pie through the window at the appointed time. Oft had our hero cause to mumble through dentures busily chomping pastry, "'S'nice cook, 's'nice pie!"

Apparently these were the days before the population explosion. It has already been mentioned that one could have a quiet, or loud, snooze in perfect seclusion in the High Street. It was also possible, in broad daylight, for a rough-looking, hoop-jerseyed cove, fully accoutred with mask, cudgel, jemmy, lantern, and large sack plainly marked SWAG, to climb nimbly in and out of open windows, or bludgeon a watch and chain from a hapless victim, with

hardly anyone in the vicinity to say him nay. The Wild West of the New World had fewer open spaces!

PERHAPS THE MOST widely known and most popular characters were the tramps. There was a humanity, benevolence, and pathos about the tramp which endeared him to most hearts. He was a purloiner of the lonely pie cooling on the window-sill, although his style was often cramped by such obstacles as a chained-up, snarling, ferocious watch-dog whose chain, unfortunately, was long enough to follow our needy and hungry friend to the next county. Often the object of the tramp's affections had been placed on the sill of an upper window—and no ladder in sight!

His powers of improvisation in overcoming such problems were worthy of our admiration. Like a certain fictional schoolboy character (who shall be nameless) he suffered from the perpetual plight of having had nothing to eat between meals, a deficiency which sharpened his cunning. To snaffle a food parcel or a rabbit in transit ("stew for supper!") was as much a part of his day as rummaging through a dust-bin.

The aroma of a good cigar, or even a mere stub of one, drew him like a magnet, and he would follow a cigar smoker hopefully for miles if need be, although certain complications arose when two tramps with similar tastes in the fragrant Flor de Stinko followed the same cigar smoker or spotted the same discarded stub.

On occasions it was not a question of "nothing to eat between meals"; there just were no meals to eat between! It was then that the pangs in the empty bread-basket would cause the tramp to cast a speculative eye around for a spot of honest toil—and more credit him! For such jobs as wood-chopping or bill-posting or snow-clearing to earn a nimble "bob" could be very back-breaking to a gentleman of uncertain years, normally more used to having his feet up on the park bench, pleasantly whiling away the time reading the financial page of a discarded paper.

It is said that the memories of childhood remain sharper in focus than those of any other period of our lives. If this be true, our deepest thanks are due to the powers-that-be for having ordered it so, enabling us still to enjoy the variety and quaintness of our long-standing friends of the Comic World. +

THE NOVELS OF FRANK NORRIS

By HENRY ADAMS PUCKRIN

THE SAYING, "Those whom the gods love, die young," trite though it may be, nevertheless has a particular application to Frank Norris. His death in 1902 at the early age of 32 robbed the United States of an author who, had he lived to a more advanced age, would no doubt have been one of the great figures of American literature. With this in mind, the writer will endeavour to do justice to the memory of Mr. Norris in a short article which may induce those who read it to take an interest in any of his stories they may happen to come upon.

Frank Norris was typical of the American "pep and punch," "guts and gusto" school of writing. Powerful descriptive narration, a scholarly knowledge of the world, and a sound understanding of men and affairs, produced a series of novels which will survive the test of time.

Like many another literary aspirant, Frank Norris began his career by studying in Paris, commencing with art which he soon forsook for writing. A perusal of his stories shows how thoroughly he assimilated the style of the great French writers of the later nineteenth century and to this, no doubt, he owed his masterly powers. Returning to the States, he was for a time a war correspondent in Cuba and later in South Africa, then becoming Editor of the San Francisco *Wave*.

After the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906 some of Norris's friends and admirers explored the ruins and rescued a number of his early manuscripts, thus helping to some extent to perpetuate his memory. His earlier works may be passed over, but they no doubt furnished him with material for his better-known stories.

These were a series of three novels, *The Octopus*, *The Pit*, and *The Wolf*, all dealing with the topic of the wheat crop and its effects all over the world.

THE OCTOPUS deals with the growth of the new crop and the struggles of the farmers with the great combines, including of course the railroads. This story has the force of a pitiless Greek Tragedy. The futile efforts of a small but determined band of wheat farmers to secure a fair return for their labours, the self-seeking of the chief characters, the moral and physical degradation of the others,

and finally the gruesome fate of the master plotter, are enthrallingly told.

Number 2 of the trilogy, *The Pit*, is a remarkable description of life in Chicago, combined with scenes from the great building in La Salle Street. The efforts of the "Bulls" and the "Bears" to capture and manipulate the stock market to their own advantage are convincingly told. After a superhuman effort by the leading character, a ruthless businessman (but not wholly devoid of good points), his success in cornering the current wheat crop results in a terrific financial crash which, although involving himself and others in ruin, enables the wheat at length to reach the consumers, and graphically illustrates the triumph of right and justice.

The last of the series, *The Wolf*, has unfortunately never been published, but it can safely be said that it would have been the greatest of the three. Whether it ever will appear in print is impossible to say; there does not seem to be any mention of the MS. being in existence.

Another story, *Shanghaied*, was quite a new departure, showing Norris's powers of descriptive adventure-writing, together with a first-rate knowledge of practical seamanship. A story of adventure off the California coast with a buccaneering flavour, it tells of the kidnapping of Ross Wilbur, an elegant but by no means useless member of society. His transformation into a practical sailor and hardened beachcomber, the schooner's crossing of "Frisco Bar," the meeting with the derelict barquentine, and the fight with the rival crew in Monterey Bay, are all told in a manner worthy of Joseph Conrad.

IN CONCLUSION, we will refer to a previous remark concerning Frank Norris's earlier efforts. Among the MSS. recovered from the ruins of the *Wave* office were a series of powerful descriptive short stories of which *The Third Circle* was perhaps the best. It deals with the excursion of an engaged couple into the rough and dangerous "Barbary Coast" of San Francisco in the 'seventies of the last century and the disappearance of Miss Ten Eyck. Her discovery is not revealed until the last sentence, and for sheer horror equals anything written by Guy de Maupassant.

These works were published after Frank Norris's death and although they are in (it is to be hoped temporary) abeyance, will perhaps in due course re-appear and entitle him to be included in that great company of writers

Whose distant footsteps echo
Down the corridors of time.

¶ *The foregoing article by Mr. H. A. Puckrin was kept "on the shelf" far too long. It was placed there because it was not about "old boys' books," but should have been taken down and used years ago. That is right—years ago.*

¶ *A further contribution to the Robin Hood discussion was received from Mr. Puckrin when just these two pages remained unassigned, so it is fitted into them.*

"ROBIN HOOD"

AN APOLOGIA

And thus is history written.
—VOLTAIRE

THIS *mot* by one of France's wittiest writers aptly sums up the discussion which has been a feature of recent issues of *The Story Paper Collector*. Without wishing to tread over already familiar ground this writer would like the indulgence of readers to explain his views a little more fully. It was not his intention to refer to the subject again, but as he was to some extent responsible for the discussion he feels that his further views will not be out of place. He has already stated that he has no personal feeling towards anyone, so he thinks he will be on safe ground.

The subject of Robin Hood has aroused, and is arousing, interest in many quarters as to his real or fancied existence. Like other heroes of popular folklore, Robin Hood is, although dead, very far from lying down. Bearing this in mind, the writer will answer to the best of his ability the various points raised, and leave judgement to the other contributors.

The longbow, which everyone associates with Robin Hood, was one of the most ancient weapons known to man. Through the ages it increased in efficiency and in the hands of bold and fearless men, ready of hand and sure of eye, it was a weapon of terrible effect. This was shown in the Hundred Years War when the English archers won for themselves undying fame.

The heavy, cumbersome (and expensive) crossbow could not come near the longbow as a weapon. To be of any use, the crossbow had to be a weapon of opportunity. Like the cavalry charge, and later the gas attack, its success depended on everything being complete down to the last detail. Otherwise disaster followed swift and sure. (The rout of the Genoese crossbowmen is a case in point.)

Equally so, comparatively small bodies of well-trained archers showed the mail-clad knights

that a well-aimed and concerted attack could, and did, put them on an equal footing with the Infantry arm. Like the French cuirassiers at Waterloo, their heavy armour was an encumbrance, for though formidable in the saddle, when unhorsed they were as helpless as a tortoise on its back.

It must be admitted that not much is known of Friar Tuck. He was, the writer imagines, a "curtal friar" (*i.e.*: one wearing a short cassock and not belonging to any particular order). Although the times were rough and hard, and human life of little account, such characters occur in the pages of history as men of a rough but kindly disposition, ready to attend at the departure of the dying and comforting them as best they could.

Maid Marian, Robin's wife, seems to have been a woman of the "Kinder, Kirche, Kuche" type, subordinating herself to her husband and encouraging him in every possible way. The term "Maid" was one of affection and respect, as well as having its pre-marital meaning.

As for the other characters, it will be sufficient to say they were the ancestors of that sturdy English Yeoman stock which play such a great part in English history.

Mention should be made of the authors who wrote for the admirable Aldine *Robin Hood Library*. Having studied these stories carefully, the writer thinks that their numerous obiter dicta, their excellent little footnotes, their fair and impartial writing, and where possible their just description of the outlaws' opponents' good points (not many, it must be admitted), stamp them as men who had studied the subject well before committing pen to paper. The names of these writers were given in *S. P. C.* Number 22.

All this, of course, still does not answer the question of Robin Hood's actual existence. The answer must, in the last stage, depend upon the various opinions of the readers.

The writer hopes that this article has given pleasure to many and offence to none. Whether factual or fanciful, the figure of Robin Hood stands out in history and may (like the fabled stone giant of the Andes mountains) serve to point the way to further fields of historical research.

—Henry Adams Puckrin

I Will Exchange . . .

—1922 and 1933 *Holiday Annuals* for *Film Fun Annuals* or *Film Funs* of 1932-38 period.—P. R. Sugars, 9 Handford St., Derby.

THE CORNER CUPBOARD

10

Is This the Custodian of The Corner Cupboard? Well . . No— Just a Fugitive From pp.319-324!

Those Small People

HAVING DISPOSED, up there, of the question as to who the small person is not, it may be well here to dispose of the question as to who the small people in Maurice Kutner's *The Comic World* are not. They are not characters from the Comic World. We have looked after them carefully for many years, waiting for a chance to use them, and lo!—the chance came at last!

While on the subject of Mr. Kutner's article, we actually do know how to spell the word *strategem*, even though the evidence is to the contrary.

North American readers may not recognize the Comic World of Mr. Kutner's article. This is because he writes about the characters in the weekly comic papers formerly published in Britain. They were, and their successors are to this day, issued as separate weekly publications and not as supplements of the weekend newspapers as is done with the comic sections in the United States and Canada.

* * *

Edward F. Herdman's *The Boys' Friend*

THE OLD-TIME amateur journalist Edward F. Herdman quite possibly read *The Boy's Friend* magazine issued during 1864-68 and written about in *S. P. C.* Number 90. In 1873 his first amateur magazine was called *The Boys' Friend*. Mr. Herdman's collection of amateur magazines was, to 1918, the largest in Great Britain. —ARTHUR HARRIS
Penrhyn Bay, Llandudno, Wales.

MR. HARRIS sent us a copy of Number 25, Volume 3, June, 1918, of *The Scot*, published by Gavin T. McColl. In it is an article on Edward F. Herdman, written by Joseph Parks under the heading *Notable British Amateur Journalists*. Accompanying the article is a reproduction of page 1 of Mr. Herdman's *The*

Boys' Friend Number 1, December 15th, 1873, published at the age of 12½ years.

Edward F. Herdman lived a long life absorbed in amateur journalism and in collecting many things. His name can be found on contributions to Joseph Parks' *Vanity Fair* and *Collector's Miscellany*. It was his fate to come to a violent end on New Year's Eve of 1934 when he disturbed an intruder in his home.

* * *

They Will Not Return!: 2 Postscripts

I AM FULLY AWARE that since the completion of my article, *They Will Not Return* [pp. 315-318], Greyfriars stories from *The Magnet* have appeared in the *Armada* series of paperbacks. I hope they are a great success; but it must be emphasised that, as shown on their covers, they are intended for boys and girls. There is a great difference between paperbacks, selling at the most some tens of thousands of copies, and a weekly paper which needs a sale of several hundred thousands a week to make it pay.

LATER — Fleetway Publications believe there is a market for a re-issue of *Magnet Library* Number 1, but *only* as a souvenir for the thousands of now middle-aged and elderly people throughout the world who would like to see again a copy of the magazine which delighted them when they were young. There are being printed only 50,000 copies, which figure falls far below the circulation of a popular boys' and girls' paper such as *Look & Learn* — approximately 250,000 a week. It should be emphasised that this re-issue does not mean *The Magnet* will eventually be revived as a weekly publication.

— W. O. G. LOFTS

* * *

Noted by the Way

MAY, 1965: 25 years since the end of *The Magnet*.

JUNE, 1965: 50 years since the start of *The Nelson Lee Library*.

THE SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY may be ordered from Press Editorial Services, 82 Girdwood Rd., Putney, London S.W.18. Subscriptions at rate of 3/6d per copy.

I Wish To Obtain . .

— *Boys' Friend* Nos. 762, 764, 780, 1042, 1261, 1264, 1294 to 1298.— T. W. Porter, 1 Timbertree Rd., Old Hill, Staffs, England.

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