

STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS DIGEST

VOLUME 30, No. 356

AUGUST 1976



CHARLES HAMILTON
1876 - 1976

20p

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A WORD FROM THE SKIPPER



MORE ABOUT ANGELA

In their book devoted to fiction written for girls our own two authoresses, Mrs. Cadogan and Miss Craig, filled a chapter or two giving their views of the work of Angela Brazil.

But now a whole book around the Life and Work of Angela Brazil, written by Gillian Freeman (Allen Lane: £4.50) has been published. I have not read the book, but I was slightly intrigued by the review of it, by David Holloway, in the Daily Telegraph.

It seems that Miss Brazil led a blameless and entirely dull life, like most of us, and the writer of the biography has been unable to dig up any hint of scandal - or, at worst, only the mildest possibility of a gossipy piece of scandal. Which, in fact, will not bother most of us one iota if we are only interested in the careers of our childhood authors and not in their private lives or in matters that are no earthly concern of ours.

It seems to me that the most interesting bit on the personal side is that Angela's family name was pronounced like the nut - her father was a nut - and it was not until she became famous in her own field that she insisted on calling herself Brazzle.

I have no doubt that the Telegraph review is a fair one, but it is the concluding paragraph which puzzles me. It ends as follows: "We can be thankful to Miss Freeman for reviving Miss Brazil for us briefly and now we may safely hand her back to the care of Mr. Arthur Marshall who has so wittily destroyed her in his inimitable way, both on the printed page and more notably on the radio."

I hold no brief for Miss Angela Brazil, but it is obvious that she gave pleasure to thousands of schoolgirls in far off days. Why should anybody set out, no matter how inimitable the wit employed, to "destroy" somebody who made past generations happy and who still provides joyful memories for people who are reaching an age when memories are too precious to be destroyed?

PARKER PYNE

I have commented more than once on the similarity in the literary styles of Charles Hamilton and Agatha Christie. And not only because Colonel Wharton features in "Destination Unknown".

Both had favourite names with which they seemed reluctant to part. Which was curious, when names are so easy to invent.

Hamilton invented Mr. Quelch, Wingate the Head Prefect, and his friend North, for Clavering in 1906. Less than two years later, when he created Greyfriars, he again introduced Mr. Quelch, Wingate the Head Prefect, and his friend North. Whether he made the duplication purposely, it is impossible to say.

In 1934, Agatha Christie wrote "Parker Pyne Investigates",

comprising a dozen short complete stories. One could well imagine that this was a series of stories commissioned for some magazine or other, though I have no evidence at all that such was the case. The stories are slight but extremely entertaining and readable little yarns. The first half-dozen of them portray Mr. Pyne as a kind of consultant - a retired civil servant - who advertises in the personal column of "The Times" that he will make his clients happy if, for some reason or other, they are unhappy. The slim basis soon was exhausted, and the remaining six tales were a sort of detective collection.

Mr. Parker Pyne's secretary was Miss Lemon. Years later a Miss Lemon was the secretary of Hercule Poirot, though we can only guess whether the two Miss Lemons were intended to be one and the same person. On Mr. Parker Pyne's staff was Mrs. Ariadne Oliver, "the famous authoress". Years later Mrs. Oliver turned up in a number of Poirot stories, and here, without much doubt, it was meant to be the same Mrs. Oliver.

Some people think that Mrs. Oliver was an autobiographical touch of Mrs. Christie herself. Overwritten, to some extent, Mrs. Oliver nevertheless became one of the most attractive of the Christie regulars.

HORRIFIC?

A reader whose letter appeared in our "Postman Called" feature last month was 'horrified' when the editor of the Magnet in 1937 told a correspondent that Frank Richards and Martin Clifford were not one and the same man. I think our reader exaggerated a trifle. We might be irritated or amused at the statement, but hardly horrified.

Right from the start the editorial departments always upheld the myth that Richards, Clifford, and Conquest were different individuals and writing all the stories for their own papers. In fact, as many of us realised at the time, there were any amount of Richards and Cliffords, and editors purposely simplified what was an involved business. Presumably the reason for the multiplicity of pen-names was the desire to pretend that the writing staff at the A. P. was larger than it was, though they may have thought that crediting different schools to different authors made things more interesting for the reader.

Basically, I suppose it was dishonest. But more disreputable,

I think, was pretending that some famous man wrote a certain story, as in the case of kidding readers that Sir Alan Cobham wrote the first Ken King serial or that Patsy Hendren wrote "The Test Match Kid", as we mentioned last month. The famous man was paid for the use of his name, and the author was paid for the story with a bit over to allow for its being credited to somebody else. So probably they were all satisfied, and the reader may have been delighted to think that a hero was writing for him.

Such cheating was not exclusive to those days. A few years back we referred to certain stories, published in hard-back, credited to famous sportsmen whose only contribution to the work was allowing their names to be used as the authors of same - for a suitable reward.

TAILPIECE

It is one hundred years since Charles Hamilton was born. Perhaps I cannot do better than lift a few comments from my history of the Gem, written long, long ago. Others have "lifted" items from my past work so I don't see why I should not do the same. I don't think I can better what I wrote then.

"We shall never again see the Gem's type of weekly story, for the simple reason that there will never be another Charles Hamilton. It is obvious to anyone that he could have become famous in almost any literary field - that his gifts were far beyond those necessary for the class of work he was doing. He made permanent, stories which were, at the time he wrote them, considered impermanent.

"If we wonder sometimes why he did not carry his great gifts of writing to other spheres, the answer is plain. He loved the work he was doing. And, even more important, his unique talents enabled him to combine a phenomenal output with his inimitable consistency of high quality."

I might add that he gave respectability to a type of work which was, for a long time, regarded with contempt. We remember him to-day with the deepest affection and admiration, and, because of him, we also remember countless others who would have been long forgotten but for him.

In conclusion, all being well, the order form for the Pearl

Jubilee edition of Collectors' Digest Annual - its 30th birthday - will come to you with our September issue. Also, all being well, we hope to present a special Double Number of this magazine in November to mark our Pearl Jubilee. If you have any reminiscences in connection with C.D. which you think might be of interest to all and sundry, please jot them down and send them along.

Articles are always welcome, especially if they do not run to great length. Type them if you are able; if not, please write very distinctly. Ageing eyesight clouds before the type of caligraphy for which doctors' prescriptions are remarkable.

THE EDITOR

FOREVER HAMILTON:

by Mary Cadogan

So many well deserved tributes have been paid to Charles Hamilton over the years that it is difficult to add to these. However the other day I came across the following lines by the Indian poet, Tagore:

And in the beauty of friendship

Let there be laughter and sharing of pleasures ...

These words seem to sum up what Charles Hamilton - through the MAGNET, GEM and BOYS' FRIEND, the COLLECTORS' DIGEST and the OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB - has brought about for so many of us.

Thank you, Charles Hamilton.

FOR EXCHANGE: Modern Boy, Nos. 89, 135, 140, 221, 231, 258, 295. Champion: 1 (1922) 1 (1923) 2 (1930) 1 (1931) 3 (1935), Hotspur 6 (1940) Adventure 7 (1940); Rover 1 (1937); Film Fun 1 (1936) 1 (1937) 3 (1939), Wizard 2 (1937) 7 (1938) 10 (1939); School Friend Annual 1945. Adventure Annual (192- (?), contains Invisible Dick story.
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DANNY'S DIARY

AUGUST 1926

With the real Frank Richards writing the finest stories of his life and with Leonard Shields doing all the illustrations, the Magnet is far, far better than it has ever been. It has come into its own at last.

The holiday stories about Harry Wharton & Co. in India are absolutely captivating. First tale of the month is "In Perilous Seas". The Red Sea rolls calmly under the blazing sun, but there is pandemonium on the S.S. "Fanny Jones" which is carrying Hurree Singh to his native land, accompanied by his friends - and Bunter. And somehow it's a new Bunter. A more attractive Bunter than we have ever read about before.

Second of the month is "Harry Wharton & Co. in India". The chums are in a quiet bungalow, for a brief period, in the residential part of Bombay, but, while Hurree Singh is sleeping, his enemies are creeping through the night to capture him or kill him.

Next "Bound for Bhanipur". There are perils at every twist of the road as the chums set out for Hurree Singh's kingdom. Then the last yarn of the month, "In The Heart of the Himalayas", continuing this thrilling series. Billy Bunter comes across a poisonous snake in the tense opening chapters, and picks up a spanking from Colonel Wharton, before the party reaches the mysterious land of Prince Hurree Singh. One can hardly bear to wait for some more of this fine series.

The stand-up figures of cricketers have been given away every week throughout the month, and they have included H. L. Collins, the cricket captain of Australia, and Maurice Tate of Sussex.

Rudolph Valentino has died suddenly of peritonitis in New York. A real shock for people who go to the cinema - and who doesn't? He died on 23rd August, and there were startling scenes and riots at his funeral. His last film "The Son of the Shiek" has already been released. His film company is rushing out re-issues of all his films, and they are coming on in a long stream. Among those which are coming on in my town are "Cobra", "The Shiek", "The Eagle", and "Blood and Sand".

At the pictures this month we have seen Mary Pickford in "Little

Annie Rooney", Syd Chaplin in "The Man on the Box", Douglas McLean in "Introduce Me", Douglas Fairbanks in "Robin Hood", and the D. W. Griffiths production "Sally of the Sawdust" starring Carol Dempster and W. C. Fields.

In Carlisle a train crashed into a charabanc on a level-crossing and nine people were killed. And somewhere else a captive balloon ran into trouble when its basket dropped off and five people were killed.

The exciting holiday series about the St. Frank's boys, with Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi, in China, has continued in the Nelson Lee Library. First of the month was "Handforth Takes a Chance". The mysterious millionaire, Foo Chow, has the boys in his power, and Handforth makes a break for freedom. Next, "The Prisoners of Foo Chow", in which Handforth punches a tiger on the nose, and gets away with it. In "Handforth the Hostage", Handy knows where Yung Ching is hiding, but Handy refuses to pass on the information to Dr. Foo Chow. Whereon Foo Chow decides to use Chinese methods of persuasion. Last of the month, "The Legions of Foo Chow", jam-packed with exciting adventures in China. The series continues next month.

There is another new Monster Library out: "The Spendthrift of St. Frank's".

Slight earthquake shocks have been felt in different parts of Britain, though I haven't noticed any myself.

Gertrude Ederle of New York has swum the English Channel - the first woman to do so. And, best news of all, England has won the Test Match at the Oval by 289 runs - and England has won the Ashes.

The two new Schoolboys' Own Libraries are "The Schoolboy Actors" about early Greyfriars adventures, and "The Sneak of St. Jim's" who is Bartholomew Ratcliff.

There are some good plays on in London at the present time. These include "The Ghost Train" by Arnold Ridley; also "And So To Bed", a story about Pepys' Diary starring Edmund Gwenn and Yvonne Arnaud; and at the Ambassador's Theatre there is a new play by Galsworthy entitled "Escape".

The Gem started the month with "The Schoolboy Sportsmen", in which St. Jim's juniors met those Australian boys (held over from last month's final tale) in various sporting events. Might entertain those

who think that descriptions of sports meetings can make a story. However many of these have there been in the Gem in recent times?

Then a holiday series about Tom Merry and his friends and plenty others on a motor-cruiser off the coast. The titles have been "The Motor-Boat Boys", "Chums Afloat" and "The Mystery of the 'Silver Spray'".

The Popular has been as stunning as ever this month, with its cut-out models of cricketers, and its tip-top selection of stories. Still running, the story about the Rookwooders on tramp with Trotsky, along with the Dirk Power series from the Gem.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Schoolboys' Own Library No. 33, "The Schoolboy Actors", comprised three inconsequential little stories which ran consecutively in the very early Red Magnet of the Spring of 1908. The first tale of the series was complete; the other two tales were heavily pruned. A pleasant little S.O.L. In the original Magnet tale (the last of the three) Greyfriars broke up for the summer holidays on "a lovely June day". In the reprint the month was changed to August. The station for Wharton Lodge was named as Fernbridge, both in the Magnet and the S.O.L.

No. 34 "The Sneak of St. Jim's" was the series about Bartholomew Ratcliff, the housemaster's nephew. It covered four stories in the Gem of the Spring of 1919. In the S.O.L. reprint, the third story was omitted entirely. This made for poor continuity in the reprint, so the rather humdrum tale was made even more unsatisfactory than in the original. It must have been a disappointment for St. Jim's enthusiasts in 1926.)

* * * * *

NELSON LEE COLUMN

GHOSTS OF THE PAST

by R. J. Godsave

It is greatly to the credit of any weekly paper to achieve a circulation that enables it to run over a period of years. Naturally, the key figure is the author or authors, and in the case of the Nelson Lee Library - E. S. Brooks.

Through the good offices of the Club libraries one is still able to look at the Nelson Lee and other publications as a whole, which was denied to the early and original readers.

It does seem to me that being an early St. Frank's Lee reader and a reader of the same many years later has its disadvantages. The first Nelson Lee I ever read was o.s. 251, "The School on Strike"

bought by my brother. The first Nelson Lee I ever saw was o. s. No. 144, "The Lighthouse Prisoners", a copy of which appears difficult to obtain. This No. 144 was part of a transaction between my brother and the boy next door, the remainder related to a set of model electric train tracks. In the early 20's many of our favourite papers were used as a means of barter.

Although I have a fairly good memory it was the brickwork of the lighthouse on the front page of No. 144 which stuck in my memory and which I have since been able to verify as being correct.

Why the Nelson Lee had such a hold on me I cannot say, but it is a relief to know that many others were similarly tied.

Normally, in those days one would become a faithful reader for a few years, perhaps with an original collection and then pass on to other pastures, or like myself eagerly await the issue of the Monster Library which filled in some of the blanks of past numbers.

It is, therefore, extremely difficult to read the 1st and 2nd New Series and at the same time try to bring them into line with the Lees of earlier times. Although time stood for the characters, one could not forget that Nipper took a leading role years before. The later Nipper - or to make matters worse, Dick Hamilton - is at the best a shadowy copy of the Nipper the earlier readers knew.

Anyone becoming a reader for the first time in the later 1920's would not have these ghosts of the past interfering with their reading. Everything would appear normal - even Dick Hamilton.

A LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S

by Jim Cook

I have been notified of a correspondence appearing in your worthy periodical describing a Meeting in the Lecture Hall at St. Frank's.

I must point out that the writer appears to have seen a ghost when he thought he saw Kirby Keeble Parkington. This red-headed junior left St. Frank's quite a long time ago without any sweet sorrow from the rest of St. Frank's. Parkington, now back at Carlton College, together with his Red Hots, filled only a minor role in the history of St. Frank's and since they departed their short stay has been entirely forgotten.

Perhaps your correspondent also saw another ghost for I am quite sure Willy Handforth would have been non persona grata at a

meeting composed of Remove and Fifth Formers.

BLAKIANA

conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

I trust that none of you will mind reading about Christmas at this time of the year. In fact, as I typed out the copy the temperature was in the region of 90 degrees F. so I appreciated the truly delightful atmosphere of snow and icy winds. They were even better than the electric fan which I had on the table as near as possible without blowing my papers away. Of course by the time you read this in August the weather may have changed, but for myself I always like a Christmas story; the one I have just re-read is "The Sacred Sphere" in which Sexton Blake, Yvonne and Tinker travel to Canada in the depth of winter. Lovely!!!! Please do not forget those articles for the Annual.

"IT A'INT HALF HOT, MUM" or

SANTA CLAUS LAY DEAD ON THE BED

by W. Lister

I had been to watch a friend's wedding. "Why not cut through the market on your way home" I said to myself, and "have a look at the second-hand bookstall". (Not that I had anything special in mind.) So I did and by so doing I came face to face with Christmas in the middle of July.

There it was, my harbinger of the festive season, right on top of a pile of paper-backs, just waiting for me. "The Snowman Cometh" by Desmond Reid, a Mayflower paperback Sexton Blake Library 5th Series, No. 33. Ten pence and it was mine.

Now it is well known hereabouts that I am a fan of the Christmas season. When other people think I ought to be in Jersey or Majorca or Spain, or would even settle for the Lake District, I am holding on to a few days to extend my winter holiday amid the snow and ice and cold north winds. Who cares? You cannot help liking what you like no matter what others think. So it was obvious I was not going to wait until

Christmas before I started to read my latest purchase and find out what sort of a Christmas I had landed for ten pence. I soon found out that I had landed a good one. Not even the heat of July could distract me from it. I ignored the calendar. From the first page to the last it was Christmas all the way. July and its heat-wave didn't enter into it till I turned the last page. The very first page had opened the door to a Sexton Blake pre-Christmas party plus favourite guests and carol singers (children from a nearby Orphanage). From there on Christmas was well and truly launched. Before long you find yourself in the company of at least twenty Father Xmas'es or at least twenty ham-actors dressed up as Father Xmas'es, and take a good look at them for in less than an hour one of the old dears will be murdered. Sad to think of Santa Claus laying dead on a bed while the strains of "Holy Night, Silent Night" could be heard in the distance.

On such a Christmas Eve as this you find poachers crawling through the snow in search of a free Christmas dinner, be it pheasant or duck. Poachers that are likely to see too much at that time of night and thus not live to see Christmas Day. You will make the acquaintance of delightfully innocent looking choirboys complete with air-gun and pellets. There are Voodoo Snowmen, poison pen letters and a villain who comes back from the dead. Christmas at Medleigh Towers, with the snow falling steadily outside and the wind howling through the wainscoting, though inside all was warm and bright, until a footman opens the front door when cold blasts sweep inward conveying flakes of snow.

For your further entertainment you will be provided with a melting snowman which reveals a corpse stuffed inside, a corpse dead these twelve months. You will see pellets from an air-gun pierce the pants of a bogus Santa Claus.

I turned the last page. The icy winds, the falling snow, Medleigh Towers faded from my sight. Detectives, crooks, snowmen, Mts. Bardell I can no longer see. July sunshine is streaming through my window, neighbours complaining of the heat. Oh well, it was good to escape from it all for a couple of hours. I'd quite forgotten about the heatwave during my Christmas visit to Medleigh Towers. By George, it aint half hot Mum!!!

In my youth I travelled extensively around the world - economy class - by the simple expedient of reading The Union Jack and The Sexton Blake Library. In company with Blake and Tinker I sailed the seven seas and journeyed to strange lands.

Who better than G. H. Teed to guide me through the banana republics of Central America or the remote regions of Colombia and Venezuela? If I encountered that dangerous adventurer Dr. Huxton Rymer en route that was an occupational hazard. It was Teed who took me to far Cathay; who was more fitted to describe the devious schemings of the wily Oriental or to convey the atmosphere of that far-flung celestial empire?

With Cecil Hayter I followed the fortunes of Sir Richard Losely and Lobangu in the forests and swamps of Africa, battling with savage tribes and sometimes finding lost civilisations.

Then again, alongside W. Murray Graydon, I visited all the capitals of Europe, becoming acquainted with the main streets and cafes of these cities. I was with Blake in Berlin during the Great War when he masqueraded in three disguises and outwitted the Kaiser's spies; I experienced The Perils of Petrograd during the throes of the Russian revolution and traversed the frozen wastes of Siberia. It was Murray Graydon who led me once more to Africa in the wake of the two detectives and Shumpogaas, the Zulu, in the Congo and the burning desert.

Another guide, Andrew Murray, introduced me to that splendid adventurer, John Lawless, and carried me away to Persia and Egypt and the explosive republics of South America. On those journeys I caught more than one glimpse of those master-roguers, Count Ivor Carlar and Professor Kew, for whom South America was a refuge and a happy hunting-ground.

With Gregory Hill and Coutts Brisbane I visited exotic India, often on the trail of that treacherous Oriental criminal, Gunga Dass. I witnessed Hindu magic and heard the tinkle of temple bells and saw the Parsee Towers of Silence.

All this before I commenced my own travels and settled in

Australia - a continent to which G. H. Teed had already led me in his records of the vengeance of Yvonne. And still I can recapture the glamour of those earlier voyagings by picking up the old periodicals and delving into their pages; still I can re-live those glorious days of high adventure in the word-pictures and phrases of those writers of a lost era.

CRIME AND ROMANCE

Though Blake lived in a state of unwedded bliss
We can't say his romances were minimal,
Because he encountered many a miss
In his long pursuit of the criminal.

Whether in England's temperate clime
Or in some torrid tropical region,
Involved with investigation of crime
The name of the ladies was legion.

A girl from Australia headed the list,
(For Mademoiselle Yvonne revenge was sweet).
Though it does not appear she ever was kissed,
She enchanted the man from Baker Street.

She wasn't the only one to entrance
Sexton Blake in the course of his long career;
What of Roxane, Paula Dane and June Severance,
Olga Nasmyth and others that Blake held dear?

Numberless girls crossed the path of his life,
Females of all colours, creeds and nations,
But none of them (thanks be) became his wife;
It might have ended his investigations.

SOME GREEN THOUGHTS

by J. E. M.

Benny Green will probably be known to many CD readers as a broadcaster, TV personality and expert on jazz music. He is, perhaps, less well known as a cultivated and perceptive literary critic whose writings in the SPECTATOR are a delight and, in my view, deserving of publication in hard-cover form. On old favourites like Conan Doyle, W. W. Jacobs and P. G. Wodehouse he has written some most

memorable essays. Recently, he excelled himself in a review* of a new book called WRITTEN FOR CHILDREN by John Rowe Townsend (Pelican), an historical survey of children's literature.

Mr. Townsend, it would seem, is yet another member of that dreary, lofty-browed band for whom Charles Hamilton is beneath notice. I can do no better than quote from Mr. Green:

"... I remain as puzzled as ever by the refusal of scholars of children's literature to acknowledge the enormous influence over his readers of Charles Hamilton, alias Frank Richards, blithely forgetting to mention that the Magnet-Gem phenomenon appeared during the Edwardian era and flourished for the next forty years, Townsend dismisses Bunter and company in two lines, and even then only in reference to the cannibalised hard-back reprints of recent years. In his own defence, he says they 'are of no great literary merit'. But if he is to play that tune then he must show us the music. Is there great literary merit in the Grimms, in Andrew Lang's fairy anthologies, in half the best-sellers of the last fifty years? In any case, Townsend's assessment of Bunter's value is perhaps not as significant as the judgment of tens of thousands of readers who once revelled in the strength of Hamilton's characterisations and the surprising tension of his plots, if not his prose. The same reluctance to acknowledge Hamilton may be found in Margery Fisher's superlative Who's Who in Children's Books. Both Fisher and Townsend have produced indispensable guides ... A pity that neither of them has seen fit to throw old Hamilton a crumb.

It ought to be added that Townsend and Co. would not find it easy to dismiss Benny Green as a soft-centred lowbrow. Elsewhere in the review from which I have quoted, Mr. Green attacks in fine modern style a number of the most famous children's classics. In the light of some most pungent comment on certain cherished names, from the brothers Grimm to the author of ERIC OR LITTLE BY LITTLE, his defence of Hamilton is, I feel, the more significant.

* SPECTATOR dated 10 July, 1976.

WANTED: BULLSEYES. Also MAGNETS between Nos. 1 and 984 inclusive.

H. L. MARRIOTT

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIALNo. 208. ATMOSPHERE

Not so long ago I commented on the post-war Bunter book, "Billy Bunter's Christmas Party". I had this to say:

"It should have been good. There was the old, old house; there was Christmas; there was a ghost; there was a mysterious young man who, in typical Hamilton style, was not so mysterious to the reader. But somehow it all lacked atmosphere."

And, because it lacked the right atmosphere, it never rang the bell.

Yet, during the major part of his career, one of the greatest gifts that Charles Hamilton possessed was that he could create an atmosphere which caught the reader's imagination. He wrote travel series of places he had never visited, creating an atmosphere which was entirely convincing; the Old Bus series was so beautifully written that it contained all the atmosphere of lazy days on the sparkling Thames; most of all the eerie quality which pervaded a goodly number of his early thrillers. Picking only a few from this goodly number, one can name as examples "Nobody's Study" and "The Mystery of the Painted Room" from the blue Gem; "The Hidden Horror" from the red Magnet; the Rookwood kidnapping series from the 1918 Boys' Friend; and the Ravenspur Grange series from the 1929 Magnet.

One memorable tale was the 1911 Gem double-number story, "The Ghost of St. Jim's", in which a leisurely-related tale, with a believable but not very exciting plot, became a little masterpiece owing to the author's gift of pen-painting.

Even that very, very early tale "Missing", which we are now serialising - in some ways not more than a pot-boiler, yet coming alive from time to time as the gift of atmosphere peeps through. A few years later we find the crypt sequence in "Tom Merry's Concert Party" stirring the imagination in the same strange way.

In my comments on the Ravenspur Grange series since I began making such comments some thirty years ago I have always spoken very highly of that series, and defended it against those who argued against it. When I first read it I thought it a superb tale of its type, and when I

re-read it from time to time as the years cascaded by I never altered my view of it.

In recent years I have not had so much time for reading as of yore, and when I came back again to Ravenspur Grange a few months ago, I found myself less impressed with it. I found myself analysing the absurdities of the plot and the theatricality of some of the writing. It occurred to me that, with Edgar Ravenspur so anxious to inherit his uncle's wealth and title, it would have been far safer and therefore more likely that he would take a pot-shot at his uncle with a gun rather than go through the involved and very chancy procedure of installing himself as Packington at Ravenspur Grange. It also occurred to me that the blowing-up of the hunting lodge, where the secret passage ended, should not have made it impossible for a detective to find that secret passage. It only needed a handful of workmen to clear away the rubble, and the existence of the secret passage would surely have been evident to anyone who suspected in advance that it was there. Other criticisms, too, occurred to me,

Yet I was no small boy when I first read Ravenspur Grange. Those same criticisms must have been evident to me then, but they did not spoil my enjoyment of the story as they did on the later occasion.

Suddenly I understood the reason. My latest reading of Ravenspur Grange came from the Schoolboys' Own Library entitled "The House of Terror". Here, by some piece of stupidity in the editorial department, four Magnets were compressed into one S. O. L. A story which once ran to about 64 chapters was now reduced to 36 chapters. The result was massive pruning, and, in fact, the sequence introducing "Mr. Garnish" was eliminated entirely. This story which could easily have filled two S. O. L.'s (and should have done so) was cut and presented in one - and atmosphere was destroyed.

The S. O. L. was a charming little book down the years, not the least of its attractions being that it is convenient in size to take on a journey or read in bed (which, in fact, was why I read it from the S. O. L. on this latest occasion.

But many a fine story was spoiled in the S. O. L. by the drastic cutting which took place. On plenty of occasions the pruning made little difference, but the effect was disastrous in the case of the Ravenspur

Grange series, which relies so very much on its eerie atmosphere in the original. In the same way there were long periods in the Gem reprints when some of the best tales of the blue Gem were reduced to indifference by haphazard and vandalistic pruning.

As I have said before, contrivance did not matter, providing it was well-written. In the same way, melodrama and theatrical effects did not matter so long as a tale had atmosphere. Hamilton was an excellent writer and a master of atmosphere in his heyday - but his work was not proof against the vandal with the blue pencil.

* * * * *

REVIEWS

GUNMEN AT GREYFRIARS

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker: £3.90)

This is the Putnam van Duck series from the Magnet of 1936. Magnet readers had already been introduced to van Duck, the son of an American millionaire, at the close of the Brazil travel series. Now, to save him from the attention of gangsters who are anxious to kidnap him, he is transferred to the classic shades of Greyfriars but unhappily the gangsters follow him.

He has a gunman guardian who even insists on going into class in order to keep an eye on his charge.

It is not an outstanding series, and is far from being a Hamilton triumph. The incidents too often border on farce and slapstick and the American sub-characters are overdrawn.

Like almost everything in Hamiltonia, it has its moments, and parts of it provide good cheerful fun. There are eight Magnets in the volume.

THE POPPER ISLAND REBELS

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker: £4.50)

Many years earlier Rookwood had barred-out on the island in the river. Now, in nine Magnets of 1934, the theme is transferred to Greyfriars. The Remove bar themselves out on Popper's Island on behalf of, of all people, Billy Bunter, who is unjustly suspected of drenching Mr. Prout with ink. Obviously those who know both series

will compare them. The Greyfriars version is much longer and far more detailed. And, indeed, far more successful.

In some ways barring-out series are much of a muchness, and one must confess that the theme does not always improve with repetition. This one is splendidly lifted by the fact that Mr. Quelch has a good deal of sympathy with the rebel cause, and the result is some delicious barbed dialogue between Quelch and the Head and Quelch and Mr. Prout.

Altogether it is a delight. The barring-out sequences will thrill the juvenile, and the older and more intelligent reader will cherish the by-play between the masters. So there is something for everyone. A charming volume.

MISSING!

Mr. Kidd looked out of his window into the old quadrangle at St. Jim's. He stood with his hands in his pockets, a slightly worried look upon his face. The quad was bright and sunny that fine spring afternoon. The old trees were beginning to show a glimmer of green after their long wintry grime. From the football ground came the echo of shouting.

The housemaster was worried. He had felt little misgiving in sending Blake on his mission to the ruined castle. There had seemed to be no danger in the work he had to do there. But Blake had not returned, and Mr. Kidd was beginning to feel anxious about him.

He had told the boy to come straight back from the ruins. Blake had intended to do so, but, as we know, he had never left them. Time enough had elapsed now for Blake to have made the journey twice. Why had he not come back? Had he forgotten that the housemaster was awaiting his return? That was hardly possible. Yet

where was he? Had something happened to him?

That was the troublesome thought which lurked in the housemaster's mind, and refused to be dismissed. Could any accident - any disaster - have befallen Blake? What if he had encountered the gipsy?

Mr. Kidd compressed his lips and knitted his brows. He had taken the responsibility of sending Blake with the packet. It was not the thought of the responsibility that troubled him, however. It was the fear that something might have happened to Blake. He felt that he would never forgive himself if harm should have come to the boy.

He caught sight of Herries and Digby in the quadrangle. He leaned from the open window and called to them. Herries and Dig were looking disconsolate. They were wondering, too, why Blake had not returned. The time he had mentioned had long passed. They heard the house-

master's voice and looked up.

"Come into my study," said Mr. Kidd.

The chums were soon in the room. They did not fail to note the anxious shade upon the housemaster's handsome, clear-cut face.

"Have you seen Blake?" asked Mr. Kidd.

"Not for some time, sir," replied Herries.

"When did you last see him?"

"Not long after two o'clock, sir."

The housemaster's heart sank. He had had a slight hope that Blake had returned from the castle, and had been called away by some other interest, and so failed to report himself to the master. It was not likely, but it was possible. Now he had to give up the idea. If Blake had come back, Herries and Digby would have seen something of him.

"You do not know where he went, Herries?"

"No, sir. I thought..." He paused. Mr. Kidd gave him a look of inquiry. "I thought you knew, sir," said Herries. "I-I thought he was gone on a message, or something, for you."

"Yes, that is the case. He carried a message for me. But I mean, do you know whether he had any idea of going anywhere else after that while he was out?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"He has not returned," said Mr. Kidd slowly. "He should have been back more than an hour ago, allowing for all delays. That is why I asked you."

Herries and Digby exchanged looks of alarm.

"I say," ejaculated Digby, "perhaps something has happened. Poor old Blake!

He was so jolly mysterious about it that I knew he was up to something."

"He wouldn't tell us anything," added Herries. "We would have bowled him out, though, but for Figgins. Perhaps Figgins knows something about it, sir. Blake put him up to collaring us because we were going after him."

"Fetch Figgins here!"

The chief of the New House juniors received the summons to the School House master's room with some astonishment. However, he came quickly enough under Herries's convoy.

"Do you know where Blake is, Figgins?"

"No, sir; I haven't seen him since he left the school about half-past two."

"I am afraid something may have happened to him," said the housemaster gravely. "You do not know anything of his movements, then?"

"No, sir." Figgins thought he had better speak out, so he went on: "He was off somewhere, and didn't want anybody with him, so Kerr and Wynn and I scragged these hounders - I mean, we collared these two kids, sir, and that's all I know about it."

"Thank you, Figgins," said Mr. Kidd. "You may go, boys."

The juniors quitted the study. In the hall Figgins stared questioningly at the chums of Study No. 6.

"What's the row?" he asked.

"Where can Blake have got to, Kids? What can have happened to him? Has he been looking for D'Arcy?"

"I don't know," said Herries gloomily. "I hope nothing's happened. He wouldn't tell us where he was going."

"There goes Kidd!" muttered Digby.

The housemaster had come out in coat and hat. He went quickly down the steps of the School House, and strode across the quadrangle. The juniors, standing on the House steps, watched him pass out at the gates.

"Where's he off to?" muttered Digby.

"Gone to look for Blake," said Figgins confidently. "I don't see what can have happened. Wish I knew where Blake had gone to."

"You see, we don't know anything," said Digby. "Where could Kidd have sent him? It's a beastly mystery. If Blake doesn't come in, I shall ask Kidd to explain when he comes back. He's no right to keep us in the dark."

"Right-ho!" agreed Figgins. "And if Blake's missing, like poor old Adolphus, we'll hunt for him, chaps. This is getting a bit too thick!"

Figgins had been correct in guessing that the master of the School House was gone to look for Blake. Now that it was too late, the housemaster regretted having sent the junior on this errand; but he had done so for the sake of the kidnapped boy. Whatever had happened, it was something that could not be foreseen.

Mr. Kidd strode rapidly down the road, and in the footpath through the wood he broke into a run. He came out of the wood, and entered upon the path up to the hill to the ruined castle. He stopped at the thicket where the patient inspector was still on the watch. Mr. Skeet made him a sign to be cautious.

"Better take cover, sir!" he whispered. "The gipsy can't be long now. It's a couple of hours since the

packet was taken there. He can't intend to leave it lying there long in case somebody should happen to come along and collar it. Don't you think so?"

"Did you see the boy I sent here?"

"Yes; it was Blake."

"You saw him go into the ruins?"

"Yes."

"Did you see him come out again?" asked the housemaster quickly.

The inspector shook his head.

"No, he didn't come out this way."

"Then he is still there?"

"I don't suppose so," replied the inspector. "There are a dozen ways he might leave the place without passing me. I dare say he scrambled out somewhere where I didn't see him. What should he have stayed there for?"

"He has not returned to the school."

"Well, ain't it a half-holiday?"

"I gave him instructions to come straight back."

"Which don't amount to much to that imp," said the inspector. "I know him. He's the most cheeky and mischievous kid at the school, sir, and you've got some regular coughdrops there, and no mistake. He's gone off somewhere."

"I cannot think so. I fear that something has happened to him."

Mr. Skeet looked impatient.

"What can have happened, sir? We've been on the watch, and the gipsy hasn't shown up."

"Barengro may have a secret way of entering and leaving the ruins. I am convinced that he did not intend to come here openly and risk capture. He is far too cunning a rascal for that."

"Secret grandmother!" muttered the

inspector disdainfully.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing. It's all right about the boy, I'm certain of that."

"I wish I were certain," said Mr. Kidd. "I think I had better go on and look for him."

"You'll give the game away if you do, if the gipsy should come."

"I do not believe he will come openly, as I have said. In any case, I am too anxious about Blake to delay."

Mr. Kidd strode away. The inspector expostulated, but the housemaster did not stay to listen. He was growing more and more alarmed.

MORE NEXT MONTH

BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 29. FROM SEXTON BLAKE TO THE MURDER MAN

Our opening film for the new term was "Sexton Blake and the Bearded Doctor", Starring George Curzon, Henry Oscar, and Gilliam Maude, this was a low-budget film made by M.G.M. in England purely to help to fill their Renters' Quota commitments. They probably did not bother whether it was booked or not, though small cinemas no doubt played it to help towards their Exhibitors' Quota under the Act. My only reason for playing it was the magic name of Sexton Blake, but, even allowing for that, it was an indifferent film.

M.G.M. played it at the Empire, Leicester Square, where long runs of big American pictures made it difficult for them to meet their own Exhibitors' Quota for that theatre. It was shown once only every day, at about 10.45 in the morning, after which the normal programme followed on. Thus, they were able legally to avoid the real intentions of an Act which always seemed to be well-meant but futile.

(M.G.M. also made "Sexton Blake and the Mademoiselle" for similar reasons, though I did not bother to book it. I believe that

both films were made from stories by Pierre Quiroule.)

Next, also from M.G.M., came the full-length Laurel & Hardy picture, "Bonnie Scotland", which, like all the comedians' full-length features, was patchy, with hilarious moments, but a good deal of padding to spin out, what would have been a first-rate 2-reeler, to feature length.

Then, still with M.G.M., Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy in "Naughty Marietta". Next, from Warner Bros., Jackie Cooper with Mary Astor in a pleasant film "Dinky", followed by, from M.G.M., Joan Crawford and Robert Montgomery in "No More Ladies".

After that, from M.G.M., Lionel Barrymore and Chester Morris in "Public Hero Number One". Then, from Warner's, Bette Davis and George Brent in "Front Page Woman". Next, from M.G.M., Robert Taylor in "Murder in the Fleet", followed by, from Warner's, Paul Muni in "Black Fury". Then, from Warner's, Pat O'Brien in "O! For the Lamps of China" - a big production in its day, though I forget

much about it now.

Now a double-feature programme, both pictures from Warner Bros.: Dick Foran in "Moonlight on the Prairie" plus "Black Mask" from the story "Blackshirt". Then, from Paramount, Fred MacMurray and Madge Evans in "Men Without Names". Next, also from Paramount, Fredric March in "Death Takes a Holiday", a delightful fantasy in which Death, personified, came to earth on a mission for a short period, during which time nobody died from any cause whatsoever. This is one which I would dearly love to see again. In passing, this was our last Paramount film. Not, I hasten to add, from any shortcoming in the firm which was delightful to deal with and releasing outstanding films, but solely because it was not really a useful system on our part to be showing films from so many renters.

Now the two big renters of Universal and Gaumont-British amalgamated under the name of General Film Distributors (G.F.D.) and as we were playing a large proportion of both Universal and Gaumont films, this amalgamation was an advantage for us. Our first film from General (a Universal picture) was the lovable Alice

Brady in "The Gay Lady". Next, also from General, Tom Tyler in "The Jungle Mystery".

Next Marion Davies, Dick Powell, and Pat O'Brien in "Page Miss Glory". This was Miss Davies first film for Warner Bros. (she had left M.G.M. owing to her not getting the lead in "Barretts of Wimpole Street".) M.G.M. claimed that all Marion Davies films lost money, owing to the interference from Randolph Hearst which bumped up the cost tremendously. Warner, however, claimed that her films for them made reasonable profits. It's not important all these years later. I fancy that "Page Miss Glory" was pretty good, but I have no strong recollections of it.

Now, from Warner Bros., came James Cagney, Pat O'Brien, and Olivia de Havilland in "The Irish In Us", followed by, also from Warner's, Dick Powell and Joan Blondell in "Broadway Gondolier".

Next, from M.G.M., Joel McCrea and Maureen O'Sullivan in "Woman Wanted", and then the final show for the term, Spencer Tracy with Virginia Bruce in "The Murder Man".

(Another Article in this Series soon)

The Postman Called

(Interesting items from the Editor's letter-bag)

R. W. STORY (Ontario): It is really wonderful that after all these years I look forward to the receipt of the C.D. monthlies as keenly as ever. I must say that the standard of interest remains always as high as ever.

L. WORMULL (Romford): Replying to Bill Lofts: Although the exact location of U. J. was known to a Library official, neither of us were able to trace the shelf-mark. Obviously a case of oversight. The Popular was another to elude me. Time prevented me from seeing these through, however. The S. B. L. is listed in the Colindale files at B. M., hence the mistake, but a phone-call confirms that it is in fact at the Woolwich depository.

D. SWIFT (Leeds): In "The World of Frank Richards" Messrs. Lofts and Adley state that the last two books in the Bunter series were based on old T. V. scripts and no doubt written up by a substitute author.

Having just read the last four books in the series, I would say that not only were the last two - "Bunter The Sportsman" and "Bunter's Last Fling" - written by substitute writers, but also the other two previous books "Bunter The Stowaway" and "Thanks To Bunter". The reading of the last four books did not "flow" in the normal Frank Richards manner; and whilst accepting that the substitute writer(s) did a good job, one must admit that no-one could do the work as Frank Richards could.

Now we are almost to the date of the centenary of the birth of Charles Hamilton, I for one, would like to raise my glass in a toast to that great man whose work gave so much pleasure to thousands of his readers. He still lives on in the memories of those who were - and still are - enthralled by his writings. I only wish I had had the pleasure of meeting him.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Our correspondent is, of course, right, and we made our own comments on those stories in our reviews. In fact, Hamilton was half-way through "Just Like Bunter" when he died, and the knowledgeable Hamiltonian does not have much difficulty in deciding where the new pen took over.)

N. GAYLE (Exmouth): I believe that the work of Frank Richards has a future in English literature - as literature: not just memory-evoking yarns for elderly schoolboys. They are so much more than that.

This I feel sure is the reason why I have been so dissatisfied with reading examples of Hamilton criticism in books - that every time the author mentions stories or series he suddenly seems to become a nostalgic 12-year old schoolboy again: which may be enjoyable for him, but is dismaying for a reader like myself, crying out for interesting,

varied, detailed objective analysis of the writings in question. I am beginning to realise that such analysis will not be possibly by anyone who read the Magnet in their youth.

E. KADISH (Hendon): I was interested to read Mr. Lofts' comments on the use of male pseudonyms in the girls' periodicals. I am sure that he is quite right in saying that there were many male pen-names in the "Girls' Friend". It is a paper that I know very little about. I always imagined it had a "love story" flavour, suitable for older girls. However, to the best of my knowledge, from about 1925 to 1940, the school-girls' Companion Papers contained only two male pseudonyms - Peter Langley and Clive Bancroft.

What a lot of interesting items in the July Digest. I agree with Danny. Leonard Shields was my favourite Magnet artist. He had a very easy, competent style, and his characters always looked like cheeky, normal schoolboys.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: I have a large collection of "The Girls' Friend" and it is my impression that the number of male nom-de-plumes was very small indeed, comparatively. One name, very evident until the later twenties - he almost seemed as popular as Mabel St. John - was William E. Groves. He specialised in long stories of mill-life. Does anyone know anything about him - if it was a "him"?)

* * * * *

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

NORTHERN

Saturday, 10th July, 1976

Chairman Geoffrey Wilde opened the meeting in fine celebratory mood by reminding us that it was in 1776 that Adam Smith wrote 'The Wealth of Nations' and Gibbon began his 'Decline and Fall'. And in 1876 Bell had invented the Telephone, Edison the gramophone, the Festival Theatre at Bayreuth had been established and Grace had scored two first-class innings! We should dig him up, said Geoffrey, and send him to Old Trafford!

But by no means least in order of importance we remembered that 1876 was the year in which Frank Richards was born.

We were happy to have with us 18 years old Susan McCormick of Preston, who, said Geoffrey Wilde, if not the youngest member of the Clubs, was undoubtedly the prettiest!

With us also was journalist Hazel Wheeler, currently engaged in writing an article about the Hobby!

So distracted by Susan on the one hand and Hazel on the other it is not suprising that we had time for only one solitary item from our planned programme. This was a quiz on Greyfriars presented by Ron Hodgson. Top came Geoffrey Wilde, tying in second place were Bill Williamson and Jack Allison and tying in third place were Harry Barlow and Susan McCormick.

An offer by Harry to take Susan home was respectfully declined. Our chaplain announced that she would be spending the night with him - that is, he said - at his Vicarage!

We debated whether or not to alter the date of our next meeting to coincide with the birthday of Frank Richards, but decided not to break the established pattern of the past twenty-six years.

Our Secretary, however, has much pleasure in making an invitation to all who are interested to come to his Vicarage (Staincliffe Vicarage, Batley, Yorkshire) from 7.30 p.m. onwards on Sunday, 8th August. Nothing tremendously exciting, but perhaps we could listen to a recording of 'Floreat Greyfriars' and drink a toast to Frank Richards!

It would be useful, however, for the Secretary to know how many might be coming, so please write to Father Good (address above) or telephone BATLEY 473343.

LONDON

A beautiful summer day at Cricklewood where Bill and Marjorie Norris saw to it that we enjoyed a happy and jolly meeting together with tea in the lovely garden.

We had our two chapters of Leslie Rowley's version of how the Battle of the Beaks would have been written, ably read by Ray Hopkins.

An article by Basil Amps in the 'READING POST' column view-point and entitled "Come Back, Bunter" was read out by Eric Lawrence. Eric has a portfolio of this journalist's fine articles on Hamiltonia which have appeared from time to time in the newspaper.

Bill Norris played a tape of the B. B. C. item that featured Mary Cadogan and Arthur Marshall re the merits of Hamiltonia and Angela Brazil on the occasion of the publication of the latter's biography. Michael Perry and David Baddiell were joint winners of Graham Bruton's quiz and the three winners of Winifred Morss' quiz were David Baddiell, Bill Norris and Joyce Dawkins.

Next meeting at 89 Kempe Road, London, N. W. 6. Phone 969 4110. Hosts Laurie and Gladys Peters.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

* * *

Members of our Northern Club are asked to note that the next meeting (Saturday, 14th August) will commence at 5.45 p.m. and each member is asked to bring some item of food (or a bottle of wine) for a small celebration.

* * *

Mr. Ben Whiter, the popular secretary of our London Club, was in an accident this week when he was knocked down by a car on a pedestrian crossing. Mr. Whiter sustained a shoulder injury, and cuts to his head which needed several stitches. We wish a speedy recovery to our Ben.

* * * * *

WANTED: to complete a run of 800 consecutive Union Jacks: Nos. 847, 917, 921, 929, 930, 934, 948, 952, 992, 994, 1008. Fair Price, or good exchanges offered.

H. W. VERNON

5 GILLMAN ST., CHELTENHAM, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA 3192.

* * * * *

WANTED: Gems, Nos. 698 to 765 inclusive, 787, 1585 to 1611 inclusive, 1663. All issues of Monsters, Bunters, B. B. At Butlins, B. B's Xmas Party, - Brazil, - Benefit, - P.O., - Butts In, - Blue Mauritius, - Beanfeast, - Afloat. Must have D.J's.

SALE: Captain Volume, Vol. 24 (1910-11) £3.50; Young England, 54th Vol, £2. Chatterbox Annuals, 1919, 1920, £4 each. Magnets, 1480 to 1487, lot £9. Pip Squeak Annual, 1927, £2.75. Infants Magazine, 1920, £1.50. Bunter titles, £1.40 each.

WANTED: Dandy, Beano Comics, 1946-1955. Topper, Beezer Comics, 1953-1960. Oor Wullie, Broons Annuals, pre 1956, Monsters, Chums Annuals, Vols. 1 to 25. Captain Vols., 1913 - 1922, Scout Annuals, 1910-1930.

JAMES GALL, 49 ANDERSON AVENUE, ABERDEEN, SCOTLAND (Tel. 491716)

WANTED: Bullseye 41, 89; Surprise 3, Film Fun 571; Boys' Magazine 580; Magnet 1400, 1403. Buy/Exchanges.

SUTTON, 41 SWALECLIFFE AVE., MANCHESTER 23.

THE STRAND

by Francis Hertzberg

SHERLOCK HOLMES - not a sentence, just a screaming sentence. And the unchanging picture of the traffic thronging the busy Thames-side thoroughfare outside Newnes' office has had superimposed upon it an oval with the aquiline features of Sherlock Holmes within it. Sherlock Holmes, the first series detective to combine detection with human characteristics, is inside: buy this issue of The Strand!

It is over 40 years since it was possible to buy a Strand with Holmes in at a bookstall or newsagent's; the short-lived Creasy-run New Strand with Lord Donnegall's Sherlock Holmes articles is also long gone. But it is well worth looking at these early volumes and issues of the magazine which gave the British public the short stories of the greatest detective ever (as they say - I think Watson's 'best and finest-man' a better epithet).

The Strand wasn't a mystery or crime magazine - there was indeed crime. The Comic Side of Crime, Cases from my Case Book (by H. Ashton Wolfe, interpreter - including Greek? - at the Criminal Court), Romances from a Detective's Case Book (by Dick Donovan; includes The Jewelled Skull, Secrets of the Black Brotherhood, The Chamber of Shadows), Arthur Morrison's Martin Hewitt, Investigator (identified tentatively in my Holmes, Reichenbach and the Strand, Part 2, Sherlock Holmes Journal, Summer 1967, as Mycroft Holmes), etc.

But more than crime, it appeared that the subjects that the newly-literate public thirsted for was knowledge of how - how things worked, how others lived - a desire for unclassified knowledge which Holmes both deplored and himself exhibited.

A fair share of the material they perused on their new railway journeys came from the pen of Conan Doyle himself - sport, memoirs, opinions, serializations of the historical novels with their intricate detail, war reporting, short stories in every possible setting (except cowboys in any quantity, and gangsters). Other writers included

H. G. Wells, E. Philips Oppenheim, Sapper (creator of Bulldog Drummond, E. W. Hornung (brother-in-law) of Doyle, the name of one of whose unsuccessful creations he adapted to 'Raffles', about whom he then wrote a series of tongue in cheek tales, recounting the mirror-image adventures of a Master Criminal, and his equally Doobus Britannicus Boswell, Bunny), Winston Churchill, Hall Caine, A. E. W. Mason, Max Pemberton, W. W. Jacobs, etc.

Themes ran over the whole gamut. From pirates to the wild west, from highwayman to historical romance, from war to convicts, to humour, to sport. However, the editor soon realised what his most valuable property was - he waged a war of attrition (and the pocket book) with Doyle. That his judgment was sound is testified by the immediate leap in circulation when the words at the head of this article appeared on the covers. SHERLOCK HOLMES!

The British image of Holmes is firmly set by Sidney Paget's copy of his brother for the illustrations which appear on almost every page of the greater part of the run of the Sherlock Holmes stories in the Strand: there were other illustrators before and after, but few live in the English mind. The American picture is based of course on those wonderful Collier's Steele drawings (and Basil Rathbone). The Steele depictions were based on Holmes' stage characterizations in the person of William Gillette. And yet the two are not as divergent in essence, as is seen in a note in an article (in the Strand of course, September 1901) with the title 'Mr. W. Gillette as Sherlock Holmes': 'What surprised the American critics', we read, 'was the almost perfect personification of the literary hero. That is evidenced by comparing our photographs of the great actor with the well-known drawings of Mr. Sidney Paget.'

Not only Holmes and Gillette appeared in the pages of the Strand - through the years, biographical and autobiographical items appeared, relating to Doyle. An interesting early one is that by Harry How in the August 1892 issue, in a piece with the title "A Day With Conan Doyle".

Alas there will now never be any new series of Sherlock Holmes; nor any new editions of the Strand. For Dr. Doyle and the Strand both are dead. And yet we may console ourselves that Sherlock Holmes

himself, in the words of Vincent Starrett, 'never having lived, can never die'.

FREE GIFTS

by W. O. G. Lofts

Some twenty years ago, and not long after I had become interested in all aspects of magazine collecting, I visited a man who specialised in collecting free gifts in juvenile papers. Living in Norfolk, his cupboards were full of them in all shapes and sizes, ranging from novelties, games, small booklets, cigarette cards, sweets and toys. Certainly a unique collection, and when he died not long after, one never knew what became of them.

The juvenile paper that first issued a free gift in its pages, is not known, though it is generally believed that it originated with free glossy plates in Boys papers in the 1860's. It should be mentioned however that with some of these 'free' plates actually bound in the magazine in question, it is highly debatable whether these were exactly free! What is however, practically certain is that the very first free gift given away in a comic paper (excluding supplements or plates) was the free cardboard model of Mrs. Bruin's famous school in *THE RAINBOW* in 1914.

Curiously, or at least in the twenties and thirties, the editor had nothing to do with the free gifts. They were devised by the promotion, advertising, and merchandising departments usually to boost a flagging circulation. The late H. W. Twyman editor of the detective story paper *THE UNION JACK*, once informed me that it was almost a sure sign of a paper's sales falling, and the entrance of any of the already mentioned departments was what any editor feared. This is of course true in most respects, but certainly not all. The number 1 issue of a new paper mainly contains gifts simply to attract the potential regular reader. Nor does it exactly explain why such highly successful papers as the D.C. Thomson group of *Wizard/Rover/Adventure/Skipper* and *Hotspur* gave away free gifts for seemingly weeks and months on end.

Surprisingly, free gifts cost almost next to nothing for the publisher. Sweets for example - with Sharp's Creamy Toffee always well to the fore. The manufacturer was only too pleased to produce specially say a hundred thousand small samples for free distribution to readers - and of course potential future customers. The amount saved by them in handling and promotion costs alone would be well worth while. Small toys or novelties could also be bought in bulk, and at a small fraction of the price than sold in the shops.

The give-aways in juvenile papers are too lengthy to go into here. The boys' paper *PALS* (Shurey) in 1895, gave away free issue No. 2 with No. 1, which was certainly a novel way to attract new readers. *BOY'S LEADER* (1903) also gave away a copy of a free comic entitled *FUNNY PIPS* for the first 14 or so issues of its run. The most amusing thing was often how a free gift seemed out of context to the readership of the paper concerned. The editorial blurb of one paper once stated in its editorial 'that it catered for the more intelligent boy' - yet they gave away next week a rubber balloon squeaker, which rather destroyed their image!

I can well remember the very first issue of *THE HOTSPUR* that came out on my tenth birthday on the 2nd Sept., 1933. This contained a black rubber mask, which was slightly below my age group. The jumping green frog given away in No. 2 was more suited to my practical joker tastes.

Free gifts are still a main factor in publications today, and they are fast becoming a collectors' special hobby.

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