



C. H. CHAMBERS

# The Old Boys' Book Collector

No. 1  
SPRING,  
1952

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### JACK LEWIS ("LEWIS JACKSON")

The anecdote of Norman Goddard and his crocodile belt, related by Mr. Lewis on page 14, was what gave him the idea for the title of a children's film he wrote for the Rank Organisation, "The Snakeskin Belt." This was made in Rhodesia and shown as a serial round the Odeon Circuit last year. The photo shows him signing autographs during the run of the film at Brighton Odeon.

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Cover design by "Magnet" artist C. H. Chapman

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## "COME INTO THE OFFICE"

This editorial heading, as you will have noticed, is purloined from "The Magnet", although I fancy we are all getting a little too long in the tooth for the remainder of the title to be added — "Boys and Girls". The borrowing is deliberate, because I hope the associations of the heading will be appropriate, which does not mean that I anticipate "The Old Boys' Book Collector" having a thirty-two years run. No, what I have in mind is the hope that while it does endure it will develop for its readers at least some of the abiding interest aroused by the famous old paper.

It is in the attempt to realise this hope that I have for the past couple of months been going about like R.A.H. Goodyear. I used to meet him in the 'thirties wandering along the lanes around Cloughton, a notebook in one hand, a pencil in the other, oblivious of the world. He drifted along in a brown study, stopping every forty or fifty yards to jot down a sentence, and then ambling on to the next halt and the next note. I never had the courage — or the impudence — to ask to see the pad, so I don't know whether he wrote down the finished product as he walked or if he simply noted his leading ideas but, in any case, his mileage per story must be an all-time record.

So here we are with No 1, to give the proof of the pudding and of my ambulatory cogitation. Nailed to the masthead, as it were, we have the genuine Wharton and Bunter, flanked by a couple of rogues whom I was delighted to see Mr Chapman had depicted not as the smooth Errol Flynn type beloved by Hollywood but with appropriate virility — not to say villainy. These represent roughly the limits of the terrain covered by our collecting and which, in varying degree, "The Old Boys' Book Collector" proposes to explore. I do not believe that good wine needs no bush but I propose to leave the reader to proceed undaunted by any editorial fanfare to his own estimation of the contents, and to confine myself to one remark. If the No 1 resembles the journals conducted by J.N. Fentelow in one respect — in that the editor has rather too many fingers in the pie — it is not so much from choice as because of the dual exigency of preparing a first number of a hobby magazine and of preserving a balance in the contents. Time and organisation will remedy that possible fault.

As so much can happen in the three months which elapse between numbers, it hardly seems wise to pin oneself down with a too definite pronouncement on the fare for No 2. There are twenty future articles listed on the back cover, but they should not be taken as forming a rigid programme. Indeed, that list was hardly in the hands of the printers before it required extension. But I can indicate the highlights.

Who can know more of "The Gem" and "The Magnet" than their editor? "Behind the Scenes", a long article by Mr. C.M. Down, will give for the

first time the real inside story of the papers by one who assisted as a young sub-editor in making up the first copies and, as Editor-in-Chief, had the melancholy duty of closing them down in those dark days of 1940. Nor is this all from Mr. Down. For No. 3 he will give us yet another inside story - that of the "substitute" authors - and so at last throw some official light on their names, their personalities and their workings.

Every reader is well enough aware of the George Orwell-Frank Richards controversy about the literary and social merits of "The Gem" and "Magnet", but as "Horizon" was a higher-browed magazine of small circulation not so many will have read Mr. Richards' masterly defence of his writings and even fewer will actually have a copy. No. 2 will remedy this, for it will contain a full reprint of his article.

With Frank Richards and Lewis Jackson in this issue, with Mr. Down's contributions to come, Lewis Jackson's forecast of an account of the Sexton Blake authors and their methods, with other articles to come from C.H. Chapman, Michael Poole and Clive R. Fenn, as well as others not yet finally arranged, I think I can claim that the promise to bring you articles by at least some of the personalities of our former favourite papers is being well and truly kept. The promised minimum of 32 pages is exceeded and, while I may have some natural prejudice, I believe that the "amateur" contributions are of a standard high enough to satisfy the most exacting critic.

It only remains to say that I am intensely grateful for the steady flow of friendly and encouraging letters which I have found so heartening during the past few weeks, and that I hope every number will justify their confidence and optimism.

PLEASE NOTE: It was unfortunately noticed too late for rectification that Page 11, giving the conclusion of "Jack Sheppard", is transposed and follows Page 16.  
T.H.

WANTED: Volume 40, "Reynolds's Miscellany", and certain volumes of "The Family Herald", "London Journal", "London Reader", "Boys of England", "Boys' Comic", "Young Men of Great Britain". Send for list. A.W. Lawson, 13 Charles Square, Hoxton, N.1.

OLD Sexton Blake Libraries, papers. Wanted list, 42, West Bond Street, Macclesfield.

WANTED: Boys' Friend Library. All you chaps with duplicates, rally round! Price, 22, Northdown Road, Margate.

SALE: Magnets, Gems, Nelson Lees, etc. S.A.E. for list. A. Horsey, 60, Salcombe Road, Walthamstow, London, E.17.

WANTED: Magnets, S.O.L's, 1933-1940. Your price paid. Highton, 14, Greyhound Road, Willesden, London, N.W.10.

# THE VANGUARD LIBRARY.

by Tom Hopperton

John Greenleaf Whittier may be of minor importance among the world's poets but from the Plutonian shades a rueful chorus of departed boys' editors would emphatically agree that he had reason, if not rhyme, when he said:

"Of all sad words of tongue or pen,  
The saddest are those - it might have been."

Prominent among them would be that conductor of "The Vanguard Library" who must have watched the triumphal progress of "The Magnet" and "The Gem" with a jaundiced eye, bitterly conscious of the fact that he held Charles Hamilton in his hand and then, because he failed to adjust his ideas as quickly as did his Carmelite House rival, allowed the future money-spinner of the Amalgamated Press to slip through his fingers. And probably the clearest proof that Mr Hamilton himself regarded Tom Morry's hold on existence as being at best precarious is found in the story which was the stellar attraction of No 1 of "The Vanguard" when the Merry siren was a scant three weeks old - "The New Boy at Northooto", by Charles Hamilton.

Success with "Smiles", "Funny Cuts" and "The World's Comic" having whetted Trappa, Holmes and Co's appetites, they entered the higher-age field on 7th May, 1907, with some faith in their ability to ring the bell. For over 18 months, every number was kept in print and procurable and as serials were not used each number was complete in itself, giving "The Vanguard" rather more right to the title of "library" than most of the contemporary papers which shared the label. It had a marked resemblance to the "Gem" in price, size and make-up. Even the cover was a related shade, although the actual colour hovered between a dooropid blue and a semi-green. The principal difference - the using of short stories by S. Clarke Hook instead of serials - soon had the A.P. editors protesting in half-page advertisements that: "the ONLY New and original stories by S. Clarke Hook are now appearing Every Week in THE MARVEL", which was soon followed by "The Gem's" insistence that: "The Only NEW and original school talk, either serial or complete, by S. Clarke Hook, will commence in a week or two's time in This Book". I have often wondered how Clarke Hook got into print much that he did - even in his top-line series of Specs and Jack, Sam and Fete. These unconnected school, sport and adventure shorts are crude in the extreme, nailed together rather than written, and it is difficult to see why both sides attached so much importance to them - or perhaps the importance was in the parade of Clarke Hook's name. Nevertheless, the A.P. continued its fusillade and the editor of "The Vanguard", undeterred, dug one up every week that he didn't have a cover-to-cover story. Fortunately, he showed more discrimination with his feature talks.

"The Vanguard", like "The Gem", began as a general mixed library: unlike it, it stayed that way, although it was subjected to something of the same modification. The first 24 numbers showed an even dozen each of

each of school and adventure stories, but during the following year the balance shifted until school led 749 to 20. The stories fall roughly into three groups: the Hamilton tales; the Taffy Llewellyn and Co series, and the oddments.

John G. Rows, who also wrote for the firm's comics, accounted for eight of the 20 unclassifiable stories with tales similar to those with which he flooded most of the papers of the period, all up to his usual workmanlike standard. There was as much Marryatt-and-water about in those days that Eric Stanhope deserved a special pat on the back for his "Midshipman Dick". Darrell Yorks began with a bang as the house detective but unaccountably faded out after four adventures, and Stephen H. Agnew of the ultra-lurid Aldines began the path of contrition that eventually landed him into the highly respectable pages of "The Scout" with a number of quite orthodox school stories. Pride of place went to another Aldine writer, H. Philpott Wright, who is probably chiefly remembered for his Robin Hood romances, but who nevertheless gave proof of both versatility and output by turning in no less than 32 of the 69 tales.

Twenty-six of these Philpott Wright stories deal with the adventures of Taffy Llewellyn and Co of Blackminster School, who were "The Vanguard's" rivals to Tom Merry. One of the Co sounds more familiar than he actually is, being no less a personage than Billy Bunter himself. The name, as it happens, is all the Blackminster boy has in common with our Owl. As he dates from June, 1907, he antedates William George by about eight months, but he could never have achieved the same distinction, being depicted as a rather obtuse youth quick to form utterly impossible solutions to the problems facing the Co but in general reminiscent of George Horrie at his most stolid. The air must have been thick with Bunters at the time: in the first Skimble story ( $\frac{1}{2}$ d "Gem" No 41, December, 1907) the boozy and light-fingered tramp on whom Herbert bestows his initial benevolence was named Bill Bunter. Philpott Wright hardly had the command of his length: the original plot occasionally peters out two or three pages from the finishing post and a fresh horse is saddled to finish the course. Apart from this, his customers had little to complain of. As time went on he followed a process familiar to "Gem" and "Lagnet" readers of building up the cast by introducing new boys until he had sufficient "specialists" at his disposal to ensure variety in the stories which are all highly readable. There are certain signs of either coincidence or of authors keeping one eye on their rivals - such as the St Jim's and Blackminster Juniors avorting round as Red Indians and being engrossed with school magazines within a few weeks of each other - but just which it was makes an unprofitable subject for speculation. Anyway, the Blackminster series must have been popular, for while it did not succeed in monopolising the paper as St Jim's did it established a commanding lead over all its rivals.

My copies of "The Vanguard" were not acquired in sequence, and when I began to read No 58, "Pong!! or, The New Boy at St Kate's," I turned back from the second page to have another look at the author's name. There it was in plain letters, "Frank Drake", but Charles Hamilton' style stuck out like a chapel hat peg, and it was hardly necessary to

read the sequel, or rather continuation, "Comrades of the Fourth", in No. 68 to clinch the matter. As earlier copies accumulated, I began to see clearly. After "The New Boy at Northoote" in No. 1, Mr Hamilton had "Plucky Jack Stanhope. The Adventures of a Board School Boy" in No. 7, and "The Fourth Form at Northoote" in No. 19. He changed schools for No. 31, "Christmas at St. Kate's", and again a fortnight later for "The Chums of St. Kate's". There was now a concentration on St. Kate's for there followed Nos. 39, "The Prefect's Secret", 42, "Who Shall Be Captain?" and 49, "The Captain of St. Kate's". All these had been signed Charles Hamilton, but it was now May, 1908, and Martin Clifford and Frank Richards were fully committed to the weekly production of the St. Jim's and Grey-friars stories - so much so that the protean author perhaps thought it advisable to camouflage his extra-A.P. activities from the possessive eyes of the Hargrave editors.

So there it is - "Frank Drake" - as yet another Hamiltonian pen-name to add to the already formidable list. Incidentally, if the No. 1 had appeared as by Frank Drake, I think I should have noticed nothing beyond a couple of coincidences in characters' names. What we can now spot instantly is Mr Hamilton's distinctive style developed with remarkable rapidity in 1907-1908. I mention the fact, but don't want to dilate on it at the moment. In a later article, "Dawn's Left Hand", which is an examination of pre-"*Gem*" Hamilton stories, I hope to be able to show at more length than is now possible both that the statement is correct and the reasons for the evolution.

There appears to be another reason for the new signature, in that the writer, perhaps inspired by his success with the "*Gem*" and "*Magnet*", gives every indication of a serious and deliberate attempt to add "*The Vanguard*'o" scalp to his belt and to provide deadly competition for H. Philpott "right. The first four stories had been complete in themselves, although each one ended with some such promise of more to come as "... and we may write again of the adventures of the chums of Northoester Board School - Ned, and Micky, and Plucky Jack Stanhope". St. Kate's contented itself with no such pious hopes. Each story ended with a carry-over of the plot, so openly contrived as to break the continuity with a much more jagged edge than was the case in the series being developed in "*The Gem*". Besides, there was only a week to wait for the next instalment of Tom Merry: it must have been distinctly annoying to have to wait a month or so for the next chunk of Pat O'Neil - and if that Irish hero was not conceived as an off-set to the "Welsh Taffy Llewellyn ...!"

I can generally take a failure to obtain copies of old papers with becoming philosophy, but my experiences with "*The Vanguard*" have been thoroughly irritating. Contrary to the usual practice of finding that the earlier the number the more progressively difficult it is to find, I have had little trouble in coming across substantial runs up to No. 69, but have only No. 84 (a football story) to show after that. The paper has been stated to have continued to No. 120, yet the only number later than my last that I have heard of is a No. 96 owned by Norman Gregory. And this is

as good a place as any to make my grateful acknowledgement of Norman's kindly help in lending me five otherwise unprocurable copies, as a result of which I can say that my list of Hamilton and Frank Drake stories is accurate up to No. 69, although it is not necessarily complete. But as for the final stages of the Pat O'Neil - Taffy Llewellyn duel — it is as bad as having religiously attended fourteen weeks of "The Exploits of Elaine" and then having missed the final episode.

There is no real reason to assume, however, that the make-up of "The Vanguard" suffered any radical change. The greenish cover was replaced in the eighties by one identical in shade with the pink "Union Jack" and the sixteen pages plus a separate cover had given way to continuous pagination — sixteen in all — including the cover. This sort of thing was generally an indication that a paper was feeling the draught, but No 84 was a football story by a Nigol Wallace (which looks suspiciously like a pseudonym) and Taffy came along for his final Christmas the following week, so the old pattern was still being pursued.

The editor may, in fact, have regarded his selection with complacency. The most uncritical reader will admit that there was some thorough bilge worked off at this period, and the A.P. was not above reproach. "The Vanguard" made no fuss about "being founded to counteract the influence of bad books for boys" — indeed, its conductor was so singularly modest as to forego an editorial after the first number — but the tone was good right through and the quality such that in over forty samples I have not seen one that the Amalgamated Press should not have been pleased to print.

Except for having failed to beat the editor of "The Gem" to the idea of a continuous run of stories, there was nothing with which the Trapp-Holmes man could reprobate himself. The indications are that it was not Hobson's choice which made Charles Hamilton a comparatively infrequent appearer. If, as seems more than possible, literary myopia made the editor consider Philpott Wright a better bet, then he would not reprobate himself. His subsequent reflections on "The Vanguard" would not be tinged with personal chagrin, but more likely would take the form of a vigorous damning of the thick skulls of Edwardian youth for not knowing a good thing when they saw it.

A Voice From The Past. Admirers of G.H. Teed who haven't spotted the book for themselves will be pleased to know that the Wallington Press Ltd. have just published "Five In Fear" in their 9d Swaney Novels. The story is typical Teed, the mystery and swift action beginning with a bang on page one, and the locale, as usual, is an odd corner of the world, this time Manila and the Dutch East Indies. The book is Sexton Blake Library size, and 96 pages. With a couple of the characters renamed, it reads as it had been conceived as a Blake story so those who grumble about the present Blake stories can, at the cost of 9d and a little imagination, fancy themselves back in the palmy days of the past.

The Walrus

# FRANK RICHARDS REMINISCENT

IT is the unexpected that happens.

Who could have foreseen, when Billy Bunter made his first bow in the far-off year 1907, that the fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove would still be going strong in 1952: even coming to life on television, which had not even been invented when Bunter started on his plump career? Certainly Frank Richards couldn't. He liked his Bunter: he was glad of his company through the passing years: but he was often just a little surprised. And when the War came, and the fat Owl, who had survived the first World War, ducked under in the second and disappeared, his author had a sad feeling that he was gone for good.

But that, as he was glad to learn later, was only one of his many mistakes. Like Amfortas in "Parsifal", Billy Bunter was only in a state of suspended animation, the principle of life still strong within him. "Pugit retro levis Juventas", says our old friend Horace, but that would not apply to Bunter. After the War, he came up again, as fresh and as fat as ever — apparently age could not wither him, nor custom stale his infinite variety.

Looking back over so many years, Frank Richards sometimes wonders a little. He recalls how he first evolved his Bunter, just before the turn of the century — Frank was quite a young fellow then! — and shyly offered him to an editor, who — alas! — could see nothing in him! For a good many years our fat friend was left in cold storage, until "The Magnet" came, and with "The Magnet" emerged Bunter. A plump figure in the background at first, but later on to take more and more unto himself until finally he almost "stole the show".

There were many other characters I liked better: — Frank Nugent, drawn from my own modest self; Bob Cherry, the healthiest of mortals; Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, derived from the most elegant of sub-editors and the best fellow in the wide world; Harry Wharton, once mine own familiar friend; Mark Linley, the boy who made his way against heavy odds. But somehow or other they all had to take second place to the egregious Owl.

Billy Bunter really isn't the kind of fellow to be very popular in his own immediate circle. But in a wider circle he seems to have achieved unlimited popularity, for letters reach me from every corner of the world, almost all about Bunter. And am I pleased therby?

They say that Conan Doyle grew tired of Sherlock Holmes, and would willingly have knocked him on the head. I couldn't possibly feel like that about Bunter. He has become a part of me, and if I lost him Nioche wouldn't be in it with Frank Richards. Happily, it looks as if Silly Bunter is going to last as long as his author, which — one ventures to hope! — may be quite a long time yet!

=====

# JACK SHEPPARD

by Brian Honeysett

I have two reasons in mind for writing this story of Jack Sheppard. One is that he is my most favoured character in the collecting of boys' books: the second is that on 4th March, 1932, it will be just 250 years since his birth, and in the 22 years of his life he became so famous a criminal that this anniversary is surely worthy of mention.

In all probability Sheppard would not have achieved so much fame if he were living today, for social conditions in England have changed very much for the better during the last two hundred years or so, but his feats of escape would still bear recognition, even during the present time, if only for their audacity. During his short criminal life Jack became so famous and gained such popularity that his execution was attended by nearly 200,000 people, some anxious for his doath but most hoping that he would be reprieved. But regardless of views, this huge crowd milled round the triple tree at Tyburn to watch him hang. On this, his birthday anniversary, it would not be out of place to give a brief account of the life and escapea which made Jack Sheppard one of the most notorious men of the eighteenth century.

In the records, we are told that he was born in Stepney on 4th March 1702, of poor-class parents, and that at birth he was an ailing and puny child for whom there was little chance of survival. Contrary to prophecy, he did not die, as his family had feared, but soon grew into a wiry and intelligent lad. Within a few months of Jack's birth his father passed away, and so poor Jack was sent to be brought up at the Workhouse school. In later years he was apprenticed to a carpenter who taught him a great deal about locks and their working, which proved invaluable to him when he was in prison. During his apprenticeship Jack was an industrious youth who liked work, but in the Spring of 1725 came his first lapse from honesty. He had of late frequented taverns and inns, and it was at one of these that he made his first robbery. This act was probably inspired by one of his new unworthy associates, named Edgeworth Bess, who was later responsible for his undoing. Other thefts soon followed, and he and Bess found themselves in the Round-House Prison at Soho, but due to his cleverness he escaped during the night, cutting a hole in the roof with a razor.

Afew weeks later he was caught again, and this time, with Bess, he was put in the New Prison at Clerkenwall. On the fifth day of his confinement he broke through a barred window, made a descent of 25 feet to the ground below, and then climbed a 22 feet spiked wall. The amazing thing is that during this escape Sheppard was hampered by the burton Bess. Thereafter he made several daring robberies in company with the notorious Joseph Blake ("Blueskin") and other unworthy characters, but unfortunately one of his victims sought the aid of Jonathan Wild, the self-styled "Chief Thief Catcher," and this has far-reaching consequences for Jack. Shortly after this, Wild, with one of his henchmen, Quilt Arnold, succeeded in

catching him, and after trial and condemnation to death he was lodged in the Condemned Hold at Newgate. This time he chose a new mode of escape, gaining the safety of the street by disguising himself as a woman. With his latest break Jack was held in awe by the whole of the country, and so he had willing helpers to conceal him. In company with one of these, William Page, he was caught days later on Finchley Common and returned to Newgate, where he was loaded with irons. Jack considered his plight in earnest for he was in the strongest cell of the jail, and soon devised a plan. One evening, when the throng of admiring visitors had departed, he set to work. First he concentrated on his handcuffs with a pin, and then with a nail he unlocked the leg irons securing his feet to the wall. Next he successfully removed a large iron bar that blocked the chimney and which had hitherto hampered his escape.

Equipped with this tool he made considerable progress as he began to climb the narrow chimney, and at the top he was able to smash his way into the deserted Red Room. By this time it was growing dark and Jack had difficulty in finding his way, but undaunted he searched for the door leading out of the Red Room, and after examining it for a few moments he was able to force it by completely removing the plate and lock together. On walking through this door he was confronted by some large gates leading into the Chapel, which were held by a bolt. These he broke through by knocking a hole in the wall with the iron bar and then reaching through to draw the bolt. After picking various other locks he at last found himself in the passage leading to the Leads, and it was here that he was met by the stoutest door that he had yet come across. It was covered with bolts, bars and locks, and was almost enough to make Sheppard give up his task in despair. But, after considering how far he had already come, he set to work on the door with his bar and nail. For nearly an hour he picked locks and broke bolts until he triumphed and the door swung off its hinges to allow him to pass. After chasing down various passages he reached a parapet over which he found he would have to descend, so Jack had to return to his original cell in order to obtain his blankets. These enabled him to descend to one of the houses in Newgate Street, and by now his escape was almost complete. He gained the street by going through the house and then set off for Tottenham Village, after breaking completely free from Newgate Prison without any help whatsoever.

But fate still bounded his heels, for it was only through his infatuation for Edgeworth Bess that he was recaptured. Longing to see her, he visited her house, where he found Wild and his henchmen waiting for him, and so he was quickly returned to prison. The new precautions taken against a further escape were amazing and Sheppard, watched day and night, had to give up the idea in despair. He was rushed before the King's Bench Court, his identity confirmed, and within a short time he was on his way to Tyburn for execution and to pay the price for his crimes.

So ends the story of Jack Sheppard, the boy who astonished the world with his escapes. It might seem odd to admire a criminal, but his pluck commands my admiration and - besides - his fictional adventures provide some of the most entertaining reading in our hobby.

# KESTREL IN RETROSPECT

by Lewis Jackson

With what I felt was unnecessary diffidence, Tom Hopperton has approached me to contribute a brief article to "The Old Boys' Book Collector" on my career as an author of Sexton Blake stories. I can assure him that it gives me real pleasure to do so, perhaps because I have now reached that age of reminiscence when the act of looking back has its own particular charm.

First of all, I would like to add my own greetings to the welcome extended to the new quarterly by Charles Hamilton (Frank Richards) who, in my earliest days as a "sub", was already an established author and one of that (in my opinion) twin-phemomena of which the other half was Clarke Hook, the "onlie begetter" of Jack, Sam and Puts. I look on Charles Hamilton as the father of our trade, a man of outstanding genius in the business of spinning a good yarn and one whose one-time prolific output never undermined his ability to produce quality stuff when he was in the mood — to wit, some of the stories he wrote for "Modern Boy". I recommend these as a model for any young author with ambitions to break into the boys' market, though, with the present vogue of wild-and-woolly (Treacle Khees the Cathedral Climber) fantasy holding the field, I sometimes suspect the value of my judgement.

Now for a few of the personal reminiscences that Tom Hopperton asks for. Having, as a Boy Clerk in the Civil Service (W.J. Brown was one of my contemporaries) failed to pass through into the Second Division, I escaped from the Post Office into journalism, thanks to the good offices of Hamilton Edwards of the Amalgamated Press who, though then Managing Director, still devoted a lot of time to his first love, "The Boys' Friend", and personally conducted its "Chat". With W.H. Back, Hamilton Edwards was the backbone of the enormously popular boys' papers of that time begun, of course, under the direction of Alfred Harmsworth.

I served my Editorial apprenticeship on a woman's paper and after a while began writing myself — verses and "shorts" for my own paper and for "Answers", longer stories for "The Boys' Realm" run by Rex Haydon who was at the same time — believe it or not! — also editor of "The Sunday Circle" "Answers", by the way, had a brilliant staff at that time, including Herbert Farjeon, the playwright, who was chief "sub" and his brother J. Jefferson.

In the spring of 1914, "sans songs à mal", as the French say, I became a free-lance fiction writer, contributing to most of the boys' group, at varying intervals but regularly to "Pluck", "The Union Jack" and "The Boys' Journal", all edited by Lewis Carlton under W.H. Back's direction.

It was W.H. Back himself who first launched me into the Sexton Blake market, "The Union Jack" being his special baby, and it was under his

tutelage and encouragement that the character of Leon Kestrel was first conceived. I must have had, I think, great joy in giving him birth and devising his exploits, probably because of the fascination the detective story always had for me (and still has) and the spell weaved in my impressionable years by Edgar Allan Poe, Conan Doyle and the Elders of the Craft. Here was the chance at last, I thought, to try my hand at weaving a few spells, myself.

It was in that early period, when I was waiting to be called into the navy, that I first became acquainted with most of the other authors who kept the flag flying over Baker Street. They were a convivial, colourful crowd, and one could write an interesting history about each one. Michael Storm, for instance, who disappeared suddenly and dramatically from the paper, and Hamilton Teed, the Canadian, originator of "Yvonne", who appeared later "out of the blue". Hamilton Teed's style was so much like Michael Storm's that he was suspected of "ghosting" until W.H. Back sat him down at a typewriter in the office, saying: "Write me two chapters of a Blake yarn." This Teed straightway proceeded to do, and in such style that his credentials were no longer in question.

Then there were Murray Graydon and his son Robert, who inherited all his father's flair for writing - and some of his taciturnity. And Jack Bobin, who wrote his first story in longhand when he was working in a laundry, and sent it in in a brown-paper parcel. Dear old Jack! He was a loveable, generous fellow, with few pretensions to education or culture, whose copy had to be carefull "subbed", yet as purely natural a writer of good yarns as ever told his kids a bedtime story.

Friday, as a rule, was the night of our foregathering in some Fleet Street tavern or other -- a few authors usually with Lewis Carlton and an artist or two, like Phil Swinnerton (brother of Frank Swinnerton, the novelist) who for a time was art-editor of "The Union Jack" and who, perhaps because of his own interest in the stage, first dubbed Leon Kestrel "The Master Mummer". I still meet Philip Swinnerton now and then in the publicans and have a little yarn about old times. And, as he says, how worth while they are to recall when with one golden "half-bar" one could have a glorious night out, ushering it in with champagne at Shirreff's Wine Shop under the railway arch at Ludgate Hill (on draught, 3d a glass!!)

Quite often in the company, discussing details of some fictional and nefarious enterprise, was the versatile Anthony Shane, creator of Zenith the Albino, a neighbour of mine in my early days and an old friend whom I still meet, though on rare occasions. Now and then, too, there would be Norman Goddard, perhaps the most colourful of them all, a mercurial, happy go-lucky schoolboy type, who could make the money fly when he'd got it and when he hadn't, would write full-out until he earned some more. On the odd occasion, Norman could be persuaded to write a Sexton Blake yarn, but his great forte was for Westerns, which he revelled in. Indeed, his chief joy when not writing about a cowboy was to dress up like one and introduce the rodeo atmosphere into a fancy-dress dance.

Whatever his attire, however, he always wore the same crocodile-skin belt, which I think he regarded as a talisman. It was something of a life bolt, too, as was evident sometimes when he turned up, stony, on a Friday morning and left it at the pub next door as security for the stimulus of a double-brandy (10d); after which some Editor, thirsting for copy, would chain him to a typewriter in the office for the rest of the day. He was a touch-typist who wrote at amazing speed and by four o'clock he would have produced anything up to ten thousand words. Then he was in the money again and would be off to Deal, as like as not, to spend the next arduous few days in the Channel with some fisherman, helping to haul in his nets. He loved that.

By this time the Kaiser's war was upon us, from which I eventually returned, broke, to try to pick up the threads again. But they had become rather frayed threads, believe me, for with rates very little increased and the pound already devalued to ten shillings, the old pipe dreams of affluence had all gone up in smoke.

For this was the period of "The Avalanche" when, for some extraordinary reason, the boys' papers died on their feet, and the popular magazines collapsed like so many dominoes and tumbled so rapidly into the limbo that the free-lance market began to resemble Petticoat Lane on a Monday morning.

I have never yet heard from anyone, Editor or otherwise, a satisfactory explanation of that melancholy phenomenon or found anyone at all who could identify the virus that infected the fiction market of that time, both adult and juvenile. It just happened. "The Boys' Friend", "The Boys' Realm", "Fluck", "The Marvel", etc., all the old-stagers blew away like so much chaff along with "The London Magazine", "The Red", "The Yellow", "The Royal", "The Windsor", Old Uncle Tom Cobbley and all.

In the case of the boys' market, an attempt was made to save it, of course. "The Thriller" and "Modern Boy" appeared, cast in a more "refined" mould; "The Union Jack" became "The Detective Weekly" - of which I wrote the first two numbers. In the end, however, they all succumbed, with even "The Gem" and "The Magnet" following the melancholy procession, while the "Comics" saved themselves largely by shedding their robust, imaginative appeal and following "The Rainbow" and "Tiger Tim's Weekly" into the toddlers' world of colour and Urs Bruin.

Yet what true comics they were! There are no "comic strips" today to compare with the work of Tom Browne, creator of "Sairy Willie and Fired Tim. Nor, in my humble opinion, will Marjorie Allingham ever achieve such mastery of mystery and melodrama as did her father in "The Jester".

It was the intrusion, perhaps of a certain half-baked form of snobbery that was responsible. Elementary education was becoming self-conscious and teachers and authorities having little sympathy with, or understanding of, the merits of youthful imagination had begun to pass their prejudices on to the parents.

The stigma of "the penny dreadful" was certainly a potent one (to

which Lord Northcliffe himself was extremely sensitive) to such an extent that we authors were made to feel at times very much like a special breed of mountebank, or at best like somewhat illiterate circus-trots to be discreetly endured and patronised by "The Box Office".

Some of you, for instance, may remember Kestrel's post-war activities with the "War Profits Liquidation Syndicate" and his vendetta against the profiteer. But I'll wager none of you remember the time a certain person's son in South Wales was arraigned on a charge of attempting foolishly to blackmail the late Lord Inchape, of whom I had hardly heard, and whom, for some odd reason, he had identified with the offending magnate in one of my stories. The threatening letter in the case in question was Leon Kestrel's, almost word for word, lifted bodily from my Sexton Blake story, and it was produced triumphantly by the prosecuting counsel in the Court. And the misguided young man, I remember, was let off on the strict condition that he read no more "pernicious literature", while I was left with my conscience.

Yes, that was the unsanctified atmosphere we wrote in, and though people like Edgar Wallace did a lot to disperse it and to make the detective story respectable, a certain measure of the old stigma still persists in the humbler strata.

How odd that you chaps should now have examined so many of the old skeletons, or pulled them out of their cupboards, to give them Christian burial and to add a laurel or two to the wreaths.

I am afraid I am over-running my space, although there is a lot more I could tell you which I think you would find interesting. Perhaps it is as well. Old soldiers, in reminiscence, run notoriously to garrulity.

If, as Tom Hopperton suggests so flatteringily, Leon Kestrel has nostalgic memories for some of you, as he has for his creator, I could perhaps tell you on some other occasion about the methods I followed in writing, and touch upon those adopted, so far as I knew them, by some of my fellow contributors in those now far-off days.

Mambille, let me say how touched (and surprised) I am by Tom Hopperton's note and the enthusiasm he obviously shares with other collectors all over the world. I little dreamed when I wrote to Mr Morris in Melbourne that the message would be echo-sounded back to me via Scarborough from the Antipodes. It makes me feel rather like some forgotten relic, dragged out unexspectedly from the limbo and set up in a glass case for public exhibition. But —— thanks a lot, all the same!

#### The March of Progress. I had ceased to be either modern or a boy whom

"Modern Boy" appeared and so never read it at the time. I now see that it appears to have been an excellent paper, and I do glean one interesting item from it. "King of the Islands" appeared in No 1 as being by SIR ALAN COBBHAM (in large letters) and Charles Hamilton (in small). Mr Hamilton was evidently a tyro at writing in 1928 but made such rapid progress that by No 24 he needed no aid from the hon. gent.

The Walrus

## SOMETHING RICHARDS

I wonder how many of those who are now waiting to read Frank Richards' autobiography remember very much about an earlier "autobiography" which was highly popular among the young boys but seems to receive scant attention from the old boys. That is a pity. "Frank Richards' Schooldays" was too good to be simply smothered under the combined weights of Bunter's avoirdupois and D'Arcy's fancy waistcoats. Its goodness was reflected in its popularity. Rockwood is generally given the credit for pulling "The Boys' Friend" out of the mire in 1915, but the paper hadn't a very healthy look in 1917, which makes me think that the Cedar Creek series which then began and ran for years had at least an honourable share in the rescue.

It would be interesting to know what gave birth to the idea, which must have been a huge joke to the author. There he was as Martin Clifford writing about himself as young Frank Richards, and setting the scene in Canada, a country he had never even seen. I do not mean, of course, that he approached the actual writing with levity or carelessness. There is one thing on which I have the slightest doubt that the tales were in every way excellent, and that is the local colour. It satisfied me as a boy, and I still can't see anything faulty in it, which is good enough for all practical purposes, and if a Canadian might have some slight natter about the Thompson Valley, so much the worse for him.

It is not much use trying to compare Cedar Creek with Greyfriars and St. Jim's. Log cabins and old grey stones need different yardsticks. About the only Hamilton school that can be brought into parallel is Packsaddle, which never appealed to me greatly. If you take away Bill Sampson dusting his pupils' breeches with a quirt, there isn't much left, and, without turnin' up copies, I'm blessed if I can remember anything about the characters except that Dick Carr was a shadowy sort of Frank Richards. James McCann and Sammy Sparshot ran away with High Coombe and Grimsdale, respectively, and, even moreso, Bill Sampson was Packsaddle. Besides, there was a farcical tongue-in-the-cheek air about the Tawan school which suited the type of tale but which, for creating any lasting impression, is much inferior to the serious treatment accorded the Canadian establishment.

Cedar Creek was no one-man show, but possessed a nicely-balanced bunch of characters. We know that Frank Richards devised Frank Nugent as a pen-picture of his youthful self, so that seeing how Martin Clifford drew young Frank Richards makes quite an interesting study. The broad outlines seem to be the same. There is nothing brash or unduly heroic about the tenderfoot, and just as Nugent is rather overshadowed by the rest of the famous Five, Frank Richards' a little to the rear of his two chums. Bob Lawless, in some respects a Canadian Bob Cherry, and Vere Beauclerc, the son of the shiftless and weak-willed remittance man, rather crowd the nominal head of the Co out of the spotlight. Mr. Hamilton has an agreeable habit of developing at least one arresting character in each story, and Beauclerc, whose unfortunate family background had given him a serious, even sombre side to his nature was the one to really ring the bell bars. (Turn to page 24)

# THE HA'PENNY HERALD

by Tom Hopperton

"Frank Richards is almost ashamed to say that he knows nothing on the subject of early struggles, never having had any ... Then, when his income dropped in a day from £2500 a year to nothing ... he could be quite eloquent on the subject of 'late' struggles." Thus Frank Richards in "The Fifth Saturday Book", and I find the words highly applicable to my own experiences in reading his stories. I could grow eloquent - profane even! - about some of my collecting efforts when the weekly "income" ceased in 1940, but when others are relating harrowing stories of parental prohibitions, the only contribution I can make to the conversation is a sympathetic noise. My father, realising that it is easier to divert a stream than to dam it - as well as being safer - banned nothing, and when he thought it time that I graduated from comics gave me a small paper, saying: "Look, here's a new paper supposed to be written by schoolboys. If you like it, you can have it every week."

It was No 1 of the first series of "The Greyfriars Herald", and if it was news to me it came as no shock to the readers of "The Magnet" for its coming had been "dinned in their lugs" for months. Experiments in swelling the collection from the Hamiltonians with Greyfriars stories in "The Penny Popular" and "The Dreadnought" had paved the way for this more ambitious scheme of an independent paper; a poll of Magnetites had been announced as resulting in: For "The Greyfriars Herald", 105,726: Against "The Greyfriars Herald", 4", and H.A. Hinton had even printed his "private correspondence" with Dr Lookes, showing how he had gradually prevailed on the Headmaster of Greyfriars to permit the general publication of the school magazine. "Tom Merry's Weekly" was similarly scheduled for promotion from supplement to weekly paper. The "Weekly", for some obscure reason, never did materialise as a real weekly, but its rival appeared as scheduled.

After all the ballyhoo, it was a modest enough mouse which emerged from the mountain. The price was only a halfpenny but, even so, it had a rather amateurish look, although that may have been part of the atmosphere of being "Edited by Harry Wharton and Co", and of all the contributors being in the Remove. There were three "foreign" items: "Mark Linley's" serial, "The Pride of the Ring" was set at Earlingham School, "Frank Nugent" had a page comic strip, and "Peter Todd" had a series of spoof detective yarns which were funny enough to have stuck in my mind long after most of the companion features had faded. Probably the funniest thing about Peter's Herlock Sholmes, though, was that when he was transferred to "The Magnet" the editor had to assure some indignant readers that his "detecting" exploits were not intended to be taken seriously. St Jim's managed to show the tip of its nose occasionally, but otherwise the new paper was simply an expansion of the old supplement, with news from the Remove Police Court (held in the woodshed), and short stories, articles and "correspondence".

all signed by familiar Greyfriars characters. This pretence of schoolboy authorship makes it difficult to estimate what contribution - if any - Frank Richards made to the paper, and the occasional gleam of his style may simply be because some of the stories are adaptations of humorous interludes used previously in longer tales.

"The Greyfriars Herald", the sixth of the Companion Papers, was no doubt intended to be both a ha'penny bait to hook fish for the penny "Magnet", and a feeler to decide just how much of a good thing the Frank Richards devotees were prepared to buy each week. Even if one makes a cynical discount from the figures of the poll and "Harry Wharton's" claim that it "was launched at the urgent request of the 'Magnet' readers", there can be no gainsaying that the demand for more and more Greyfriars was there. But the Knisur War was in its second year and in No 17 "Harry" sounded a warning about the paper situation. Something had to go, and the axe fell on the youngest and cheapest of the family. The following week's issue appeared with a notice of suspension, and the promise to re-appear in brighter times. Short as it was, this first run must have convinced the conductors of Fleetway House that they were on the right track, for within two months of the Armistice the paper was back as a fully-fledged member of the "Magnet" group.

This second series lacked much of the appropriateness of character which marked the original version, and neither Old Conquist's stories of Jack Drake at St Winifred's nor a continual fiddling about with its make-up saved it from an early grave. It was just as inevitable, I think, that the halfpenny series would also have petered out if it had been allowed to continue un molested. The basic idea, after all, was to present gags after page of chit-chat about Greyfriars, which was enjoynble enough in a short supplement, but was not strong enough to carry a full-sized weekly paper. It was impossible to draw indefinitely on a capital of Richards' characters without Frank to infuse them with vitality in their natural sphere - the longish story. The demand for more Greyfriars, as I have said, was very much there, but it was a rather more discriminating and intelligent demand than H.A. Hinton imagined. Proof of this is afforded, I believe, by the much longer run of "The Penny Popular." "The Penny Pop" played some queer tricks with its scissors-and-paste policy but it did give the gist or essence of the original yarns and we cheerfully defied myopia at the hands of its often vilo print to keep reading it.

Still, I regard the halfpenny series of "The Greyfriars Herald" with an affectionate eye. For me, it was most appropriately named, for it heralded many years of entertainment and amusement with its "staff". For that meritorious service, I think the least I can do if I ever lay hands on the elusive No 1 is to frame it.

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SALE/WANTED: Magnets, Gems, Union Jacks, Dick Turpins, Saxon Blakes, cto. Honeysett, 65, Orchard Road, St. James, Lancashire.

# THAT DREAUFUL MR REYNOLDS

by Tom Hoperton

"We are all children compared with Reynolds". — Charles Dickens.

"That most gory or sanguinary stumtful novelist, G.W.M. Reynolds, who perhaps did more harm to the rising generation of his time than any other writer". — H. Chance Newton, "Crime and the Drama"

Dickens was hardly the man to throw indiscriminate bouquets about, least of all to Reynolds, who had infuriated him by calmly "pinching" the Pickwick Club for a "Pickwick Abroad" which at one time outsold the original, and as "we all" included Bulwer Lytton, Harrison Ainsworth, Wilkie Collins, J.F. Smith and Charles Dickens himself, it is reasonable to suppose that there must have been substantial reasons for the compliment. There were! "The Pickwick Papers", phenomenal success as it was, took over ten years to gross a 40,000 sale. The day-of-issue sales of Reynolds' parts unfailingly topped 60,000 and in at least one case — "Mary Price" — soared to 107,000. In addition, for nearly half a century, there was year in and year out a bibliographically bewildering deluge of Reynolds' editions in penny and halfpenny weekly numbers, sixpenny monthly parts, serials, paper wrappers and full publishers' cloth pouring from the presses and in competition with his authorised editions he was pirated (and worse) on a scale that would have sent Dickens, a fellow sufferer, into a frenzy. Dickens's remark, then, was founded on fact. That of Chance Norton rests solely upon opinion, and there is only one way to test it — by reading the maligned author for oneself. The newcomer to Reynolds is assured of an entertaining and exciting experience and can calm any ethical qualms with the reflection that if he has read of Sweeney Todd without succumbing to the urge to sally forth and cut a throat, he will probably emerge from, say, "The Mysteries of London" with his morale intact.

George William Macarthur Reynolds must have been a considerable disappointment to the propagandists of the Hamilton Edwards type, who loved to depict the penny dreadful authors as semi-literate wretches who, in the interval between being born in the gutter and dying there, scribble their scrawls on scraps of wrapping paper in the gin palace while existing on other scraps from the cook shop. He was born on July 23, 1814, the son of Sir George Reynolds, a post-captain in the Navy, and being destined for the Army, entered Sandhurst in 1828. His father and mother died within a few months of each other and young George, now fallen heir to £12,000 (not £120,000, as Montague Summers has it) quitted Sandhurst in 1830 to travel on the Continent. He claimed at least once in later years to have passed the examinations necessary to qualify for a commission, but as he was only 16 when he left the story is perhaps no better founded than "Reynolds's Newspaper's" subsequent promotion of the post-captain to

admiral. In 1835 he established himself in Paris as the proprietor of a daily newspaper (in English), "The London and Paris Courier" and of the Librairie des Etrangers, and in the same year foreshadowed his fictional trend with "The Youthful Imposter", a novel subsequently re-issued under the more lurid title of "The Parricide; or, A Youth's Career of Crime". These ventures gave him experience at the cost of most of his capital and by 1837 he was back in London as the editor of "The Old Monthly Magazine", a post he held for a couple of years. His precise activities during the six or seven years following are rather vaguer than one could wish. There is a strong supposition that he wrote, anonymously, a number of romances for Edward Lloyd. This is certainly not improbable, but it is strange that no-one has been able to point to any of the Lloyd dreadfuls as being written in Reynolds' distinctive style, and he vigorously repudiated the paternity of quite a number of them with which rumour wished to father him.

But he did produce a number of books, as well as being in charge of the foreign news section of "The Daily Dispatch" from 1840. "Master Timothy's Booknass", which is not as innocuous as the title suggests, ran through five editions in four years. "Grace Darling; or, The Heroine of the Farne Islands" must have made the Northumbrian fisher-lass blink more than a little at the plot into which Reynolds interwove her heroic rescues. "Pickwick Abroad; or, The Tour in France" brought him £800 and a first-class row with Charles Dickens. The creator of Sam Weller was deeply incensed by such catch-penny efforts as Edward Lloyd's "Penny Pickwick": how much more irritated he must have been by the laudatory press notices of this more serious rival, such as "The Sun's" "'Pickwick Abroad' is so well done by G.W.M. Reynolds that we must warn Boz to look to his laurels." Correspondence between the authors seemed to peter out with the real original reduced to breathlessness by Reynolds' cool retort that it had been open to him to take Pickwick abroad and as he had neglected to do so it was his own fault that it had been Reynolds' destiny to transport the Pickwick Club to the Continent himself.

Translations of such an odd mixture as Paul de Kock's novels and Victor Hugo's poems, plus some ten books and innumerable articles of his own in most of the leading journals had made him a figure of some note by 1844, when he became associated with George Stiff and George Vickers and so had his foot set in the path to his final celebrity.

George Stiff achieved a certain eminence of notoriety in the throng of peculiar characters haunting the parlours of Crub Street - no easy task at any period, and particularly difficult in those turbulent times when the cheap periodicals were fighting for a foothold. He began with many disadvantages, of which an overweening regard for moral scruples was not one, as a pound-a-week wood engraver of less than moderate ability, as can be readily seen from his most accessible work, the illustrations to Vickers' first edition of "The Mysteries of London" (or W.M. Clark's 1857 edition, which was stereotyped from Vickers'). Stiff, inspired by the success of "The Family Herald" and undeterred by the fact that he

had not the proverbial two brown to rub together set out to have his own weekly, "The London Journal". His modus operandi was delightfully simple. Fly-by-night sheets started up in all directions at that time, generally financed "on spec" by some paper manufacturer or wholesaler who was willing to take a chance. Stiff found such a wholesale stationer and talked him into giving a month's credit. Once the budding journal proprietor was "into his ribs" the unfortunate capitalist was indeed on the horns of a dilemma. The only thing that would send Stiff's hand to his pocket was the bailiff's hand on his shoulder and, in any case, he just could not meet this obligation. What was the creditor to do — shut off Stiff's supplies, thereby closing down his paper and placing the debt for ever beyond recovery, or give him a little more rope in the hope of eventual settlement? The rope had it. Heaven only knows how even Stiff's plausibility succeeded so far with a firm which began to pester him for payment when his paper bill was only £30, but he eventually cajoled his Santa Claus of a wholesaler into buying him machinery and even into building him a block of premises. Incredible as it may seem, this man without a penny in his pocket to begin with made not the slightest attempt to settle until he had run his indebtedness to the fantastic total of £13,000. From this promising beginning, he went on to control a number of papers, and he disposed of his first string, "The London Journal", some years later for £24,000. This was not quite what Karl Marx had in mind when he described "the primitive accumulation of capital", but it was accumulation all right, and Stiff's methods could hardly have been more primitive.

Such was the character, then, who engaged Reynolds for the dual task of writing "The Mysteries of London" and of editing "The London Journal". Translations of Eugene Sue's romances were then great favourites as serials in the cheaper periodicals, although the Frenchman doubtless felt that the admiration might well have been reinforced by a little cash in the way of royalties, and his marathon "Mysteries of Paris" suggested its London counterpart. The story was a roaring success from the start, and as its 105 weekly numbers proceeded the enthusiasm mounted, over 100,000 copies a week being sold.

I have an uneasy feeling that Mr E.S. Turner's remarks about Reynolds' works in "Boys Will Be Boys" were based on skimming through "The Mysteries of London" alone rather than on any extended study of his books. They are, in a way, fair comment if that be so, but by stressing certain facets they convey a quite misleading impression. Reynolds certainly never hesitated to cast the first stone at any injustice or evil to which he objected and, as likely as not, he would follow it up with a fusillade of anything hard and jagged which lay to hand, but his eager readers didn't fight outside the newsagents for his weekly numbers to read his interjections on the moral obliquity of the aristocracy. He gave ungrudgingly of thrills and excitement, chills and horrors, and the eight hundred odd pages of "The Mysteries of London" contain more value for the sensation seeker than fifty modern "thrillers".

"The London Journal", however, began sedately and gave every indication of staying that way. There was only one sure way of putting pep into it, and Reynolds' superabundant energy was harnessed to a serial. "Faust", a highly Gothic version of the old legend - without asides or interjections, Mr Turner - began in No 32, and within a few weeks the circulation had shot up to the then record of 75,000. By No 52 it had topped 120,000 and it continued to rise. Faust sold his soul to the devil for a good run, and he got it. His story went on in hefty instalments until No 73, 18th July, 1846, but Reynolds wrote no further serial for the "Journal". It was hardly surprising that differences had arisen between editor and proprietor and while G.W.M.R. remained in charge until the middle of August, he found relations so strained that he withdrew and busied himself with launching his own weekly, "Reynolds's Miscellany", of which John Dick, an ex-news vendor grown prosperous became publisher. No 1 appeared in the first week of November, 1846, with "Wagner: The Wehr Wolf" - a self-explanatory title - as the serial and front-page draw.

The break with Stiff was not a clean one. Reynolds had completed the first series of "The Mysteries of London" and was under contract to produce a second series in 104 numbers of which only the sixth was on sale before his "Miscellany" appeared. Calling as the entanglement must have been, he was a man of his word and he continued to write. Probity and consideration for his literary reputation alike forbade any attempt to foist off fustian, and the story stands as mute evidence that neither Stiff nor the readers had cause for complaint.

How different it was with J.F. Smith, Reynolds' successor as chief writer for "The London Journal" and his closest rival in popularity. Smith was in the middle of a serial when he in his turn quarrelled with Stiff. He concluded a secret agreement with John Cassell to transfer his pen to the exclusive use of "Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper" and then turned up as usual at Stiff's office to write his weakly instalment, to which he gave a distinctly novel twist by gathering all his characters on a Mississippi river steamboat — which he blew up, cast adrift. Having thus "discharged" his liabilities, he made sure that the copy would appear by giving it direct into the hands of the printers, put on his hat and quietly vanished from the scene.

"Reynold's Miscellany" was little more than half the size of "The London Journal", but its initial 30,000 copies a week crept steadily upwards, and by the end of the third half-yearly volume it was popular enough for Reynolds to decide to expand it to the same size as its rival sixteen 11" x 8" pages, in a new series of which the first number was to be issued on 28th June, 1848. This development gave rise to one of the most incredible and unsavoury episodes in the chequered enough history of English journalism.

Reynolds had advertised widely that the new series would begin with a serial by himself, "The Coral Island; or, The Hereditary Curse", and a translation of Alphonse Lamartine's "History of the Girondists". The first issue was printed by Saturday, 24th June, and on that evening a substantial number for despatch to Scotland were sent round to George

Vickers, who combined wholesale distribution with publishing for Stiff. If the inception of "The London Journal" were not proof enough that launching a new paper was a light-hearted job in those days, what followed should clinch the matter. George Stiff, who had been hurriedly furnished with copies by his stooge, suddenly appeared at a printer's the same evening, vowing that he "would spend £1000 to ruin Reynolds and the 'Fiecel-lany'" and demanding to know whether he could have printed there a new "publication in opposition to 'Reynolds's Miscellany'". On the Monday morning, work had not even begun, but on Tuesday morning, 27th June, Stiff issued with Vickers as publisher "Reynolds's Magazine".

Why "Reynolds's Magazine?" The explanation out-Stiffs Stiff. He employed a stoker named Abraham Reynolds, who was unable to read or write and No. 1 bore the imprint: "Printed by A. REYNOLDS, 10 Vine-street, Liquor-pond-street". Could impudence go further? It could - and did!

George Reynolds' "Coral Island" was pirated under the title of "The Mysteries of the Court of Naples", which gives an inkling of its nature. No 1 of Stiff's "Magazine" began "Corral Island. A Tale. By the Editor" a wretched affair set on "an island in a secluded quarter of North America" and in which the hack who had ground it out literally overnight kept reverting absent-mindedly to the spelling "Coral". Osse was piled on Pelion by the further inclusion of the first instalment of - yes! - Lamartine's "History of the Girondists", "lifted" from another translation. "The Three Musketeers" appeared as the other serial, although it had been in print in England for over three years, and the remainder of the paper was filled with bits and pieces culled from the pending copy files of "The London Journal". To aid the anti-Reynolds front, the "Notices to Correspondents" column was an extended study in scurrility. For example:

"A.B.X. - The only ladies connected with weekly periodical literature are ... (seven names given). The tale alluded to by you is generally known in the literary world to be the production of Mr. Alexander". (This was a swipe at "Gretna Green", by Susannah Frances Reynolds, George's wife and herself a popular novelist).

"R.R. - There is no good book published on the 'Laws Relative to Masters and Apprentices'." (Reynolds had just issued that title).

"G.R. - Yes; the gentleman is a relation of Reynolds, the spy. It was for some time believed that he himself was a spy". (There was probably no more malignant smear that could have been used against Reynolds, who was one of the Chartist leaders. The Government's spies and secret agents drove the working-class movements to fury, and while there was a spy named (or alias) Reynolds, he was no relation of G.W.M.R.'s.)

Reynolds immediately issued "An Address to the Public" in which he fully exposed the swindle and appealed "...to the British Public whether a more malignant, cowardly and dishonourable attempt to supplant a popular publication and throw discredit on an author was ever made before." It probably never was, and while Reynolds went to law with justifiable confidence, Stiff had other tricks and more filth up his sleeve.

(To be concluded.)

Having defied Mr. Quelch by splitting an infinitive to emphasize Beauchere's excellence, I don't want to deal with the other characters in such a way as to make you think that I am simply ladling out superlatives. But it is difficult. The shortness of the Rockwood stories kept down the number of effective personnel as compared with St. Jim's, but as it was a full-sized school the author had to chalk in a crowd of background characters. Cedar Creek had it both ways. The tales were short and as it was a backwoods village school Mr. Clifford had to confine himself to a mere handful of characters whether he liked it or not. The concentration meant that each received the maximum attention, with fine results.

If you except Fatty Wynn, who was pre-Bunter anyway and not an imitation Owl, Chunky Todgers is as agreeable a member of the bloated tribe as you will meet. He is likeable because he is never crude or gross, as Trimble often is. He is bearable because he never gets out of hand to monopolise the stories. Kern Gunten, the Swizz "villain", twirls his moustache, as it were, but neither he nor Keller, the jackal, go in for the sheer, wilful, gratuitous villainy that the early Levison did. Mr. Hamilton seemed to lose his early belief that a Chink who talks like Wishee and Washee in a Pudsey pantomime of "Aladdin" is funny, and he never explained how the incongruous Wun Lung contrived to get through the Greyfriars entrance exam. But in Yon Chin, who also shared the attributes of Bret Harte's Heathen Chinee, he had a similar character who was quite in keeping in the Thompson Valley and who was used to good advantage. Even the staff was novel, with Miss Meadows in charge and Mr. Slimay as her shy, devoted right-hand.

There is one great advantage about the stories, and that is the Canadian background, which had a three-way effect. There was a ready transition from school to adventure stories without having to drag the boy off on such remarkable holidays as the English juniors enjoyed. Quite a number of the plots are unique in Mr. Hamilton's repertoire, where duplication of ideas is not exactly unknown, and as he is not the man to let a good idea go a-begging once he has got hold of it, it is really interesting to see how Canada modifies some of his stock situations when he does produce them. Besides, he was long past any teething troubles as a writer. In "Magnet" No. 111, Snoop set the Famous Five and Bunter adrift in a balloon, and it occupied one week. When Gunten did as much for Frank Richards and Co., they blew round Canada for week after week, and comparison of this pair of stories or any other pair will verify that my claim that Cedar Creek can vie with any other Hamilton series is not ill-founded.

The Fleetway House editors printed plenty of bad stories once, but they were at least astute enough not to duplicate their errors. "Frank Richards' Schooldays" was reprinted in "The Popular", "The Gem", "The Boys' Friend Library" and "The Schoolboys' Own Library". That should make you think - and I hope it will stimulate your memory sufficiently for you to obtain a few of the numerous copies available and renew acquaintance with that rich and delightful series.

## **SHIPS AND SHOES**

AND SEALING WAX

by The Walrus

Disgruntled Note: It is surely a coincidence that Guy Raynor, who did not believe in uplifting editorials, was a singularly unsuccessful editor. Equally a coincidence, no doubt, is the fact that Hamilton Edwards, who did, was a singularly successful one. There seemed to be nothing Edwards enjoyed more than to balance his cigar on the inkwell and give juvenile smokers "the works". Considering that he was at one with Ichabod Bronson, the arch-reformer of "The Belle of New York", it wasn't in very good taste for H.E. to alternate crusades against lung corrosion in his papers with hefty adverts for Cope's "Jap" cigarettes. This irritates me in two ways. It was using the prestige of the paper to bolster up for advertisement revedus what the editorial condemned, and a packet of five "Japs", complete with "mouthpieces" cost a penny. Looking regretfully at the cigarette in my hand, I fished out paper and pencil and ascertained that it cost more than eleven times as much as one of those "Japs". Verily, those must have been the days.

Dummkopf: I suppose my brain isn't what it ought to be. Listen! An elderly gentleman travelling on a London bus reproved the conductor for shouting: "Westminister. Westminister". "It isn't Westminister", said the E.C. "It is Weatminster!" "Oh, aye!" retorted the conductor. "Then what's the W for?" "Tit-Bits" printed that over twenty years ago, and it has haunted me ever since because I just can't see where the fun comes in. Now my bête-noire has a mate. Both "Story Paper Collector" and "C.D." quote with apparent relish an extract from "The Case of the Spiv's Secret" by Anthony Parsons (Sexton Blake Library No. 225) — "The Baker Street pair were well known at Yard headquarters, where for years they went up in the lift, and upon being admitted...." That's the bit, and I suppose my acuter confrères must see some point in it. Me, I'm stuck again. Please, someone, explain the joke to me before, in despair, I begin to sign myself — "THE MACWALRUS".

## THE LEADING MEN

by Dennis Richland

Speaking with a considerable experience of reading school tales or every date from Tom Brown to the Bunter Books and in such videly assorted papers as the "B.O.P." and "The Rover" and of some slight experience in writing them (Yes, they sold!), I have settled down to the fixed opinion that the absolute bane of the author's life is the nominal leading man, the hero of such stories.

In a boy's adventure story it matters little who or what the hero may be. I've seen everything from space man to anthropoid apes. The plot is generally the dominating factor and it is a regrettable thought not invincible rule that plot and characterization are present in inverse ratio. The protagonist is generally roughly sculpted to fit the role of airmen, detective, Rastafire or what have you. If an interesting twist of eccentricity or some unusual quirk of character can be imparted, so much the better, although to judge by numerous examples it really doesn't matter a great deal, look at the number of years Jack, Sam and Pete flourished, although Jack and Sam were never much more than dummies carried on the darby's broad shoulders. How contented would be the school story writer who could get away with Clarke Hock's happily slap-dash characterization.

But such things are not for the budding Hamilton, and if he thinks he can find a solution by flying to the other extreme he is likely to find that his cure is worse than the disease. Rosentriicity has been tried on immovable occasions. Keeping to the same example Clarke Hock, he evolved Spook, who had a fair outing in "Pluck," while J.N. Pantolow wed his hand with Johnny Grogan, a not dissimilar character, in "The Fourth Form at Franklington" and "Goggs' Grammar". They are familiar figures to every collector, who will recall that, whatever their merits, the innocent geeko-adorned faces masking exceptionally keen brains, the jujitsu, the ventriloquism, the incredible impersonations and the outrageous practical jokes which were their stock-in-trade soon wore thin. The abnormal may make an excellent single story, funny, exciting or macabre according to the planning; it does not and can not stand up to the wear and tear of a lengthy series centred on a school.

It is easy to see why. If the hero is really to be the load, he cannot be overshadowed by anyone else in the cast - at least not in the traits which are the subject of human admiration and human envy. This automatically assumes that it is not sufficient that he dominate the mind of the reader. Indeed, one can go further and say that he cannot dominate those unless he also dominates his foemenates. Ipo facto, then, he has sooner or later to become the form optional, and what are the qualifications for that job? Not ventriloquism or the ability to understand Leon Korsak, the Master humorist, anyway! A likably normal youth, reasonably adept at games and handy with his fists could outvote all the but-once justifications in fiction. So, unless the author is willing to chance a flagrant defiance

of probability which will, sooner or later, knock the bottom out of his variety of every writer's dream - the series that goes on and on and on - he has to buckle down to the depressingly subtle task of devising a youth who is normal without being insipid, while different without being a caricature. Poor fellow! No matter how conscientiously he tackles the job, there will generally be some indication that his heart would rather pursue another path. Rylton Cleaver, whose school stories stand high in my list of preferences and which I can thoroughly recommend to those who do not know them, affords a good example of this. As book followed book, he contented himself with an adequate but unelaborated characterisation of the boys. His form master, however, evidently seized his imagination for he gradually carved and polished him with loving care into a first-rate character.

Charles Hamilton, of course, worked in the genre on a scale and for a period untouched by any other author. He shows (indeed, he could not have avoided) a general development in all his characters from the gate porters to the governors, but this particular problem of the hero he tackled resolutely on dozens of occasions. Once or twice, by design or accident, some adult character ran away with the story: in the three major series of St. Jim's, Grayfriars and Rockwood, there could be no weakness without disaster. There was no disaster! In some of the one-shot stories, there is no real reason why the hero couldn't be lifted bodily from within one set of old grey walls and dumped down in another without unduly inconveniencing either the reader or himself. The Big Three were tailored to fit, as it were, and emerge as models of characterisation.

There is perhaps one slight qualification needed in that last paragraph. Was Tom Merry expected to last any considerable time, or did the author project him as of similar dimensions to Mark Darren, Pat O'Neil, Clive Russell, Specs and a hundred more, a likely subject to endure for three, six or twelve months before vanishing into the limbo of the lost? It seems probable. The Tom Merry at Clavering stories were not as good as the earlier St. Jim's tales in "Fluck", and whoever decided to blend the Terrible Three and St. Jim's had every reason to congratulate himself on impeccable judgement. In any event, Martin Clifford rather stepped off on the wrong foot with Tom Merry. We can disregard the fact that if the boy had been as full of Pink Pills, Purple Powders, Green Globules, Cerise Syrup and Tangerine Tablets as seems to be likely with his antecedents, he was highly unlikely to have reached the age of fourteen at all, much less to reach it in vigorous health and abounding animal spirits. What is more to the point, although equally beyond the bounds of probability, was that a boy reared as he had been, cossetted and pampered, mollycoddled and doted over by Miss Priscilla Fawcett, could have thrown off so quickly her enervating influence and adjusted himself so rapidly to the hurly-burly of public school life and so thoroughly as to take the lead among the juniors almost immediately. It was all over in a few weeks, except that Miss Priscilla's amateur physicking cropped up as a stock joke for thirty-three years, and it was quite good fun.

This first announcement hardly gave Martin Clifford time to get his orchestra seated when the Claverking Suite was shoved off his music stand and the St. Jim's Overture substituted. Tom Merry's velvet suit came out of the mothballs, but the characteristic of the Hero of the Shell as we know him can hardly be said to have begun until its unfortunate wearer worked it off onto Figgins. After this, and particularly at the end of the few weeks it normally took a Hamilton character to achieve the junior captaincy, Tom was in the groove, in both of the usual figurative and "hep-cat" meanings, and he has run there ever since.

Considering how well we have known him for over forty years, it is surprising how vague we are about what he looks like. Mr Hamilton has always refrained from detailed personal description, contenting himself with the more than adequate alternative of keeping the highlights illuminated by continual reference. Even so, "a sturdy junior", "a sunny face and "curly hair" are not much to go by. It is an even-money chance that I can spot Harry Wharton in a Chapman group, but Macdonald has me beaten completely, and I don't believe that anyone, with the caption covered, can single out Merry's from the half-dozen agreeable enough faces of his pictures. But if the "Gem" artist is not such help, poor Jimmy Silver fares even worse. Heyward's rather untidy original Rockwood drawings just won't remain in my mind. No boy ever lived who remotely resembled a Wakefield illustration but, despite my best endeavours, Silver is to me eternally a curvaceous cherub with a large head, small body, no face to speak of, and his limbs inserted in his torso at peculiar angles. It is disquieting at times, but, when I remember what Wakefield could do to a girl's anatomy, I find some consolation in thinking that perhaps Jimmy Silver got off lightly.

The drawings, of course, had nothing to do with the author's conception, which suffered from none of the same hesitations. From start to finish there is no possible chance of confusion. A rose is a rose is a rose, as Gertrude Stein puts it, and Tom Merry is Tom Merry is Tom Merry and Harry Wharton is .... well, finish it for yourself. True, while there has never been a whisper that Wharton and Silver deviated from the party line there has been comment that the eldest of the trinity changed at least some of his spots. His age certainly went up from about 14½ to 16, but the background was extremely sketchy in the early stories, and as Martin Clifford elaborated the detail until he must have had the very bricks numbered, he had to bring his hero's age into line with that to be expected in the Shell.

More important is the charge that Tom began as a most light-hearted youngster - he was surely not given that surname for nothing - and developed into something of a sober-asides oppressed by the cares of office. There is a kernel of truth in this statement, but I think that one considerable factor has to be much understressed to make it. The stories themselves changed. The majority of the early tales were themselves light-hearted, concentrated on house rivalry and japing, with much of the

dialogue were back chat among the juniors. As Tom took a leading part in both japes and repartees, he could not but appear as bright and perky - "slipper", almost. Then, as the cast enlarged and more variety was given to the stories, this sort of ebullience naturally receded, so the general impression remains that Tom was toned down. Nevertheless, if the later stories in which the traditional themes of rivalry are used are examined, it becomes pretty clear that the unity of characterisation had not been disturbed. What had happened was that Tom had been pushed out of the limelight of the early years towards the wings. As for the hollow trappings of pomp and power that have been supposed to hag-ride him, either the reluctant imposition of discipline by the form captain or dropping someone from the team by the games captain were favourite points of departure for stories at all three schools, and, as far as my memory serves me, Harry encountered no more trouble in this respect than either of his rivals. In particular, I feel sure that Nugent's inclusion or exclusion gave Wharton a lot more trouble than ever Manner's did at St. Jim's, although I grant you that the whimsies of the unpredictable Cardew probably balanced the account. And that's how I remember it - as balanced!

Not only did the stories change - so did the author, and I don't mean by the introduction of deputy writers. As Mr Hamilton's writing of the schools has extended over 35 years, that can hardly be wondered at, but despite the inevitable refinement imposed by time and development Tom Harry ended in "The Gem" very much as he began - the sort of boy which any one of us would have been pleased to be.

That is more than I can say of Harry Wharton. St Jim's junior captain had his troubles, but without exception they came from some external cause. Most of Wharton's sprang from or were exacerbated by internal faults. Tom in the beginning had to be rescued from Miss Priscilla, Harry from himself. The Greyfriars' lad received an unusually detailed personal description on his first appearance - but in addition to the usual well-built frame and handsome face we learned that "in the dark eyes was a glint of suspicion and defiance", and he was in self-provoked trouble on the first page of the first story. Under all the power of leadership, the high principle, the athletic ability, there lurked always a super-sensitive streak of pride and obstinacy. Used as a central theme by Frank Richards, it gave rise to what are probably the finest series in the entire history of "The Magnet". The three most memorable, in which Wharton disimbarts himself because of misunderstanding a scrap of his uncle's letter, his prolonged feud with Mr Quelch, and the Stacey stories were roughly equal in length to some dozen or fifteen ordinary novels. The whole elaborate structure rested on the characterisation of one schoolboy, and the unflagging interest of the stories endorses that - 1st Bunter's fugalmen blow their tin trumpets as they wish - the real triumph of "The Magnet" was the characterisation of Harry Wharton.

In between such stories, Frank Richards' concentration on other angle might have led, forgivably, to the Removites distinguishing traits being

allowed to slide out of sight. His craftsmanship was too good for this. No reader could be unaware of them, for if it be by reaction to some malicious gibe of Skinner's or to Smithy's tantrums, the temper, the pride and the obstinacy were kept sufficiently in view for it to come as no surprise if they suddenly blossomed into the temporarily dominating portion of their owner's nature.

Such a boy is not a likely subject to be imposed on, yet Wharton frequently is. Peter Hazeldene almost invariably weeps on Harry's neck when his "sporting" proclivities have aired him. He succeeds in his unreasonable demands because he is Marjorie's brother. Without that cogent reason, there would be neither sense nor reason in the Hazeldene stories, for he is not dealing with Tom Harry, whose softer heart and engaging habit of never suspecting a lie made him a "sucker" on several occasions for Cutts and similar birds of prey. But what about Bunter? The Owl snogged Wharton's grub, pried into his correspondence, wedged into his tea-parties, tattled falsely about him, and hooked on like a burr to his holidays for over thirty years. If the isolated Hazeldene exploitations hang entirely for credence on Harry's affection for the Cliff House girl, what are we to make of Bunter's wholesale depredations? I fear that the only thing we can make of them is to admit that Frank Richards just would have Bunter dragged into every "Magnet". As a boy I preferred "The Gem" to "The Magnet" because, among other things, I thought — dare I say it? — there was too much Bunter in the Greyfriars paper. W.G.B. is a vastly improved character in the later stories, although I still wish he had broken a leg or at all events done something occasionally to keep him out of the picture for a few weeks. And please note where the emphasis is. Because Wharton in the last resort had to fit Greyfriars and not the other way round, it isn't much use saying that this strange tolerance of Bunter is a flaw in an otherwise perfect characterisation, but I can hardly prevent the thought hovering around the edges of my mind.

Strange that so much emphasis is put on Wharton's darker attributes. I suppose that we take the good things — of which he had plenty — for granted in a school story hero, and there is an unusual complexity, an intermingling of human failings with the fictionally commoner desirable qualities in Wharton which, if not unique, is exceedingly rare, and which certainly grips the interest and imagination. It would have been so easy to overpaint the grey streaks, turning pride into arrogance, impatience into selfish absorption, and temper into mere pettiness. As far as that goes, it would have been just as easy to over-colour the good side, with principle stressed into priggishness, and so on. Nothing of the sort happened either way. The character is artistically harmonious, completely in proportion, and therefore convincing.

When Jimmy Silver appeared on the scene in the 1915 "Boys' Friend", he needed rescuing from no-one, and least of all from himself. "Uncle James" is probably the most sensible and best balanced lad in school fiction. The very nickname is an indication of this, and it is not without significance that he is the only one of the trio to have an affectionate

handle to his name. Jack Blake, in his head cook-and-bottle-washer days, was fond of saying, "Your Uncle Blake is a big chief," but none of his study mates used the term - except in derision. Under no circumstances can I imagine anyone referring to Wharton as "Uncle Harry", and even with Tom Merry, who had much more in common with the Rockwood leader, it still sounds just silly to say "Uncle Tom."

Lovell, Raby and Newcome were so exasperated by the cool new boy's successful refusal to be ejected from the end study in that first story that they met with grunts and glares his assurance that "I'm quite an easy chap to get on with." But he was. There was an easy-going, philosophical streak in Jimmy which marked him off as distinct from Wharton and Merry. Rockwood revived the house rivalry of St. Jim's, and the sparring with the Moderns showed that this "philosophy" did not impair Silver's vivacity, for he was always on his toes. But when the Juniors got into deeper water and Lovell was prepared to rush in where angels would have felt distinctly out of place, Silver, with imperturbable patience and tolerance, offered gentle and restraining advice. It never got him anywhere, as the egregious Arthur Edward bulled his way through just the same and, even if with a sigh, Jimmy stuck to his pig-headed pal.

In any sensible project, however, the lead was always very much in the lead, although he never seemed to work himself into the state of virtuous indignation that sometimes afflicted Wharton and, moreso, Merry. When the knuts were to be put down, Uncle James directed operations, but with a grin on his face. He would certainly have been the most pleasant of the three to live with - sound as a bell, placid, and almost unfailingly good tempered. If I were pinned down to making a choice, I should have to admit that as a fictional character Harry Wharton is a head taller than the others, that Tom Merry's manifold attractions are hard to resist, but that for cheerful company I think Jimmy Silver bears away the palm.

Fortunately, neither I nor you have to choose one to the exclusion of the others. That is just as well, for not only is each one an outstanding character, but each is inseparable from his school. Jimmy could never replace Harry Wharton in the Greyfriars Ramove, Wharton and Lovell could only end in mutual boyslaughter, while Tom Merry might at a pinch squeeze into Rockwood, although to its detriment, but would totally destroy the balance of the Famous Five. Let us count ourselves fortunate, then, that we have defied the flying years in preserving from their ravages both our memories and so many copies of the old papers. In them we can still enjoy the blessed diversity of the three lads who, in the entire field of boys' fiction, hold unchallengeable eminence as the leading men.

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NOTE: "The Leading Men" is the first of a series of five articles.

Dennis Richmond continues in No 2 with "The Key Man" (D'Arcy, Bunter and Lovell), to be followed by "The Seals," "The Freaks," and "The Cads."

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF FRANK RICHARDS

Six years is a long time to wait between the *hors-d'oeuvre* and the main dish, and those of us who had that foretaste of Frank Richards' autobiographical style in the 1945 "Saturday Book" have been drooling ever since, awaiting with more or less patience the long-deferred Autobiography. Published on 21st February, it was too late for inclusion, but the major publishing event of the year cannot be let go without mention.

Like most deposits laid down by time, the book is in strata - a layer of writing experiences, a slice of something else, then another course of St. Jim's and Greyfriars, and so on. No stratum is arid rock, for aridity is a quality foreign to Frank Richards, although I was faintly surprised to find that I grew so absorbed that I read steadily on, exasperating my family by suspending all activity until I finished the book at a sitting, without feeling any urge to skip Frank the globe-trotter to get to Frank the author. Which is saying more than a little! If I skip it now, it is not from lack of appreciation. Each of the miscellaneous chapters has its charm, but this is "The O.B.B.C." so let us stick to the agenda.

The methods of autobiographers are as diverse as their persons. "Almost an Autobiography", by Chapman Cohen, devoted its pages to explaining how its author's mind worked, with nary a word of his body, which must have played some part in his life. Frank Richards is not as bad as that, thank goodness, but, like Iggdrasil, while his trunk is here, he has no earthly roots — for the reader, anyway. Frank is seventeen and seeking his avocation when he steps out of the first sentence. The man who has written so many millions of words about fictional boyhood has not one to say of his own. Strange! And as the fountain of the virtues is at the roots in more than Norse mythology, I feel the loss is double.

The avocation was soon found, and fortunately for us it was in writing. There is an intense fascination about this part of the story, which binds together and amplifies the scattered details we have accumulated during recent years. The hunter after early Hamiltonia will have new avenues to explore, and we have for the first time a connected account of the foundation of "The Gem" and "The Magnet", and of their early history. "The pushful Percy" Griffith may have had some peculiar ideas at times, but for the decision to amalgamate Tom Merry and St. Jim's, and for the inauguration of "The Magnet" he can be forgiven much. Most readers will recognise John Nix Pantelow peering through the palisade of initials which bars him from joining in the story. Not so many will know that H.J.B. of Trapps, Holmes and Co. was Henry Crane, who had plenty of peculiarities of his own but evidently never excised them on Mr Richards.

Nethertheless, the collector, as he reads on, will find himself becoming restive at the reticence. Early in 1945 the author told me: "About the Autobiography, a good many difficulties have cropped up, partly owing to Frank being too frank, if I may so express it... Frank Richards does not feel disposed to blot a single line of it: having taken Hotspur's advice to heart, to 'tell the truth and shame the devil'." Other counseils have

prevailed. Mr. Richards now feels that he should divest his mind of rancour and other destructive emotions, an attitude to which it is difficult to feel unsympathetic. But the result is that we see nothing - or practically nothing - save Frank serene and Frank unruffled, so that while the book is certainly Frank Richards it is an incomplete Frank. And not only is the author incomplete; so is the history of his major achievements, the twin papers. He explains the change from his first treatment of his disputes with Griffith and Hinton and of the "substitute" writers by saying: "He rather let himself go on the subject ... all of which, reading it over after the lapse of years, he has decided to delete. Why dwell on unpleasant things?" and "They have been read by many friends, almost all of whom is of opinion that the locked drawer is the best place for them." Why, oh why, did not Mr. Richards ponder his own dicta on the irreplaceable freshness of an author's first rapid inspiration, and that he himself had written: "It has always been one of our author's weaknesses that .... an adverse word discouraged him unduly?" Reluctance to dwell on things unpleasant is natural: refusal to do more than hint obliquely at actual and important phases of the lives of both papers and author savours a little of sugaring a history of the world by suppressing references to famines, wars and pestilences. Mr. Richards does give us his famine, although without saying how and by whom it was unnecessarily prolonged, but he largely evades his wars, and of J.N.P. - whom he probably regarded as his private and personal pestilence - there is but one muted whisper. The Autobiography therefore inevitably loses much in dramatic content and - at least to the collector partly grounded in the story - assumes a certain disproportion.

And so is this review becoming disproportionate, for the burden of my last half-page has been not what the book contains but what it omits. What it does contain is 190 pages of entrancing writing, of penetrating pen portraits of personalities ranging from editors to gondoliers, of humour which, as in the story of the American lady "doing" Europe who nearly "did" Frank in the process and the editorial "conferences" with Percy Griffith, put me to the unusual experience of laughing aloud over a book, and a multitude of eminently sensible observations on life.

One arrives at the last page with regret. 60,000 words is so little in which to cram the experiences of so many busy years that the process of excision must have given the author more trouble than the writing. James Agate got over the difficulty of a single volume autobiography by "Ego 1", followed by "Ego 2", "Ego 3" and so to "Ego 9". Agate was the man who had never heard of Billy Sunter. Surely the man who created the Owl will not be swamped nine-times by such an ignoramus.

Please, Mr. Richards, reduce the odds at least a little, and if you do not unlock that drawer, it will not really matter. H.A. Hinton was quite right in saying that we lapped up Frank Richards' lucubrations like milk more than thirty years ago. We can still lap up lots more.

And in proof of that, I can now read the Autobiography through again, not this time for analysis but for pure pleasure.

T.H.



## ONE STEP NEARER!

These post-war years have been lean times indeed for boys' periodicals, and any attempt to reproduce in these pages the covers of the few first issues that have seen the light would be greeted with well merited amazement, to say nothing of jeers. But here is one No. 1 we shall all delight to welcome - the first Gold Hawk Book, "Tom Merry's Secret," with its No. 2 to bear it company, "Tom Merry's Rival."

I use Hamilton & Co.'s numbering but it is not so much a No. 1 as No. 1600-and-some, for to those of us who sometimes bemoan the edit-

orial vagaries of "The Gem" and wonder what the yarns would have been like if Martin Clifford had continued to write them without interruption, this is surely the answer. Those who are still not reconciled to the loss of their weekly fare can look at this new series, with its promise of two new titles each month, and echo the words of the leading man in "The Sorrows of Satan" - "One step nearer!"

And the step is a substantial and attractive one. The Mandeville Books gave the St. Jim's juniors their first post-war airing: they have become familiar friends, and while one hopes that they will not now just disappear, it is obvious that they could never have been put out at the rate these paper-backs will be. Martin Clifford was quite right, of course, in his opinion that it was the story that mattered and not the covers, but paper-backs is rather a misnomer as applied to these well-produced, 112 page books with their varnished pictorial covers. We oldsters may have to look twice before we recognise Gussy in his new three-colour splendour, but as R.J. Macdonald takes over the illustrating as from No. 3, the last touch of reminiscent perfection will be added, for the stories themselves are told with every whit of the old smooth charm. It is unlikely that any reader will have overlooked the Gold Hawk Books but, just in case, a descriptive leaflet cum order form is enclosed.

"PARTING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW"  
("Romeo and Juliet," Act 2, Scene 2)

but an annual subscription will save you time and trouble, as well as ensuring that you do receive "The Old Boys' Book Collector." Future issues will have to be printed closely to order, and there is therefore no guarantee that it will be possible to supply late orders. If your sub. expires with this number, please use the enclosed renewal form before it slips your mind.



GEORGE W. M. REYNOLDS  
1814-1879

*From a contemporary woodcut, c. 1855.*

## IN THE BAG — FOR FUTURE PRESENTATION.

“BEHIND THE SCENES” - by the Editor of ‘The Gem’ and ‘Magnet’ (C. M. DOWN)

C. H. CHAPMAN on ILLUSTRATING ‘THE MAGNET’

Reminiscent articles by MICHAEL POOLE and CLIVE R. FENN

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| Dennis Richmond’s series, ‘The Key Men,’ ‘The Beaks,’ ‘The Freaks,’ ‘The Cads.’ | ‘L.C.D.’ - a revaluation of Sexton Blake.             |
| ‘100 Years of the Wild West.’   | ‘The Dixons’ - Brett and Hawke.                       |
| ‘Study No. 11’ - Skinner, Stott and Snoop.                                      | ‘Tinker’s Grandfather.’                               |
| ‘Dawn’s Left Hand’ - the pre-‘Gem’ Hamilton stories.                            | ‘Jack’s Paper.’                                       |
| ‘Coloured Counties and Coloured Covers.’  | ‘Tubby Halig.’  |
| ‘The First and the Best’ - St. Jim’s.   | ‘Stand and Deliver’ - the highwaymen.                 |
| ‘Too Much and Too Often’ - some Hamilton characters.                            | ‘The Demon Barber.’                                   |
| ‘No Ordinary Smith’ - the Victorian sensationalist.                             | ‘Greyfriars Oddities.’                                |
| ‘Reprinting The Gem.’   | ‘Gutter Genius’ - The amazing A.1. of Lloyd’s, Prest. |
| ‘Buffalo Bill.’   | ‘Blood Merchants Supreme’ - the Aldine Co.            |
| ‘Emmett v Brett.’   | ‘Dick Turpin.’  |
| ‘Trial Canters’ - the £d. series of ‘The Gem’ and ‘The Magnet.’                 |   |