

STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS DIGEST

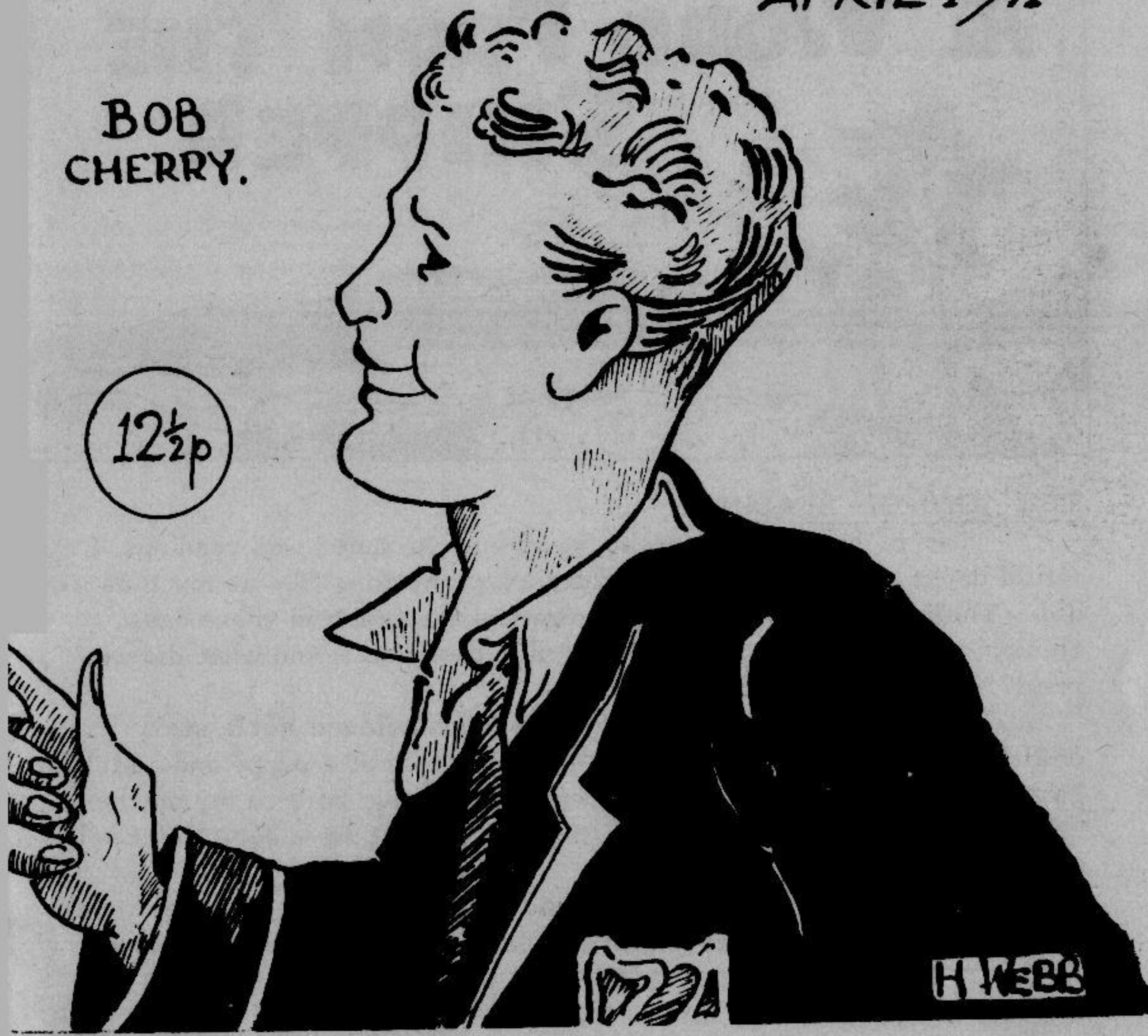
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APRIL 1971

BOB
CHERRY.

12½p



—STORY PAPER—

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

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A WORD FROM THE SKIPPER



THE JOYS OF READING

For most of us the great joy of our childhood was reading. I would doubt whether young folk today read anything like as much as we did. There is so much more to claim the attention in these days, though whether that is a good thing is a question. And what did we read?

I can recall having, as a tiny, a much beloved little story entitled "So-Fat and Mew-Mew." It was a tale of a puppy and a kitten. Precocious tot that I was, I am reported to have said to my mother: "Mummy, this is a lovely story. I think it must have been written by Charles Garvice."

Not, of course, that tots read Charles Garvice, but he was a very famous novelist in those far-off days. My sister used to read

aloud to the family in the evenings, and I loved to hear her. She and my mother were Garvice fans, and I remember the titles of two of his tales that she read aloud: "A Wilful Maid" and "Queen Kate." I feel sure that I never read any Garvice novel myself, but I well recall, down the years, the closing lines of "Queen Kate," viz: "Oh, irony of Fate. The great and powerful Sir Jordan had come to die in the arms of the woman he had betrayed."

I wonder if any reader knows any details concerning Charles Garvice. He was reputed, probably on account of the great number and the varying quality of his books, of having employed ghost writers to churn out stories under his name. I feel sure that "Queen Kate" was one of his best. I would dearly like the chance to see whether I could read it in 1971.

Three famous books when I was a child were "Line Upon Line," part one and part two, and "Peep of Day." The first two told the Old Testament stories for children. "Peep of Day" told stories from the New Testament. My mother gave them to me, and I loved them, and kept them for years. When we were children our parents made sure that we grew up with a knowledge of the Bible. I wonder whether modern parents do the same.

Then, for any boy keen on school stories, there had to be the evergreen "Eric," plus Warren Bell, Harold Avery, and plenty more. And while these stiff-covered books made a permanent base for our young lives, we were progressing from comics to Hamilton, to Brooks, and to Sexton Blake. Charles Garvice would have summed it up, viz: "Oh, irony of Fate. What was regarded as impermanent proved to be the most permanent of the lot!"

STRIKES AND JUBILEES

As a result of the postal strike, our February issue was a month late in appearing, and our March issue was three weeks behind. And, of course, I have had dozens of letters from loyal readers who enquire "Oh, dear, what can the matter be?"

The simple solution would have been to drop a month entirely. But this is our Jubilee Year. In November we celebrate our 25th birthday, and in December we reach the mature figure of No. 300. If

we cut out a month, we should only reach No. 299 in December, which somehow wouldn't sound right. Therefore, we are going to try to catch up with the lost time. If we can reduce the time-lag a little each month, by the Autumn we shall be back to normal publication days.

It may yet be necessary to drop the month, but, at any rate, for the time being, we are trying to catch up, so that next Christmas will bring No. 300. Wish us luck?

A PENNY'S NOT A PENNY ANY MORE

Nowadays the pound note goes quicker than thought. You buy a couple of bananas, receive a few silly little brass bits in change - and the note is gone but not forgotten. They call this rubbishy stuff pennies, but they are not my idea of pennies. My pennies bought a platform ticket, or a bar of chocolate, a Gem, a Magnet, a Nelson Lee, a Union Jack, or Merry & Bright. They were real pennies. I want no truck with this modern bit which, though it costs two-and-a-half times as much to get it, is not worth the rubbishy metal it's printed on.

TWO GRAND OLD-TIMERS

It was sad to hear of the deaths, within a few days of each other, of Harold Lloyd and Bebe Daniels. Harold Lloyd brightened the youthful days of many of us. He was a master of the now forgotten art of being very funny without being dirty. Bebe Daniels graced her profession. She never forgot that great stars must set good examples to a public which tends to imitate them. British people have a special affection for this American lady who lived over here for so long.

The firmament is a trifle greyer for the passing of these two bright stars, though their memory will sparkle on, untarnished.

THE EDITOR

I need the following urgently, and would pay generous prices for good copies. Regret none available for exchange. MAGNETS 962, 966, 968, 978, 982, 984, 985, 986, 992, 994, 995, 1017, 1020, 1043, 1104, 1119, 1125, 1138, 1181. GEMS 1291, 1350, 1378, 1381, 1389, 1399, 1401, 1430.

GEORGE LONGMAN, 8 PATHFINDER TERRACE, BRIDGWATER, SOMERSET.

DANNY'S DIARY

APRIL 1921

Summer time came in on April 3rd when all the clocks were put on by one hour. In a way it is nice to have the long light evenings, but it always seems a bit cold when summer time first comes in. And, on the same day, Mr. Chamberlain introduced his Budget, and Budgets always seem a bit cold to me. There is a $\frac{1}{2}$ d tax on tobacco, so now Dad has to pay 1/- for his ounce of St. Julien.

In the Boys' Friend, the series continues about the Rookwood Fourth without a master, owing to Mr. Bootles leaving to become a millionaire. The first story was "Peele's Plot." The French master was giving the Fourth extra French lessons, and Peele plotted to make Mossoo think himself cracked in the head.

Then "Something New in Form-Masters." Mr. Oliphant had been tutor to Lord George St. Leger who was weak in the upper storey. And Mr. Oliphant arrives to take charge of the Rookwood Fourth. But next week, in "The Frolicsome Form-Master" it turned out that the new form-master was really the cracked Lord George.

In "Form-Master & Boxer" a new master named Mr. Dalton comes along, but Jimmy Silver & Co. have seen a boxing match at Bunbury in which a boxer named The Lamb met the Bunbury Pet. And the boys recognised their new master as the Lamb. Finally, in "Carthew - Detective," Carthew finds out Mr. Dalton's secret and sets about spying on him.

The Cedar Creek tales have been excellent as usual. Mr. Lawless is convinced that his nephew, Frank, robbed Miss Meadows, so the rancher makes arrangements to send Frank to a very strict school in Vancouver. But Frank runs away. The story was "Frank Richards' Flight." In the next tale, "The Hunted Schoolboy," Frank has various adventures before he finally gets clear away from the Thompson Valley.

In "Fallen Among Thieves," Frank rescues a man named Le Couteau, a horse dealer, from two villains. Le Couteau, in the next story entitled "Frank Richards' New Job," gave Frank a job as a chore-boy, but it didn't last long, for the man was a vicious brute.

Finally, Frank came across his old friend Mr. Penrose, now

the proprietor of the Siskoo Gazette. Frank joined up with Mr. Penrose, and agreed to write stories for his newspaper, in "Frank Richards' Partner."

The new airship R.36 left the Clyde and arrived safely at its new home at Pelham. But the pilot flew on in an aeroplane, and was killed when the planed crashed at Biggin Hill.

It has been a curious month in the Magnet. The first tale was "Marooned" in which Sam Ashley, the gardener's boy, was the son of a convict who escaped and hid on Popper's island. But the convict was found to be not guilty, owing to the work of Harry Wharton & Co. Sir Hilton was so pleased that he gave the Co. £100 and also gave the cleared convict a job.

In "Waking Up Alonzo," Alonzo thinks he has killed Skinner. Then, in "Skinner's Secret Society," Skinner ran a set he named the Black Brotherhood. This was a very short story - only 7 chapters - and it introduced Dennis Carr who had previously only appeared in the Popular's Greyfriars tales. It seems quite clear that it was a story left over from the Popular series, which ended at Christmas.

On the other hand, "Deaf Bunter," which was excellent, very funny, very original, and by the real Frank Richards, was a much longer story than usual. Walker boxed Bunter's ear - and it gave the Owl ideas.

Finally, in "Bob Cherry's Luck," Bob got the chance to act on the films. It was rather grim.

The football season ended with Burnley as the League leaders. And Spurs won the Cup Final which was played at Chelsea before a crowd of 73,000 people.

There have been some grand films at the cinemas. Harold Lloyd was very funny in "Captain Kidd's Kids." Charles Ray, my favourite, was good though not quite so good as usual in "Paris Green." Henry Edwards starred in "A Lunatic at Large." John Barrymore was exciting in "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." But the best of the month, and one of the loveliest pictures for a long time, was Charlie Chaplin and Jackie Coogan in "The Kid." Charlie was a window-mender - and the Kid made sure he had plenty of windows to mend.

One evening we went to the Royal Artillery Theatre at Woolwich

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN
27, Archdale Road, London, S.E. 22

By the time this edition of Blakiana appears in print I most sincerely hope the disastrous Postal Strike will have ended thus enabling all of us to get on with our jobs, our letter writing and the postal dealings with fellow Sexton Blake fans. The production of the reprint of the Sexton Blake Catalogue and the additional Supplement has been sadly delayed because of the strike. I have been unable to obtain, from the printers, any copy for checking, but I am assured that as soon as possible this will be sent to me and then I shall be able to report on the progress made. In the meantime perhaps members who would like copies of either the reprint and the supplement, or just the supplement only, if they already have an original Catalogue, would be kind enough to let me know their requirements. I am unable at the moment to state the exact cost but will let you all know as soon as possible.

With regards to the Library books out on loan, when the postal strike is over I would be grateful if borrowers would be kind enough to return as soon as possible all those books they have finished reading so that I can check whether they are safely to hand, or in the event of any being posted to me just prior to the strike, that they are not lost or left lying around in the sorting offices.

Just in case any of my letters have been lost I should like to say thank you to those people who sent me material for Blakiana. I am sure everyone will enjoy reading these forthcoming articles.



SEXTON BLAKE MEETS SWEET WILLIAM

by Derek Smith

Devotees of the archives have always hoped that Edwy Searles Brooks might one day favour them with a volume entitled "Sexton Blake versus Norman Conquest." Such an encounter would have been either Homeric or humorous and quite possibly both; but this particular battle of the giants was never to be recorded. However

the worlds of Blake and Conquest did indeed overlap on one important occasion.

The common factor was their mutual acquaintanceship with our old friend Sweet William - otherwise Chief Inspector William Williams of New Scotland Yard. The case was recorded as "The Three Frightened Men" by Berkeley Gray (S.B.L. No. 641) and is best remembered as the pre-war B.B.C. radio serial "Enter Sexton Blake."

Sweet William has been Norman Conquests' long-suffering sparring partner in many an adventure since the grand old days of "The Thriller." His face was rosy and chubby, and beaming with the joy of living - his temper has soured only slightly after thirty years with the Gay Desperado. Sweet William's brief association with Sexton Blake was rather less exciting but a good deal more profitable. After all, Blake did most of the work and could be relied upon not to swipe the crooks' loot as a reward for services rendered.

The case began when Sir Roger Powers was machine-gunned down in Baker Street by American gangsters. They were in the employ of Otto von Stennig, master mind of the title trio. Powers had been the fourth member of a crooked syndicate until a belated spell of conscience brought him to Sexton Blake's doorstep. An innocent victim of the shooting was Sir Roger's son, Harry Powers, who had been badly wounded in a bid to save his father. Both Blake and the opposition soon realised that young Powers held the key to the mystery. Not only could he identify his father's murderers, but he alone knew the whereabouts of the "Old tin bucket" a secret depository containing Sir Roger's confession, a document exposing all Von Stennig's criminal activities.

Harry Powers was taken to Harpole Street and placed in the care of Lord Broadington, Blake's fellow club member and the only surgeon capable of performing the delicate brain operation which might restore him to consciousness.

The following day Inspector Williams reported to Baker Street by telephone. A ballistics report on the bullets recovered from Sir Roger's body had led the Inspector to believe that the shells had been fired from a Grant Hammond converted automatic pistol by a London gang using American methods. Since Blake - and the readers - well knew that Powers had been shot by American mobsters using a Thompson

sub-machine-gun, it seemed that the police were combing London for the wrong killers with the wrong gun. Immediate fears that Sweet William had joined the long line of Scotland Yard bunglers founded by Inspector Lestrade in the Eighties were allayed by the discovery that the whole conversation was a put-up job and part of a plan to trap the crooks. Williams knew very well that Blake's telephone had been tapped - and another carefully rehearsed duologue between Lord Broadington and Sexton Blake was designed to lure the thugs to Harpole Street. The plan seemed to be a brilliant success and the two would-be kidnapers were soon in custody. Unfortunately Blake had for once committed the bad mistake of under-estimating his adversary. Von Stennig had in fact launched simultaneous raids on both the Harpole Street residence and Lord Broadington's Nursing-home in Hampstead, where Harry Powers had been taken, and now the unfortunate invalid was in the enemy's hands. "The big, kindly, apple-cheeked Williams was silent. The difficulties of the investigation were beginning to depress him. There was no real lead. The entire police organisation was active, but it was merely groping."

Tinker too had been active - and not just on terra firma. In fact he seemed to have been spending much of his time under water. He had already been knocked over the head and dropped over Putney Bridge, and now he was cruising in a yawl off the Essex Flats in the Bleakwater Estuary. A post-midnight swim to the caves under Rock Island led to the discovery that Harry Powers was being held captive in the hidden dungeons under Easton Old Abbey, Von Stennig's island sanctuary. Tinker reported to Blake and Williams that the trail was hot again. Unfortunately for his admirers, Sweet William took no active part in the resultant showdown. It was far too tricky for him to handle in his official capacity - that was where Blake had the advantage. He set off for Bleakwater Estuary while Williams glued himself to his office telephone. "And with that Inspector Williams had to be satisfied. He looked just as satisfied as a hungry man who had been given a couple of crumbs."

And there, to all intents and purposes, ended Sweet William's brief association with Sexton Blake. For a full account of the wild and reckless doings on "Rock Island," the reader is referred to "Mad

The nineteen-twenties were the heyday of the foreign travel series in the Magnet, but oddly enough hardly any Gem stories of this period were situated outside England, and the only two that were both had Canadian venues. The 1920 series about the Levisons fleeing from Dirk Power was melodramatic and unreal: the stories seemed to have been written hastily and rarely rose above the level of the mediocre. The 1927 series, though not ascending to the imaginative heights of the best Magnet series, was nevertheless an assured and competent piece of writing. Coming as it did in an arid waste of substitute stories, it must have seemed even more distinguished by the contrast.

Wildrake was the hero of this series, and most of the action took place in the vicinity of his father's Boot Leg Ranch. The villain, Rube Redway, was trying to kidnap Wildrake in order to force his father to sell a part of his land called the Pine Tree section, for reasons which were not clear. A basis of excitement and mystery was thus laid down to sustain the action of the plot, whilst the humour was provided by D'Arcy: the like of his aristocratic elegance and gleaming monocle had never been seen before in such rough outlandish parts, and part of the surprise was the way in which he managed to astonish the natives into admiration as well as derision.

The series was long enough to provide a number of different episodes after Redway was captured, and one cannot help feeling that Charles Hamilton was pleased to return to the old Cedar Creek stamping grounds once again. Only an elderly Canadian can state just how accurate an account this is of life in British Columbia some forty years ago, but there is no doubt that it was fascinating enough for the readers of the time, just as Westerns are today. The main difference is that Charles Hamilton's villains were not true members of the Empire - they were Americans, Indians, and half-castes, all lesser breeds without the law! This might have been appropriate enough for a boys' paper designed to circulate within the Empire only. It would be interesting one day to know if any researcher can say why so many of Charles Hamilton's stories were situated in Canada, a country that he had never visited.

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIALNo. 157. STONEHENGE OF HAMILTONIA.

The experts seem to be unanimous that there is very little to puzzle the student in the last decade of the Magnet. Most of the puzzlement comes a good deal earlier.

There are three specimens of the Hamilton papers which seem to stand out like sore thumbs. One of these is the rather crude and theatrical series of 1920 about the schoolboy film-stars and Wingate's love affair. We dissected and discussed this series some time ago, and there is no point in giving it more than passing mention now.

The second is a Gem story of 1921 entitled "The Schoolboy Hunger-Striker." There are incredible episodes in this little tale, and they remain incredible because it is not well-written. Because Hamilton wrote well, he could make the incredible seem credible.

To give credit where credit was due, I feel sure that it was Laurie Sutton who first challenged the genuineness of this one. I have not always agreed with Mr. Sutton's findings in the past, but after scanning the Hunger-striker tale, I am sure that he is right in what he said about it.

For my third rock of Stonehenge I go back to the blue Gem of about 1909, which is so long ago that but few people will recall it. It was an odd tale named "His Past Against Him." It concerned a one-story star who was named Gerald Blane. He was a schoolboy with a criminal past, and he was nicknamed, by his underworld associates, the Toff, or Toffy. He had, of course, nothing to do with Reginald Talbot who was to wait in the wings for several more years.

It was by no means a bad yarn, but I am quite sure that it was not a genuine one.

The connecting link between these three is that they were all accepted as genuine by the experts of yesteryear. None was included in the list of substitute stories compiled by John Shaw soon after the war. And none was included in the lists of substitute stories from W. O. G. Lofts, of much more recent date. Mr. Shaw compiled his lists from his wide knowledge of Hamiltonia, and, possibly, from correspondence he had with the author. Mr. Lofts drew his information

from the official information - which he admits was incomplete - in the old files at the Fleetway House.

To the best of my knowledge, the very old Gem story "His Past Against Him" was never reprinted in any medium at all. This must mean that it was deliberately omitted each of the many times that the old Gem tales were reprinted. This would seem to be a pointer that it was not a genuine story, though the reason could have been the introduction of a "Toff." And it must be agreed that plenty worse substitute stories were re-issued, though not many in the Gem itself.

The Wingate's love affair of 1920 was heavily pruned, and reprinted in the Schoolboys' Own Library. Oddly enough, the Hunger-Strike tale was reprinted in the Gem. In fact, it was specially selected for inclusion, for the editor jumped forward several years to pick it out for inclusion as the final reprint story in the Gem. This would seem to indicate that the editor of the Gem believed that it was a genuine story.

Though, for plenty if not all of us, these stories are obviously substitute efforts, there must have been some common factor which caused an earlier belief that all were genuine. In my view, the only solution is that they were "ghost" stories, commissioned by Charles Hamilton himself. In that case, Hamilton would have paid the writer for them, while the A.P. would have paid Hamilton.

Charles Hamilton is reported to have said that the only man who wrote Gem and Magnet sub stories with his, Hamilton's, blessing, was Clive Fenn. Yet, according to Mr. Lofts, there was nothing in the old records at Fleetway to indicate that Fenn ever wrote sub tales of Greyfriars and St. Jim's.

Therefore, did Clive Fenn act as a ghost writer in the employ of Charles Hamilton? It seems feasible, and, if so, he may well have been responsible for the Stonehenge specimens which I have quoted. And, if Hamilton touched them up himself here and there, we see something of the reason why an expert like John Shaw failed to include them in his list, and why Mr. Lofts did not find them credited to anyone else in his official records.

Nelson Lee Column

EARLY STRUGGLES

by Bob Blythe

PLUCK 1st SERIES

We have now arrived at the year 1912, and E.S.B. has established himself as a competent story teller, if no more, and one who could always be relied upon to turn in a story at the drop of a hat. Still, the time had not yet come when Edwy could rely on an ensured steady income from his writings, and so, although editors did commission stories from him, he still had to go out and find his markets.

An incident of this kind occurs in the first series of Pluck. At this time Pluck, a paper of similar size to the Union Jack, featured stories of Will Spearing. Whether the editor hoped to have another Blake in Will Spearing I don't know, but certainly yarns featuring this character had a fairly long run.

Brooks' efforts in this direction ran to no more than one story, but it is interesting to read the background to writings of this kind, from the first tentative suggestions to the finished story in print. As it was seven months before the story appeared in print one can see that E.S.B. had to have plenty of stories on the go if he was to make a living.

We read first the tentative suggestion.

February 1st, 1912.

Rex Haydon,
"Pluck Library."

Dear Mr. Haydon,

How does the following strike you for a Spearing yarn; I am not going into details but just set down the idea of the plot:

A certain man has been badly injured, and he is in a sub-conscious condition; he cannot speak or write. Yet his friends are eagerly awaiting the time when he can, for he had an important secret to reveal - a secret which is worth thousands of pounds. Two scoundrels know of this, and decide that they shall be the first to hear the secret. But how can they do it? There is only one way, and they make very elaborate arrangements. The nurse who attends the injured man is in league with the villains. So, in the prologue, they drug the injured man and get him out of the house into a motor-car. In this they travel several miles and place their victim in a room in another house; but the room is an exact counterpart of his former one. Therefore, when he awakes he suspects nothing. There is the same nurse, and one of the villains disguises himself as the usual doctor. In this way the injured man is allowed to get well as though he had not been kidnapped. (The villains could not have kidnapped him in the ordinary

way because the knowledge would possibly have made his illness much worse - and he would certainly never reveal the secret to his captors.) As it is, however, he knows nothing; the whole thing is a pretence. One of the villains is clever at disguises and he appears before the injured man several times a day as different characters. In the first chapter, of course, would be described how the kidnapping was discovered, and Spearing would be commissioned to take up the case. Then he would get on the track, etc.

Of course, the above is only a bare idea, but if you think it suitable, I will write the prologue and first chapter and send it along with a full, chapter-by-chapter synopsis.

Yours, etc., E.S.B.

Being anxious to get things moving he wrote again a week later.

Feb. 8th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Haydon,

Can I send you the Prologue, First chapter and synopsis of the Spearing story which I outlined to you in my letter of the 1st inst? As I haven't heard from you yet I presume that the matter has slipped your memory.

By the way, have you had a chance to look over that school story synopsis yet?

I am, etc., E.S.B.

This brought the promising reply from Rex Haydon.

Fleet Street.

February 8th, 1912

Dear Mr. Brooks,

I have not forgotten your synopses, but I am so swamped with stories for my papers of late that I have not been commissioning any further yarns. However, you can get on with your suggested Spearing tale if you like.

The idea seems good, but please make the central character a "girl" instead of a "man," and bring in some strong dramatic love scenes if possible. Spearing need not take a very great part in the yarn; he is merely a peg to hang the story on.

Please let me see the opening 6,000 words when ready. The full length of the yarn is to be 22,000 words.

With your kind permission I will keep back your Realm synopsis until I have worked off some of my stock of completes.

Faithfully yours,

REX HAYDON

Whether E.S.B. was too busy with the Frank Kingston yarns in the "GEM" at this time and professed a diplomatic cold, I don't know, but three weeks later he hadn't started. In fact it was over a month before he did.

Feb. 28th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Haydon,

I fully intended sending off the beginning of that Spearing yarn on Monday, but while in London I caught a nasty cold and haven't felt a bit like work since; although I'm very much better now. I'm glad you're not in a hurry for it, for had you been I should have worried. I'm sorry for the delay, especially as it's the first Spearing story I've had to do, but I'll get on with it right away and let you have the first six thousand words, together with a full synopsis, as soon as I possibly can.

I am, etc., E.S.B.

March 12th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Haydon,

I enclose herewith the opening of MARJORIE DRUMMOND'S SECRET - Spearing story - together with an outline of the remainder. I am sorry I have not been able to let you have it before, as I ought to have done. If the enclosed is satisfactory I will immediately get the story finished and send it in to you.

By the bye, have you looked into that school story serial Synopsis yet? If so, perhaps you will send me a word with regard to it when you return the enclosed?

I am, etc., E.S.B.

Haydon's reply is interesting, inasmuch as it shows how the editor helped to shape the finished product.

Fleet Street.

March 14th, 1912.

My dear Mr. Brooks,

I have given the enclosed a careful reading, and think that it ought to work up into quite a good yarn. Since I commissioned you to write this story I have been obliged to curtail the Spearing yarns to 16,000 words, and I shall be glad if you will keep "Marjorie Drummond's Secret" down to that length.

I think that the prologue might very well be cut down. There is absolutely no incident in the first five folios, which means that it reads a little bit slowly. I suggest that you delete as much as possible of folios 1 - 5, leaving only that part which is essential to the story. The visit of Marjorie's sweetheart is not really necessary. He could easily be introduced casually in the prologue when the villains are discussing their plans.

I do not think you have made quite enough of the fact that the two rooms are identical in every particular. Would it not be helpful for Marbolt to take Jerrold to see the room, and to ram the fact home to the reader then? Reference can be made to it again when the actual kidnapping takes place, and also when the girl awakes. It seems to me quite a strong point in the story, and it would be advisable, therefore, to make the most of it.

I note how you intend to keep the yarn going, and quite approve. But please put plenty of vigorous incident into it.

With regard to your school serial synopsis I have not yet had an opportunity of looking at it, and as my next two school tales are already commissioned, it hardly seems worth my while to keep it. If you would like it back please let me know when next you write, and I will send it along. Of course, if you care to leave it with me in hopes of my having an opening in the remote future I have no objection.

Very sincerely yours,

REX HAYDON

Edwy, as always, was amenable to suggestions.

March 18th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Haydon,

Thank you very much for your letter of the 14th inst - and for your suggestions in regard to the Spearing story. I will get ahead with it this week, and send it in as soon as possible.

I shall probably be in London on Thursday next, and will call at your office with reference to the school serial Synopsis.

I am, etc., E.S.B.

Nevertheless, a month later we still find him using a cold as an

excuse for not finishing the story. I cannot help feeling that Edwy had his hands full with other work at this time, for I'm sure he would not have taken all this time in writing one story.

April 14th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Haydon,

I thought I had better drop you a line to let you know that I haven't forgotten that Spearing yarn. But I have been rather off-colour lately, suffering from a wretched influenza-cold, and haven't felt up to work at all. However, I'm better now by a long way and will send in "Marjorie Drummond's Secret" on Tuesday evening. I shall very probably be coming up to town on Thursday, and if so I will call upon you, as I'm rather anxious about those school stories you mentioned. School-story writing comes more naturally to me than anything else, and I should very much like to do some of this class of work for you.

I am, etc., E.S.B.

April 21st, 1912.

Dear Mr. Haydon,

I enclose the completed M.S. of "Marjorie Drummond's Secret" herewith. Fate seems to have delayed its dispatch, for I planned to let you have it early in the week. But, on the day I intended writing the last two chapters, I received a letter from Mr. Hinton asking for one of the complete "Frank Kingston" stories I am doing for the GEM. The result was I had to put all other work aside. However, I enclose it now, and trust that you will find it suitable. I have cut some out and made one or two alterations, in accordance with your suggestions.

I am rather anxious about those school stories I referred to in my last letter, and hope you will find time to let me know whether I can have the privilege of writing some for you.

With kind regards,

I am, etc., E.S.B.

Obviously, Haydon must have made some suggestions for the improvement of this story as the next letter shows.

May 1st, 1912.

Dear Mr. Haydon,

Thank you for your letter received this morning. On looking through the MS. I can see that it is improved by the alterations I have made, in accordance to your suggestions. On page 11 I had made some reference to Marbolt's reason for placing Marjorie in a duplicate room, although it was not definite enough. I have now added considerably to it, making everything quite clear. The other alteration - that of making Marbolt leaving Spearing to starve - was only a matter of crossing a few lines out and substituting other words here and there. I think you will find the story now satisfactory.

I was rather disappointed because you made no mention in your letter about any other work - school stories. You may remember I sent you a copy of the GEM because you said, if it was the right style, I might be able to do some school stuff for you. If you would care to discuss the matter with me I could easily run up to town any time you wished.

I am, etc., E.S.B.

Although Edwy kept plugging away at the suggestion that he wrote a school serial he never got anywhere with it - at least, not then. In fact a St. Frank's yarn did appear in Pluck eleven years later, so you

could say that he finally made it!

We end this brief interlude with a letter which is typical of many and serves to illustrate, I think, that story writing was by no means a bed of roses!

May 21st, 1912.

Dear Mr. Haydon,

I hardly like to make the request of you, but could you oblige me by letting me have a £5 advance on "Marjorie Drummond's Secret" this week? If you can see your way to arrange this I shall be grateful.

I am, etc., E.S.B.

BOOKS REVIEWED

"AUSTRALIAN SILENT FILMS," A Pictorial History, 1896-1929. By Eric Reade. Hardcover, 192 pages, 8½" by 11", more than 200 photographs and a chronology of all Australian made silent films, telling who made and acted in them, where they were first screened, etc. Aust. price \$5.50.

"THE AUSTRALIAN CINEMA" by John Baxter. Softcovers, profusely illustrated, Aust. price \$1.80, 118 pages.

They jerked, they wobbled, the actors in them hammed it up, but the amazing thing was that they moved. Lantern slides were out; the flickers were in. That was back in the late 'nineties when the first moving film projection machines had such names as the Kinescope, the Biograph and the Bio-Tableau. It is not so strange (in this continent) that the first Australian made film should be of a horse race - the Melbourne Cup of 1896. Another major step was the world's first full length film, "Soldiers of the Cross" produced by a Salvation Army officer in 1900. In it martyrs were crucified, beheaded, hacked to bits and thrown to the lions. Meaty stuff. Baxter's book covers the same ground as does Reade's, but a different point of view and different photographs from old films makes it well worth while. Also Baxter deals with Australian Talkies right up to the very latest made.

Collectors' Digest readers have been film fans from way back, Danny included, and here is a splendid chance to renew acquaintance with, or meet for the first time, heart throbs such as Lottie Lyell, Louise Lovely and Beatrice Einsedel, as well as Australia's strong, silent he-men of yesteryear.

JACK HUGHES

Come back with us over 60 years in this old, old classic in which the Sixth-Formers wore night-shirts, and carried candles to light them to bed.

THE ONLY WAY

Closer and closer!

A shiver of excitement ran through Bob Cherry's frame. The pail shook, and a portion of its contents slopped over Bob's waistcoat. It was dark in the passage; the juniors could barely see one another. Down the passage a dim form came - dim and shadowy.

The pail swept into the air. Swish!

The contents shot out in a flooding stream, right upon the head of the dim figure. There was a wild and muffled yell.

The drenched figure staggered, gasping wildly.

"Run for it!" gasped Bob.

And the juniors ran. Bob Cherry stumbled, and the pail slipped from his hand, and rolled clanging on the floor. There was no time to look for it. Doors were opening on all sides, and lights flashing.

The victim of the jape was gasping and spluttering. The Removites ran on, gained the staircase, and there, in the darkness, they paused breathlessly to look over the banisters.

"He doesn't like the flavour!" murmured Bob Cherry.

Fellows were coming out of the Sixth Form studies in their nightshirts and pyjamas, some of them lighting matches, some carrying candles. The lights showed up the fellow who had received the drenching. He was dressed, and that was about all that could be seen of him. He was covered with the sooty mixture, and he was utterly unrecognisable.

The Sixth-Formers crowded round the unfortunate victim in astonishment.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Wingate.

"Who are you? What's happened?"

"Blessed if I can make out his chivvy! Who are you?" demanded North.

"It's Courtney!" ejaculated Wingate, in amazement, peering close to the face of the blackened senior.

Bob Cherry felt quite faint and clung to the banisters.

"Courtney!" murmured Wharton.

"How was I to know it was Courtney?" whispered Bob. "Why was he mooching about in the middle of the night? It can't be Courtney! It's all rot!"

Wharton chuckled softly.

"Rot or not, it is Courtney," he said. "Look there! There's Valence without a spot on him."

Bob Cherry groaned.

There, sure enough, was Rupert Valence. He was fully dressed, unlike the other seniors who were all in their night-clothes.

Valence was grinning as he looked at the drenched and blackened senior. Courtney knuckled the horrid mixture out of his eyes and mouth. He found his voice at last.

He said, gasping: "I was coming along the passage, and all of a sudden this stuff was flung over me without the least warning."

"Some junior trick," said Walker of the Sixth.

"I suppose so; but I don't know why the juniors should play me such a trick," said Courtney. "If it had been Loder or Carne --"

Loder and Carne laughed together.

"We'll find out who did it," said Wingate, frowning. "You had better go and clean yourself, Courtney. We'll look for the young rascals. You might get some canes, Loder and Walker, and come with me."

Courtney went into his room again. It was in darkness. He turned on the gas and lighted it. As the light flared up, he saw that Rupert Valence had followed him into his study. Valence grinned as Courtney bent over the wash-stand in the corner.

"The kids seem to have selected you for special treatment," said Valence. "But

what on earth were you doing out of your room at this time of night, Courtney; and fully dressed, too. Were you going out?"

"Grooooh!"

"Or were you watching for someone?" asked Valence, unpleasantly. "Have you been playing the spy for somebody?"

Courtney turned towards him a face dripping with inky water.

"I waited up to stop you if you went out," he said. "As a prefect, I can't allow you to play such blackguardly tricks. I heard a sound in the passage, and thought it was you. I went quietly because I didn't want to make a row. If it had been you, I should have stopped you."

"Thank you," said Valence, with a sneer.

"You intended to go out," said Courtney. "You are dressed. You haven't been in bed."

Valence nodded.

"Quite true," he said. "I was going out. It's impossible now, after all this fracas. I'm glad you've got it in the neck."

He quitted the study.

Courtney went on with his washing, in a decidedly ruffled temper.

* * * * *

"Look here!" exclaimed Loder.

He held down his candle as he caught sight of the pail that Bob Cherry had dropped.

"That had the stuff in it," said Walker, with a grin.

"So they came this way," said Wingate. "Some of the Remove most likely. Might have been Fourth Form, though."

"Oh, they were Remove, of course, and I think I could tell you their names," said Loder. "Look here, they've left a trail."

There were smears of inky blackness on the stairs, and Wingate grinned as they followed the inky trail. He came into the junior dormitory passage, and found the marks thicker on the linoleum leading to the door of the Remove dormitory.

Wingate opened the door. He switched on the electric light, and the three seniors entered.

The tell-tale marks crossed the

dormitory to Harry Wharton's bed. There were others near Bob Cherry's bed, and others near Nugent's.

The three of them lay in peaceful slumber. Harry Wharton's eyes were closed, and there was an expression of blissful innocence on his face. Bob Cherry was snoring softly to add to the effect.

"Fast asleep, of course," said Loder, with a sneer.

"Of course! Apparently they didn't know they had any of the stuff on their socks," said the Captain of Greyfriars.

Wharton gave a start, and opened his eyes.

"Have you been out of the dormitory this evening, Wharton?" the Greyfriars Captain asked.

"Catch him telling you the truth!" sneered Loder.

"Wharton will speak the truth or nothing at all," said Wingate, quietly. "Shut up, Loder!"

"I have been out of the dormitory, Wingate."

"Did you throw that stuff over Courtney?"

"I had a hand in it."

"And a foot in it, too, I should say," chuckled Walker.

"I suppose we may as well own up," said Bob Cherry, sitting up in bed. "I meant to explain to old Courtney tomorrow somehow. We were jolly sorry it went over him, Wingate, honour bright."

"So you didn't intend it for him?" asked Wingate.

"For me, I suppose," sneered Loder, "because I gave you lines for screwing up my desk?"

"It wasn't you this time, either, Loder."

"Then who was it?" asked Wingate.

"Valence."

"You thought it was Valence when you pitched that stuff over Courtney?"

"That's it," said Bob, with a nod.

"And why," demanded Wingate -- "why did you expect Valence to come along the Sixth Form passage at eleven o'clock at night, when the Sixth are always in bed. What reason had you to suppose he would be stirring?"

The three juniors were silent. Bob

Cherry coloured under Wingate's searching glance.

"I'm waiting for your answer, Cherry," said Wingate, ominously.

Bob Cherry hesitated.

"I put it to you," he said. "If we knew anything by chance about a fellow, should we be justified in sneaking about him?"

Wingate wrinkled his brows.

"Perhaps not," he said, "and perhaps I could guess as much as you could tell me anyway. I shall not ask you any more questions."

"Thanks, Wingate, you're a good chap!" said Bob Cherry, in great relief.

Wingate smiled grimly.

"I hope it won't injure my reputation as a good chap, but I am going to give you a good hiding for playing such a trick," he said. "There's such a thing as discipline, and it's got to be maintained. See?"

"Yes!" groaned Bob. "Lay it on lightly!"

"You needn't get up," said Wingate. "Take one each, you fellows, and give them half a dozen. That will meet the case."

There was the sound of thwacking in the Remove dormitory. Wharton, Cherry, and Nugent took the caning through their bedclothes, which deadened it a little. But it was very painful all the same.

The rest of the Remove sat up in bed, looking on with a deep and painful interest. The six strokes each administered, Wingate and Walker stopped, but Loder was going on. Loder was never satisfied with enough. But Wingate stopped him promptly.

"That's enough Loder!" he exclaimed. "I hope that will be a lesson to you fellows not to jape the Sixth. Good-night!"

And the avengers retired, leaving the dormitory in darkness and three practical jokers wriggling in pain in their beds.

"The beasts!" growled Bob Cherry.

"The Sixth have no sense of humour at all!"

"Ow, I'm hurt!" grunted Nugent.

"I say you fellows, shut up!" said Billy Bunter. "You're keeping me awake, you know. I want to get to sleep. You

might shut up."

"You fat bounder --"

"I shan't be able to get up in the morning now!" said Bunter, peevishly. "I shall expect you fellows to explain to Mr. Quelch."

"Oh, ring off!"

"I'm not going to ring off. Why can't you take a licking quietly, as I should? If I had ever such a licking, I should keep a stiff upper lip. You won't hear me yowling out when I'm hurt," said Bunter, contemptuously.

"We'll soon see about that," exclaimed Bob Cherry.

He jumped out of bed, and ran to Billy Bunter's bed. There was a gasp from the fat junior as he felt a powerful grasp upon him.

Spank, spank, spank!

Bob Cherry's large size in hands descended on the fat person of the Owl of the Remove. The spanks rang out like pistol-shots. There was a wild yell from Billy Bunter.

"Help! Murder! Fire! Oh!"

"Hurt?" asked Bob Cherry, pausing breathlessly.

"Ow! Yes!"

"You weren't going to yowl if you were hurt," Bob Cherry remarked. "Do you call this yowling, or don't you call this yowling?"

"Yow! Yes! Beast!"

Bob Cherry went back to his bed, feeling more comfortable and satisfied. There came a succession of groans from Bunter's bed.

Bolsover, the bully of the Remove, sat up with a wrathful snort.

"Is that you making that row, Bunter?"

"Yes, I'm hurt!"

"If you make another sound," said Bolsover, "I'll get up and take a cricket stump to you. You hear me?"

There was not another sound from Billy Bunter.

(MORE OF THIS Old,

Old Story

NEXT MONTH)

BARNARD'S AT CHATHAM

(Eric Fayne recalls some of the theatres and cinemas he knew long ago in the days of his youth)

Silent films, as they grew bigger and better, killed off the small legitimate theatres. The coming of talking pictures ended the cheaper music-halls. And, of course, television killed off most of the rest.

Until the arrival of sound on the screen, Chatham was a town singularly well catered for so far as the live stage was concerned. There was the Theatre Royal which presented the best of the touring companies - excellent plays and elaborate musical comedies. Chatham Empire was a fine Stoll music-hall offering the cream of touring revue and variety entertainment. And there was Barnard's where the most expensive stalls were not more than 1/6. Barnard's was the home of the No. 3 (or 4 or 5) touring revues, comprising small, not very talented companies with a chorus of about 6 plump ladies of uncertain age. The Tiller Girl type went to the Empire, the lesser lot went to Barnard's.

But Barnard's did well, unlike plenty of other cheap music-halls. There were plenty of sailors in Chatham, who could not afford 2/6 or more at the Empire, but could run to a bob at Barnard's. There was a bar at the back of the ground floor, where some patrons, if they liked, could drink, and watch the show at the same time. And the shows were pretty good, in their way, even if a little tatty, for, before a full house - and Barnard's was full nearly every night at each performance - the companies would try to give of their best. And some of the greatest stars of later years went to Barnard's before they became famous. Gracie Fields went there with "Mr. Tower of London" when it first went on the road, and I recall seeing Tommy Trinder there as an early act on an unremarkable variety bill.

I suppose I visited Barnard's about three times. Once was the second house on a Saturday night, when the theatre was packed to capacity. The exits were appalling. Getting out through the narrow doorways was an ordeal with the crowds pushing from behind. I remember thinking what a death trap the place would be in case of a fire.

I know nothing of the early history of what was really a famous theatre. It fell to the early talking pictures. Chatham was not well equipped with cinemas, but they sprang up after talkies came in. I have an idea that there was a fire at Barnard's one night after the audience had left. At any rate, the site has long been occupied by a Lyons' tea-shop.

Two other cheap music-halls reminded me very much of Barnard's. One was in the heart of Portsmouth. I visited it once, though its name eludes me now. This, too, did great business from the sailor trade, and it ran the same class of touring revue.

Another was the Queen's Theatre, Poplar. It had the same type of entertainment, the same cheap seats, the same bar at the back of the stalls. I rather doubt whether it did quite the same business. I went there twice, and found meagre audiences, though my visits may well have been after the talkies had started to take effect. Presumably the Queen's at Poplar, like the other two, has long been swept away.

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

RON BECK (Lewes): I was interested to read in 'Danny's Diary' the mention of the Crumbles murder. Although only a very young lad at the time, the names of Field, Grey and Irene Munro were very

familiar to me because the trial was held at the Assize Court here in Lewes and my father was foreman on the jury. I also seem to remember (but I wouldn't swear to it) that for the duration of the trial my father was not allowed to come home, I believe that the jury were billeted in a local hotel and kept under police supervision.

Finally, congratulations on yet another excellent Annual and another very enjoyable Buddle story. It made me ferret out my back numbers and I re-read all the previous stories about this character. I only hope that you can find the time and get the inclination to let us have plenty more.

BILL LOFTS (London): I agree with Bob Blythe that the reprinting of old St. Frank's stories in the Schoolboys Pocket Library is a storm in a tea-cup. Our argument seems to be how we personally interpret the business. Personally I always feel that old plots used, with characters names/places/and phrasing slightly altered is nothing original from the author, and if I had bought the copies at time of publication I would have felt cheated. It is never my intention to knock E.S.B. because he did this - to the contrary if I were in his shoes probably I may have done it more often! In fact it was Derek Adley way back in the early days of the C.D. who discovered the astonishing similarity of the S.P.L. tales with those in the N.L.L. and thought that the former author had pinched the tales until Herbert Leckenby informed him that both authors were the same.

E. S. TURNER (Peterborough): Could you please get me King George the Fifth Jubilee Book? It came out about 1935. The Daily Mirror told me to write to you and that you might be able to help me. I would, of course, pay for it, and I should be ever so thankful. You see, I have got no legs, and I cannot get about much to look for one. My photo is in that book, taken on board H.M.S. Iron Duke. Please help me.

(If any of our warm-hearted readers can help Mr. Turner in his search for the book he wants, his address is:

1126 Lincoln Road, Walton, Peterborough, Northants. —ED.)

H. P. CLARK (Nuneaton): I have often wondered about Charles Hamilton's typing technique. Was he a touch typist or an expert visual

operator who, like many of us, did not use the correct fingering, but pounded away with two or three fingers? From pictures I have seen of him seated at his Remington I would imagine the latter. But perhaps someone could enlighten me on this matter.

He must have been self-taught for I notice from reproductions of his typescripts that he used the capital 'I' for a one instead of the letter 'l' - a common mistake among self-taught typists. The letter 'I' of course makes a clumsy one and involves the added chore of operating the shift key.

It seem surprising to me that Hamilton used a typewriter for more than 50 years without realising this fact.

I find the writing methods of authors fascinating. Ruby M. Ayres pounded out her famous love stories with two fingers on an old machine. Enid Blyton operated a portable typewriter balanced on her knees - a rather awkward way of typing I would have thought. Yet she is reputed to have turned out up to 12,000 words a day - an output which must have approached Charles Hamilton's own quota. Jeffery Farnol wrote his historical romances during the night - presumably sleeping by day. Godfrey Winn has his own special method of operating a typewriter to turn out his daily quota of 2,000 words.

I take this opportunity of congratulating you on the continued high standard of C.D. and the C.D. Annual. There is nothing I look forward to more than the arrival of my copy of C.D. which I read from cover to cover at the earliest opportunity with an enjoyment only matched by my youthful love of the Magnet.

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

LONDON

The Kensal Rise meeting taking place on the Vernal Equinox reminded members of the summer meetings to come and the game of cricket. This it was with Don Webster opening the entertainment side of the meeting with a passage from "Mike at Wrykin" by the Northern Leeds Club's president, P. G. Wodehouse. This Ben Whiter

followed up by reading the 'Don's' "Who's Who" number 21 from an issue of "Story Paper Collector." Switching subjects, Ray Hopkins rendered a sterling talk entitled "A Survey of the Rover, 1967-69."

From "The Rover" we went on the trail with Trackett Grim as Bob Blythe read one of the stories by Edward Oswald Handforth, entitled "The Pink Eye of Put."

A "Magnet" series quiz conducted by Ben Whiter was won by Roger Jenkins. Three Hamiltonians to share third place were Sam Thurbon, Charlie Wright and Don Webster.

Brian Doyle, ably officiating in the chair, conducted his "Minute Talk" item. Members drew a subject from the pile on the table and then spoke for a minute about it. Some dozen miniature talks took place and were very well received.

A good meeting and well looked after by the hosts, Larry and Mrs. Peters, to whom a vote of thanks was accorded.

Next meeting at the home of Bob and Louise Blythe, 47 Evelyn Avenue, Kingsbury, London, NW9 0JF. Phone 205 0732.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

#

MIDLAND

Meeting held on 23rd February, 1971.

This was another excellent meeting, with an attendance of nine, an increase of two on last month. These two were Jack Bellfield and Bill Morgan, who were both warmly welcomed after an absence of a few months.

The anniversary number was N.L.L. (O.S.) 142, dated 23/2/1918, and the collectors' item was B.F.L. (1st S.) 235, The School Under Canvas. There was no correspondence due to the postal strike.

The first item in the programme was a talk in the series "Chosen Companions," and appropriately given by our chairman who first suggested it. It was a masterly talk and was enthusiastically applauded.

After the interval George gave us another recording - Tape No. 2. Nostalgic Memories in Sound. This contribution also drew great

applause from the members.

The meeting ended with the raffle, winning numbers being drawn by the two Winifreds.

Next meeting 27th April at the Theatre Centre, from 7 p.m. onwards.

TOM PORTER

Correspondent.

* * *

MIDLAND

Meeting held on 30th March, 1971.

The attendance was 10 and included Ray Bennett, Ted Dodd and Bob Wareing, all making welcome reappearances.

In the unavoidable absence of our chairman Ted Davey took the chair and signed the minutes.

Ted first passed round the anniversary number, N.L.L. (O.S.) 147, dated 30/3/1918 and the collectors' item - an early story by E. S. Brooks - B.F.L. (1st S.) 405, The Cad of The School.

Next Norman Gregory gave us a most interesting talk on Billy Bunter - 40 Years On, and the final item was a reading by George Chatham from chapter 2 of Magnet 174, which was very much appreciated by all members present.

The next meeting will be on 27th April from 7 p.m. onwards, followed by the A.G.M. on 25th May.

TOM PORTER

Correspondent.

* * *

SPECIAL REMINDER

NORTHERN SECTION 21st BIRTHDAY PARTY.

Yorkshire High Tea at our Club Room on Saturday, 8th May. Price 60p. Assemble 5 p.m. All welcome, but if intending to come, please ring Leeds 56615 in good time.

BLOODSHOT

by R. Hibbert

It's been all quiet on the 'Unsuitable Reading for Children' front for a long, long time.

It must be twenty years since those questions in the House about American horror comics and that wasn't so much a question of reading as looking. Staring aghast - or so they said. Perhaps the critics were struck dumb with the horror of it all because they haven't raised a mumble since.

Mind you, they've had less and less to complain about. Most present day British boys' papers contain nothing but picture stories, and something unpleasant in a picture is nowhere near as disturbing as the same thing described in words. Once you've drawn your Nameless Horror it's fixed for good in its pen and ink outline and people look at it and say, "Um. So that's a Nameless Horror is it?" And, however shocked they are at first, after meeting him in three or four frames they're used to him. He's as familiar to them as their Uncle Joe. In fact, he's got a look of Uncle Joe, hasn't he? "Hey, Alice, who does this Nameless Horror remind you of?"

But if you write about your Nameless Horror and leave a lot to the reader's imagination then you can really frighten or disgust him and people who are concerned with the welfare of children might have reasons for criticizing you.

Nowadays though only the Rover has stories in words that aren't in balloons and the Rover's harmless enough. And, of course, the censors have the new target of T.V. and its possible effect upon the young, but, whatever the reason, for the first time in a hundred years the combined forces of school teachers, parents and magistrates have stopped running down boys' papers and high time too.

But there was one valid criticism:-

The print was too small.

Always.

In the days of Charley Wag the publishers said, "More words on a page - more value for money." The sort of argument that went down well in mid-Victorian Manchester. But right up to the end, or until they were transmogrified into strip cartoon compendiums, boys' magazines carried on using tiny type on poor quality paper. "Bad for the eyes," my

mother said and she may have been right.

Look what bloods in boyhood did for me.

Began to read at a ridiculously early age, read everything available - clapped in glasses by the time I was nine. They were horrid things with brass wire side pieces. I can still show you the wheals behind the ears. And everyone (my mother, my father and my auntie Annie) said, "He's read too much. Weakened his eyes." And they went on to say that if they could have their time over again - and my time too - they wouldn't let me do it.

Those were the people who would only let me go to the pictures once a week because more than that was not only bad for the eyes, but sinful to boot. The self same people who now watch telly every night from tea time to bed time. My auntie Annie died watching telly at the age of ninety. Went during "Dragnet" and they didn't find out until a commercial for hot chocolate nudged them into asking her if she'd like a cup.

Anyway, all those years ago they said that if they'd only known they wouldn't have let me read so much. But of course it was too late.

Too late. And since then although the frames of my glasses have become more elegant, the lenses have become clumsier; thicker. These days if you look me straight in the glasses you'll be lucky if you see my eyes at all. Perhaps you'll get just a flicker; like a glimpse of jelly fish at the bottom of a frozen pool.

And, of course, the ironical part of it all is this; the heroes and villains - especially the villains - of my childhood reading had nothing wrong with their eyes. Not a pair of spectacles amongst them.

Perhaps the odd monocle, but that was never for use. At least never put to the use for which it was intended. One twiddled with it while deciding on a cutting reply to the Master Spy's last gibe, or, if things were really bad, stamped on it and slipped the powdered glass in the gaoler's coffee. But no mention of spectacles.

Except for secondary characters in school stories. Amiable, halfwitted boys who were the butt of the entire Fourth Form. They had nicknames; Giglamps, Four Eyes, Goggles, Professor. Poor lads. All heavily gashed about the heads. Because you can't tell me that the bucket-of-water-poised-on-top-of-the-half-open-door-joke never hurt

anyone. Dammit, buckets were made of zinc in those days; they weren't the prissy, polychromatic plastic pails of our effete period. Heavily gashed about the heads, all too conscious of their ink sodden collars, they squelched into school in their gum filled shoes. Even the lenses of their badly bent glasses had jocular remarks inscribed upon them with a glazier's diamond. Their tormentors were as clear eyed a set of boys as you could meet outside an optician's nightmare.

Buffalo Bill and colleagues; nothing wrong with their eyes. Ever see or hear of a cowboy with glasses? Nope. Never will neether, pardner Nary an Injun, eether. Made the acquaintance of scores of Injuns called Hawk Eye, Keen Eye and Eagle Eye, but not one called Bleary Eye.

The "Raiders from Planet X" type of story. All major characters - perfect vision. Major characters from another world - perfect vision plus. Red glowing eyes that could pierce the walls of massive buildings if need be. Sometimes they gave out paralyzing flashes.

There seemed to be a general rule. Villains - whether terrestrial or from a home address several light years away - exceptional eyesight. Their morals might be non-existent, their appearance repulsive, but their Fairy Godmothers had decided they'd have something special in the way of eyes.

When I was a lad the number of hypnotists - and fanatical, honest to goodness, only-to-be-satisfied-with-the-complete-destruction-of-the-British-Empire hypnotists - was colossal. Pale faced men they were with lank, black hair and ... oh, Grandmama, what great big eyes you've got.

Ersatz Fu Manchus had almond eyes with very nasty depths. Eyes which dilated and contracted. Made you feel dizzy to watch them. It was a relief to swig the hocused China tea and flop across the lacquer table.

"Everything went black ... The sinister Oriental smiled evilly ... He rapped out a sharp command in Pekingese and a pigtailed giant with a razor edged scimitar entered."

"Master?"

"Dispose of ... this."

The River Police earned their pay in those days.

Visual aids too. One hundred per cent vision to begin with and then - to get the edge on the forces of law and order - scores of gadgets for minding other people's business. X-Ray Spectacles? Normal issue. Only type of spectacles worn.

The Black Sapper - smallish man; long black underwear (worn as

outerwear; wonder what sort of underwear he wore underneath his underwear?) and bathing cap; travelled about in an enormous screw; no bullion vault was safe - well he had Radar ten years before the Admiralty. There was a pre-Baird television set in every decent sized crooks' hide-out in the United Kingdom. As for infra red ray periscopes ... well.

In fact, the eyes had it.

Not mine, though. But ... if I did have my time over again it wouldn't make the least difference. Why only this morning a parcel of Nelson Lees came from the London Old Boys' Book Club Library. Before I go to bed tonight I'll know just how Edward Oswald Handforth and the chums of Saint Frank's foiled the Mysterious X.

And that reminds me. Have to go along to the oculists again

soon.

JACK WOOD DIES

It is with the deepest regret that we report the death of Jack Wood, at the age of 56. He was taken ill with pneumonia three weeks ago after attending a York football match which he was reporting for his newspaper. He was well on the way to recovery in hospital and was expected to resume work within a month or so. However, he collapsed about six o'clock on Saturday evening, April 3rd, and died shortly afterwards.

Mr. Wood had been a member of our Northern Club since the beginning, and had always been an enthusiastic supporter of this magazine. A keen St. Frank's and Brooks fan, he wrote a great many articles on Brooksiana which have appeared in our columns down the years.

A bachelor, Mr. Wood was keenly interested in all sport, and, when younger, was actively engaged in cricket. A popular and widely-read sports reporter, he came of a family of newspaper people.

Our sympathy goes out to Jack's friends in our Northern Club. The loss of Jack Wood is a blow indeed.



JACK WOOD

LONDON CLUB: CHANGE OF MEETING VENUE

The April meeting will be held at Richmond Community Centre, and not at Kingsbury as stated in the London Club report.

REJOICE WITH US IN OUR JUBILEE YEAR.

COLLECTORS' DIGEST CELEBRATES ITS 25th BIRTHDAY
IN THE AUTUMN.