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COLLECTORS DIGEST

VOLUME 36 NUMBER 422 FEBRUARY 1982

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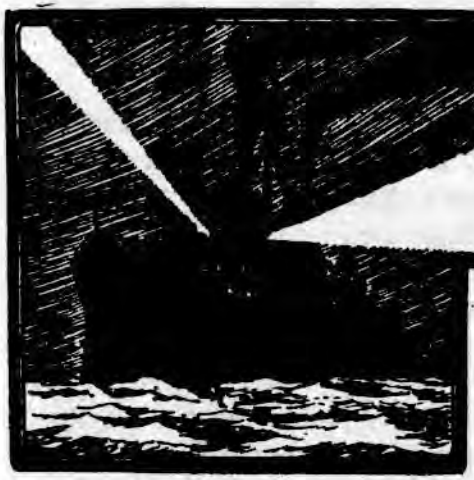

A Word from the Skipper.

All who joy would win must share it -
Happiness was born a twin.

THOSE OLD COMPETITIONS

In the extract from his diary which we publish this month, Danny refers to a competition in the Union Jack, fifty years ago, in which the first prize was £20 a week for life. Even today, that would not be a prize to be sneezed at. One wonders whether the prize was won at all, and, if so, who won it - and how it would be paid. Unless an annuity were taken out on behalf of the winner, it sounds a bit dicey. If the publisher starts off sending a cheque for £20 every week to the winner, what happens when the publisher goes out of business or is swallowed by another firm?

Anybody know how it was done? Anybody know anybody who won a prize like that?

Plenty of big prizes were offered as enticements in John Bull's competition "Bullets". Were those big prizes ever paid out? A paper named "Truth" claimed that, in Horatio Bottomley's time, the prizes weren't paid. "Truth" claimed that the published names of the winners were those of Bottomley's own staff, and that the addresses printed were accommodation addresses. I forget whether the matter was ever satisfactorily settled for the public.

I have mentioned before that my mother used to send in entries in my name, when I was a child. I recall one in Picturegoer - a kind of literary competition in connection with a British film "Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor" which starred Owen Nares and Isobel Elsom. She won three prizes in that competition. My prize was a bound volume of "Pictures and Picturegoer" which is a cherished item in my collection today. It is in excellent condition even now, and a browse through it is a marvellous trip into the cinema of long years ago.

She entered for the Tuck Hamper competition - in my name. The first prize was £1 - with several Tuck Hampers for the runners-up. I badly wanted a Tuck Hamper. My Mum won the first prize - £1.

Those were stories in puzzle-pictures. The correct solution was "locked in the editor's safe". I never believed it - there would probably have been too many winners. I fancy they picked out the entries which were unlike any other entries. This particular competition that my mother won was "The Hare and the Tortoise" in puzzle pictures. It started: "A hare once upbraided a tortoise for the slowness of its pace ..." I recall my mother landing on the word "upbraided" to fill the bill - and I reckon that that word stood alone in the entries, and so won the first prize.

Some time later she won First Prize again in a similar competition in the "Butterfly". This time the prize was £5.

As the first prize was £1 in the earlier one, I assume that the Tuck Hampers might have been worth about ten bob. But you could buy a rare lot of tuck for ten bob in those days. I seem to recall that my dear friend, Jack Overhill, was once delighted to win a Tuck Hamper.

HAMILTON'S CRICKETERS

Down the years Hamilton and his schools have been turning up all over the place, tapped out from their typewriters by professional writers for the press and magazines. The motto has long seemed to be "When short of material, fall back on Greyfriars".

All the same, it was pleasant to see Hamilton turn up again, this time in the January issue of "The Cricketer", complete with a Magnet cover from the summer of 1917. That Magnet cover is a good cricket picture from Chapman, even though the cricketers in the picture are shown wearing neckties. Did batsmen and fielders wear ties at their job in those days?

The article suggests that Hamilton had a deep love for the game, and that many of his cricketing characters' names may have been taken from the star players of his boyhood - for instance, R. G. Warton, C. Aubrey Smith, G. F. Vernon, George Bull, Frank Field, T. Merry and G. F. Higgins. "No doubt", says James D. Coldham, the writer of the article, "Hurree Singh was based on Ranjitsinhji. He first appeared in 1908."

Actually, Hurree Singh was created in 1907, and, in early days, he was more associated with Rugby than with cricket.

At any rate, whether Hamilton really selected names from those of cricketers of his boyhood for his characters, it is nice to see those characters now mentioned in such distinguished company.

In passing, some years ago, two of our Let's Be Controversial articles on cricket themes, were reprinted in consecutive years in the Year Book published by the Cricket Society.

THE C.D. MUST GET THROUGH!

Talk about Good King Wenceslas and his loyal page. You ought to have seen us - for Madam insisted on coming with me through the winter murk - staggering along, laden with stacks of C.D's over the snow and ice, slipping and sliding, panting and puffing, over the icy mile to the Post Office in mid-January, to get that belated and beleagured issue on its way to loyal readers who were waiting patiently and hopefully for it to arrive.

THE PRINCESS SNOWEE'S CORNER

"I don't like the snow much. I cry to go out, so they open the back door. I put my nose out, look around, and draw back quickly. They open the side door. The same thing happens. And again at the front door. After all, I'm nearly all white. If I got out there in the deep snow, they might not be able to find me. And I might get stuck. An awful thought.

The editor chap has a book in which he has dozens and dozens of photographs of cats. They have been sent to him by his readers. The cats all belong to people who have this magazine every month, and he loves to look through them. "Mollie, in Yorkshire, has five," he said the other evening. "She calls them 'The Famous Five'." He says, a bit wistfully: "I wish we had five." I'm not sure that I do. My Mum says: "Fancy five like this one" - stroking me. "The mind boggles," she says. But she doesn't mean it. I'm sure she would love five like me - but it would put my nose out of joint.

My Mum was reading a bit from the newspaper, and he and I listened. An elderly lady had six of us. People used to sneer a bit at one person with six cats. One bitterly cold night she went out into her back garden, slipped and fell, and lay there unable to move. One of her spoiled cats came out, and spread itself over his mistress. Another came and did the same thing. Soon, all six cats were spread over their injured mistress. It was several hours before she was found. The doctor declared that the cats saved her life. But for the warmth they gave her, there on the ground in the cold, she would have died. And that's a true story.

Clever people are always studying us. They've found out lots of things about us cats. One thing nobody in the world has ever been able to discover. How we purr! Nobody knows how we do it. And I'm not going to tell you. And if you think it's because I don't even know myself, you're just jealous."

THE EDITOR

* *

WANTED: LILLIPUTS: issues No. 7 - 12; 43; 67; 68; 70; 71; 91.

Mrs. M. Rowe, 27 Cranford Ave., Church Crookham, Hants., GU13 0QU

Danny's Diary

FEBRUARY 1932

Professor Zingrave is back in the Nelson Lee Library, and the new series has gone on all through the month.

Opening story is "The St. Frank's Fortune-Hunters". Zingrave is out to find the buried Edgemore Treasure before the St. Frank's chums find it. The second story "Pirate's Treasure" carried on with the theme of the rival parties digging away for all they're worth. The last story of the series is "Foiled by St. Frank's" with the school chums outwitting Zingrave at long last.

With the last week of the month a new series starts with "The Mysterious New Boy". His name is Tony Cresswell, and he arrived at St. Frank's by means of an aeroplane and a parachute. Which is a bit unusual. And, once he has dropped in, Tony is a bit strange. He is very reticent about his father, for one thing.

In real life, Sir Malcolm Campbell has broken all records for speed on Daytona Beach, Florida, reaching a speed of 254 miles an hour.

Grand month in the Gem. It always is these days. One forgets that they are old stories. I wonder whether they alter them at all. I hope not. First tale of the month is "Tom Merry the Second" in which Tom is detained by Mr. Ratcliff, and that means Tom can't take his eleven to Frampton to play football against the Frampton Fliers. But Kerr disguises himself as Tom Merry and takes his place in detention so that Tom can go with the team. Next story "St. Jim's on the Spree", in which the juniors have a day in London and visit the Tower, and have great adventures in the world's largest city.

Next tale, "The Nobbling of Nobbler Jim" (horrible title!) in which Ferrers Locke appears yet again, and enlists the help of Tom Merry as his assistant. Finally, a double-length tale entitled "The Treaty of St. Jim's". Digby, who has been out of the stories for a while, returns to St. Jim's, Marmaduke Smythe plays a part, and the St. Jim's Co's unite against the Grammarians who are led by Frank Monk.

Only three Rookwood tales in the Gem this month: "Peele Pays

the Penalty" in which it is shown how Peele managed to win an exam; "Lovell's Love Affair", and "Looking After Lovell". I can't get very interested in these short Rookwood tales.

We have seen some good films at the pictures this month. "Splinters in the Navy" is a British film starring Sydney Howard, plus Reg Stone and Hal Jones and the Splinters concert party which is touring the music halls - I enjoyed this one; Gary Cooper and Sylvia Sidney in "City Streets"; Cicely Courtneidge and Jack Hulbert in "The Ghost Train" which was exciting and also funny; Marion Davies and Leslie Howard in "Daughter of Luxury"; Ruth Chatterton in "Unfaithful"; Mae Clark in "Waterloo Bridge"; and Herbert Marshall and Edna Best in "The Calendar", from the book by Edgar Wallace. All good this month.

Doug, as usual, had the Union Jack this month, and passed two of them on to me. "Aerial Gold" by Gilbert Chester, is a long tale taking up the whole paper. I found it a bit heavy, but Doug enjoyed it. The second number contained "Lost in the Legion" by G. H. Teed, and it features Mlle. Roxane Harfield in her first adventure. The issue has a new serial "Five Dead Men" by Anthony Skene, and a new picture puzzle competition with a first prize of £20 a week for life. Such a prize sounds terrific.

Not much change in the general flavour of Modern Boy this month. There is a new series by Alfred Edgar (he seems a very regular contributor) about Big Mike who is building a railway in Manchuria, assisted by two boys who refuse to go back to school, plus an old soldier and a bus driver. With Chinese bandits thrown in to add to the excitement. Murray Roberts continues with his series about Captain Justice. George E. Rochester has a series starring the British spy, Grey Shadow. And John Hunter provides the serial entitled "Adventure Camp".

The magnificient Magnet continues with the lovely Flip series. First story of the month is "The Schoolmaster Cracksman". The new master of the Remove, Mr. Lagden, (I wonder if he is related to any of the other Lagdens we have come across) is popular with most chaps, but Flip knows that he is really Jimmy, the One, the notorious burglar.

The second story continues with "Jimmy, the One". The third of the month is "The Hunted Master". Mr. Lagden continues as a respectable schoolmaster, and Flip is kidnapped to prevent him spilling

the beans. But detective Brent is getting warmer on the trail.

Final tale of the month is "While Greyfriars Slept". Detective Brent gets his man at long last; Bunter brings about the rescue of Flip, and it turns out that Flip is the long-lost son of John Brent. This series ran for eight weeks, and it didn't seem a week too much. Flip was a good character, and Bunter emerged in a slightly new light, which was very jolly.

Two pretty good tales in the Schoolboys' Own Library this month. "Nobody's Chum" is the sequel to last month's story about Bob Cherry at loggerheads with the Remove. "The Rebels of the Fourth" is a Rookwood story in which Mr. Dalton gets the sack, and the Head appoints a brute named Mr. Carker in his place. Jimmy Silver is expelled, and they all bar out on the island in the river.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 165, "Nobody's Chum" comprised the final two tales from the Bob Cherry - "Swot" series of late 1926 in the Magnet. No. 166, "Rebels of the Fourth" comprised seven stories from the Island Rebellion Rookwood series of the Spring of 1924. Originally there were nine stories in the series. Two of them were omitted in the S.O.L. reprint.

"Tom Merry the Second" in the 1932 Gem was originally "Tom Merry's Double" in late 1907. "St. Jim's on the Spree" was originally "Tom Merry & Co. in Town". "The Nobbling of Nobbler Jim" was "Figgins & Co's Failure" in January 1908. The double-length "Treaty of St. Jim's" was originally "The Gathering of the Clans", No. 1 New Series of the Gem. Running with the supporting programme dropped, it fitted in snugly in 1932. But the very long St. Jim's stories were now to present their own problems for the editor. The half-penny issue tales had been of ideal length for the modern Gem. Providing the clipping was skilfully done, the old tales would suffer little from the pruning. Danny, in February 1932, was yet to see what the powers-that-be would make of the very long tales now to be reprinted. "The Ghost Train" by Arnold Ridley was a great success on stage in the late twenties; in fact, it was possibly the most successful comedy thriller of all time. It was made into a film, starring the Hulberts, which Danny saw in February 1932. It was made again, less successfully, early in the war years, with the leading role divided between Arthur Askey and, I think, Richard Murdoch. In fact, it was used in probably more films than any other play in all time, the most memorable of the others being the Will Hay classic "Oh, Mr. Porter". "Ghost Train" had also been made as a silent film.)

* *

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BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

At the time of writing this preamble our harsh winter weather appears to have disappeared. The snow has been finally washed away by the recent rain but today the sun is actually shining, for how long is anyone's guess. It was, however, nice to shut out thoughts of the weather by reading our Christmas editions of the monthly C.D. and the Annual, both containing a feast of interesting reading, enough to make anyone forget what was happening outside. Now, with all this happy reading maybe some of you will have had an inspiration for an article for Blakiana, if so, please get down to it rightaway as I am in need of material.

THE GHOST SHIP

by Raymond Cure

Of the four seasons of the year Winter is the time for ghosts. One could say from November to February. At least, that is the time most tales including them as co-stars are to be found during those months. Charles Dickens did well to set his ghost story - the immortal Scrooge and to call it a Christmas Carol - during mid-winter.

Midsummer is not the time for ghosts, unless it be poltergeists who are likely to throw pots at you any time of the year. Countries that don't enjoy our winter weather get over this ghost problem, in spite of the heat, by catering for Witchcraft.

Edwy Searles Brooks and Charles Hamilton conjured up all their ghosts during the traditional season, as also the author of "The Ghost Ship" a Union Jack success. He launched his Ghost Ship on the public in 1929 early January in U.J. No. 1319.

Most ghosts hang around old castles, old public schools and old Abbeys, though some ghosts take to the open sea, The Flying Dutchman being an example of this. The Ghost Ship sponsored by our Union Jack must be an off-spring of the Flying Dutchman or so the artist's illustrations give that impression.

On the cover page she looms out of a sea-mist lit only by the moon overhead, complete with her magnificent canvas sails on full show. Like all ghosts she had had a perfectly material existence but vanished after being abandoned as monstrous seas threatened to break her up. Later

search parties could find nothing save a few dead bodies of her crew. Yet she is seen sailing the Seven Seas again and if that does not tempt your reading taste-buds, it would be advisable to see a doctor.

Behind our mystery you will find Eileen Hale and Gilbert her husband, who according to Sexton Blake are two of the toughest criminals he has encountered. Sexton Blake fans will know that he did not believe in ghosts. He speaks for himself, of course, as the writer (in these days) would be inclined to think there is increasing evidence of supernatural activities. In this case Blake's theories are confirmed, his attempt to contact the Ghost Ship via a tugboat results in Tinker and Blake being blown into a shark-infested area. Talking of sharks, I suppose readers will have seen the film "Jaws" either at the cinema or on T.V. Did you enjoy the excitement of avoiding the huge snapping shark? If so, secure and read the Ghost Ship. Sharks abound - but here you have an added thrill. The tale comes to an amazing climax as on the blazing Ghost Ship those on board seek to escape. Escape from what? The hot searing flames! Maddened apes having broken loose swing screaming from the rigging, panic stricken crooks, detectives and scientists crowded in the lifeboat that was swinging at a dangerous angle while Sexton Blake endeavours to cut the release rope, while underneath the sharks are seen raising their ugly heads, their huge white teeth snapping the empty air.

At this stage dear reader, I leave you. If by now you are desperate to read it you will find the Josie Packman Sexton Blake Library has a copy.

ONE OF THE BEST OF THE GOOD-BAD GUYS

by J.E.M.

If there is one character in crime fiction who appeals more than either the good guy or the bad guy, it is the good-bad guy - the modern Robin Hood at odds with the law but always on the side of the angels against true villainy. This gay desperado has been fiction's friend for a long time (the original Robin Hood goes back at least 600 years) and, in his company, we can have our cake and eat it; for what is sweeter than a tale of skullduggery in a good cause?

It was a special pleasure to me, anyway, when I first met a character of this kind in the Union Jack nearly half a century ago. I had

already encountered a number of Sexton Blake's opponents and a pretty nasty lot some of them were. The ruthless Huxton Rymer, the cruel, sinister Wu Ling, the murderous Dr. Satira and the quite terrifying Mr. Reece were only a few of this very ugly army of crooks. It is true that there were less repellent villains like Zenith the Albino, a glittering and often sympathetic figure, but even he was hardly a fellow you'd want to cross swords (or sword-sticks) with. The ladies were not always much better, either, some of them - like Marie Galante for instance - definitely making the blood run cooler.

And then, one day, I came upon debonair Rupert Waldo, friend of the defenceless and terror of the wicked. If he was a crook, he robbed only the genuine nasties and his creator, Edwy Searles Brooks, made it clear that, in any case, most of the loot found its way to charities and good causes. Naturally, Waldo came into conflict not only with the law but with Sexton Blake himself, though Blake had more than a sneaking regard for this cheerful outlaw. Mind you, I can't help feeling that occasionally Waldo also came into conflict with his readers' credulity. It wasn't for nothing that he was known as the Wonder Man. His physical strength was that of ten men while his uncannily sharp senses could alert him to danger almost literally a mile off. It all took a bit of swallowing, though Brooks never fell into the trap of making him bullet-proof or gravity-proof like so many of the "super" men encountered in present-day cheap fiction - especially that of the American-style "comic" strip.

One thing about Waldo that always did ring true - and really made all those other attributes unnecessary - was his personality. There never was a warmer-hearted or more honourable rogue. A long-standing favourite with UJ readers, he retained his popularity to the end and, in fact, two of the last four issues of the UJ were devoted to his exploits. Whatever the reasons for its sad demise, the UJ can surely be said to have gone out with a bang not a whimper.

For any Brooksian who is not yet also a Blake and Waldo fan, let me strongly recommend The House of Light (UJ 1528). This is one of ESB's most delightful and exciting stories, with the added bonus of illustrations by Eric Parker (though the drawing of Waldo himself in

the special "portrait gallery" does the Wonder Man less than justice, giving him a pigeon chest, double chin and altogether making him look like a self-indulgent lounge lizard).

The setting for this tale is a fantastically luxurious English mansion occupied by a Yankee millionaire who makes Waldo his personal bodyguard after being rescued by the latter from Chicago gangsters. But all is not what it seems and, since Waldo is additionally suspected of a jewel theft, Blake, Tinker and Inspector Lennard are soon involved as well. In this lively yarn, the Wonder Man is given every opportunity to show off his talents and it would be a shame to reveal more. So, if you have not yet read this particular tale or - improbably - have never even met Rupert Waldo, do try to get access to The House of Light. After this story, there were to be only three more issues of the UJ. You may well be left wondering why.

* *

Nelson Lee Column

THE ST. FRANK'S SANATORIUM ... BY AN OLD BOY

The St. Frank's sanatorium houses three wards which are partitioned off by wooden screens. One ward is maintained as a private ward.

The sanatorium is really a wing of the Head's house, but it is self-contained. Not far away and along a corridor is the laboratory. Two nurses are in charge, one an elderly woman and the other is Miss Dora Manners, cousin to Irene Manners of the Moor View School. I mention these details to give me an easy lead in to describe an episode in the history of the old school where two well balanced seniors gained admission to the sanny mainly to look upon the young nurse Dora Manners.

Some roughs who were being treated after a coach accident on Holt's Farm had been placed in the sanatorium by Dr. Brett, the school's doctor. After a temporary stay they had got ready to leave but wanted to kiss their young nurse goodbye ... in their fashion.

Her screams had William Napolean Browne and Horace Stevens of the Fifth rushing to her assistance, and following the rescue their

bruises and cuts were bad enough for them to be admitted to the sanatorium by Dr. Brett.

Before this incident took place, Browne and Stevens had met the charming Dora near the Open Air Camp where some of the Removites were staying and both were vying for her attention ever since.

It had reached a stage when both were using subterfuge to "accidentally" run across Dora when she was off duty. I can see them now; there is Stevens hurrying through Big Arch, striding recklessly across Inner Court as though that ground were free, instead of being out of bounds.

And there is old Browne, shooting along the private drive at the side of the school, en route for the same destination as Stevens. A case of two minds with but a single thought.

And all because this happened to be Dora Manners' off duty hour'. Ever since Dora had arrived to take the position as nurse in the sanny Browne and Stevens had changed. They were not so foolish as to be in love with her, but they were certainly happy in her company. They had fallen under her spell. And a sort of jealousy had arisen between them, making them somewhat uneasy, for they were really the best of friends.

The situation is as old as Time, but forever new.

When Dora met the Fifth Formers by the river she acted sensibly and invited them to tea. And there I must leave them for I want to describe events that were happening in the meantime.

A coach taking some trippers on the way to Caistowe had broken down just passed St. Frank's and on one of Farmer Holt's meadows. The roughs in the coach had become intoxicated waiting for the coach to be repaired and attacked Nipper & Co's camp. Afterwards they sent the coach careering across the meadow. Then followed the accident, and several of the men had been injured.

Staying at the school was the head's sister, Lady Honoria, and her husband, Sir Lucian Dexter. Besides being a school governor, Sir Lucian was a distinguished archaeologist.

The area around St. Frank's was a noted site for Roman remains and when the coach accident had caused a subsidence Sir Lucian was to be found to be very interested.

To describe all what happened at this period would spoil the

researcher's love of digging into the past, but one can spend many a happy hour reading of the time the St. Frank's juniors turned farmers; of the time when Browne and Stevens were smitten and a treasure of Tiberius was found near St. Frank's.

I don't know who won the charming Miss Dora in the end. Time will keep that secret. But it would be interesting to know if ever Wagner's well-worn Bridal music from his famous Lohengrin ever accompanied Browne-or-Stevens and Dora down the aisle.

CORNERSTONES by R. J. Godsave

It is generally agreed that the majority of the old papers, so beloved by the Clubs, were mainly written for those of a youthful age who would soon be joining the large army of wage earners. These papers first made their appearance in the early years of this century.

Perhaps the earliest papers, as we know them, were the Boy's Own Paper first published at the beginning of 1879 by the Religious Tract Society for one penny. The BOP was considered to be the Christian answer to the "Penny Dreadfuls" of that time.

This paper was followed by Chums, published by Cassell's which commenced its long life in 1892. The Captain made its appearance in 1899 for 6d. monthly, with such celebrated authors as P. G. Wodehouse, Warren Bell and the like. As these publications were rather on the expensive side there is little doubt that a market for a less costly paper was there for Charles Hamilton to secure.

The Sexton Blake Library, like the Nelson Lee Library, were first published during the war years of 1914-18. The Sexton Blake being for the more adult teenager.

From my own experience I have been somewhat surprised at the complete lack of jealousy and envy by the readers of the school adventure papers. The characters of these papers generally came from homes of more wealthier people than those of the youthful readers. The activities of such people gave an author much more scope to write an interesting story.

The Nelson Lee would have lost much of its charm had not E. S. Brooks been able to incorporate Lord Dorriemore and his yacht in those wonderful summer holiday series. Again, the Christmas

mysteries invariably took place in the aristocratic home of one of the parents of a St. Frank's pupil.

In the spring of 1923, E. S. Brooks wrote a series in which Alfred Brent, son of the Chairman of the Board of Governors of St. Frank's College, arrived at St. Frank's as a cockney schoolboy under the name of Alf. 'Uggins. He lived the part in order to find out how one with a cockney accent would get on at a public school. Personally, I cannot believe that anyone can successfully drop all his previous training as a child, and then as a teenager and be able to forget it all. In fact, the whole series gives, to my mind, a hollow ring.

If I may trespass for a short while on Hamiltonian ground, I would mention the excellent 'Tatters' series in which Tatters spoke in the same way as Alf. 'Uggins for the simple reason he knew no better.

* *

DO YOU REMEMBER? by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 175 - Gems 304-6 - Hammond Series

The Gem had declined a little from its zenith when the Hammond series appeared at the end of 1913. 'Arry 'Orace 'Ammond was a Cockney whose father had recently made a fortune out of Hammond's 3/9d. hats, and he was sent to St. Jim's to acquire some "polish of manner" as Dr. Holmes put it. It was explained that a Governor of the school had made a special request that Hammond be admitted, but Gussy found it hard to accept a gold watch-chain, a diamond pin, hair glistening with oil, and thumbs stuck in the pockets of a check waistcoat.

Charles Hamilton was perenially intrigued by the effect upon public school boys of a newcomer from a lower point in the social scale. Hammond possessed, perhaps, more indpendence of spirit and intelligence of mind than most of the waifs and strays that passed through the pages of the Companion Papers, and so it seems highly unlikely that he would have poured his tea into his saucer or eaten cake with the blade of a pocket knife. Nevertheless, Hammond's sensitivity was underlined and he was quick to reject friendship from people like Cutts and Levison when it was clear that his money was all they wanted.

Saving Cousin Ethel from the River Ryll was the action that won

him acceptance, especially from Gussy, but a device of this nature is, possibly, too facile a contrivance for resolving a difficult situation. The last two numbers of the series featured Levison, first when he tried to break up the friendship between Gussy and Hammond out of sheer malice, and secondly when he was unjustly suspected of all sorts of villainy. It is interesting to see that No. 306 began with Levison playing ghost, having taken a monk's habit from the school museum. (The famous "Mystery of the Painted Room" in No. 302 constituted the Christmas Double Number for that year, but No. 306 offered a ghost nearer to the actual date of Christmas in 1913.) The monk's habit was taken by someone else for a quite different reason, and a well-knit plot with an air of mystery ended the series most successfully. Hammond stayed on at St. Jim's, to become part of the enormous log-jam of dead wood at that school.

It seems likely that Charles Hamilton sometimes forgot exactly who had and who had not been expelled from his various schools. Albert Prye, who left the Fifth in disgrace at the end of Gem 306 was apparently still at St. Jim's in 1931 when he was featured with Cutts and St. Leger as "The Shady Three" in No. 1205!

* *

BACK TO SCHOOL - AND SPORT

by Laurie Sutton

In the 1981 C.D. Annual there is an article of mine ("New Light on Some Old Stories") published with an Editorial Comment appended. Such Comment, while acceptable in the monthly C.D., where the author can reply in that publication, is surely out of place in the Annual, where it is left isolated on permanent record - particularly when the Editor is in error. Since my article was submitted early in the year, I suggest that the correct procedure would have been to refer it back if any of my facts were disputed.

Regarding the four S.O.L's that I stated came from the 1921-22 "School and Sport" (which the Editor denies, in arguing that they were reprints from the 1924-25 Boys' Friend) I do not possess these B.F.'s, and obviously the Editor does not possess the S. & S. However, it would seem from Danny's Diary that the St. Kit's stories ran in the B.F. between Sept. 1924 and May 1925, although not continuously. I cannot see why the S. & S. stories (written only three years earlier) should have received minor re-writing. The altering of Lovell to Wilmot was a simple editorial job, so what else was needed, other than perhaps a slight altering on occasions of the commencing and concluding paragraphs (not required in the S.O.L.) and the provision of Hamilton's own ending to the rebellion in place of the sub writer's effort.

However, I will list the titles of the 8½ S. & S. stories that Hamilton wrote, with their S.O.L. reprints. With this evidence, to assert that the S.O.L's came from the later B.F. reprints is like saying that the Gem reprints of the 1930's came from the Popular rather than their original Gem source.

School & Sport	Approx. Words		S.O.L.	Approx. Words
1. The Nameless Schoolboy	25,000)			
2. Parted Chums	25,000)	64.	Parted Chums	50,000
3. Sent to Coventry	25,000)			
4. How Harry Nameless Found His Father	25,000)	70.	The Boy Who Found His Father	50,000
5. Who Shall Be Captain?	25,000)			
6. The Foes of the Fourth	25,000)	136.	Who Shall Be Captain?	50,000
7. The Tyrant of St. Kit's	19,000)	188.	Up the Rebels	(Unable to confirm)
8. The St. Kit's Rebellion	21,000)			
9. Barred Out (Hamilton's contribution - 6 chapts.	10,000)			
Nos. 7-9, Total =	50,000			

Now, regarding my statement (which the Editor doubts) that C.H. wrote only the first six chapters of S. & S. No. 9 I was not aware, either when I spotted the sub, or when I wrote my article, that the total word count of Nos. 7,8,9 practically confirms this fact, particularly when one reads the final paragraph of No. 9, chap. 6 - "The St. Kit's barring-out had begun! And nobody at St. Kit's - not even the rebels themselves - could surmise how it was going to end." Does anybody doubt that that paragraph was intended to conclude a week's episode, rather than appear in the middle of an instalment? Further examination suggests that a 25,000 word instalment was spread over S. & S. No. 7 and the first four chapters of No. 8, where chap. 5 commences: "St. Kit's cad!" - a new theme of inter-school rivalry, very appropriate to start a weekly instalment, even though not out of place for an inner chapter. Chap. 5 of No. 8 to the end of chap. 6 in No. 9 make up the remaining 25,000 word instalment.

On the suggestion that Hamilton left Hinton high and dry in the middle of a serial, if this means in the middle of a weekly instalment I have already indicated that he did not. If it means that Hamilton was guilty of "slightly shabby treatment" in leaving a series unfinished, I would have thought that after supplying some 200,000 words without payment (the equivalent of some 13 Magnet or 14 Gem stories of that period) even Hamilton would have to give an ultimatum. Whatever the circumstances (which none of us knows) I would have thought that it was not Hamilton who was guilty of shabby treatment.

Regarding Hinton, we are informed that as he had done some sub writing himself, it is not clear why he should engage another sub to finish off a Hamilton story. Well, who said that he did? Certainly not I. In fact, I made clear that there were two sub writers involved with St. Kit's, and it has never been established whether E. R. Home Gall was the first or the second of these; therefore, Hinton himself could well have been the first, and the one to

finish off the Rebellion series. In fact, as Home-Gall has also revealed that he was never paid by Hinton, it seems unlikely that he was the first sub, writing no fewer than twelve stories without payment.

An interesting point is that after S. & S. No. 7 Hamilton's pen-name of Clifford Clive was dropped from the title heading, which surely suggests that C.H. supplied his last contribution with the instruction to Hinton not to use his pen-name for any substitute St. Kit's tales. No. 8 should have been the last Hamilton story had not Hinton spread 50,000 words over three weeks instead of two, so that Hinton was actually a week premature in dropping the author's name.

In case anybody still doubts my statement that the S. & S. Rebellion series was finished by a sub writer, I must give one or two examples of that writer's style in concluding S. & S. No. 9.

Here is the Head (Mr. Carker) speaking:- "Oh, do you?" Mr. Carker's unpleasant voice was heard. "You wish Dr. Cheyne were back here again, do you, Mr. Lathley?" he said grimly. "Then allow me to inform you that in all probability your wish will never fructify. I heard this morning that Dr. Cheyne is very ill indeed; dying, in fact." "Dr. Cheyne - dying?" said Harry, in a whisper. "Yes," rapped out Mr. Carker, "dying - probably dead by now. At any rate, in the critical state he's in, he'll die as soon as he hears of the havoc you've caused in the school, you - you young criminal!" Harry Lovell's eyes flashed. "Criminal!" he cried. "You dare to call me a criminal!"

Here is an example of the author's descriptive writing: 'His way led him across the high bridge which spans the River Wicke. As the junior approached in the early morning, with the birds twittering, and the cocks crowing in the farmyards around him, Harry could not help recalling the circumstances of his first crossing of that bridge, when he had dived from it to save his cousin Algy, who was drowning. Now everything looked very peaceful in the early morning light - the sheep grazing in the meadows, through which the broad river ran ...' 'Be this as it may, Randolph Carker ...' 'But judge of his utter astonishment when ...'

An episode that I like is when Lovell and Algy hold the desperate Mr. Carker at bay in his study. Algy leaves by the window to get the night train to London in order to summon his father. Lovell is left to guard the cowering Carker, who hesitates to tackle the boy, who is armed with a weapon. What is the weapon that terrifies the savage Head? A gun, a knife, or a red-hot poker? Well, actually, it's the Head's cane! However, Harry relaxes for a moment: 'Suddenly, with a spring like a tiger, Mr. Carker was upon him. The Fourth-form junior had been so deep in thought that the other had seized his advantage, and a chair as well. Before Harry could dodge the infuriated Carker had raised it above his head and brought it down with tremendous force on the Fourth-form captain. Instinctively Harry put out his elbow to break the force. It did so a little, and probably saved his life, but all the same, that savage blow was not entirely warded off.'

In case anyone is interested, Algy's mission was successful, for he brought back not only his father, but Lovell's father, and also the "dying" Dr. Cheyne, both of whom happened

to be staying with Algy's pater at the time. Dr. Cheyne had, of course, made a miraculous recovery from his injury.

I think that is quite enough to convince anybody with no more than a casual acquaintance with Charles Hamilton's writing. I can only assume that the Editor has never read this particular issue of S. & S., or that he read it a very long time ago. Either way, he was hardly justified in querying my statement, the accuracy of which he will surely now acknowledge.

(Eric Fayne adds: My footnote to Mr. Sutton's article in the Annual was not intended to be a criticism of an interesting, speculative essay. The footnote, concerning the St. Kit's stories, comprised last minute thoughts as additions to the article. My comments were mainly on the Boys' Friend, to which Mr. Sutton made no reference at all.

I was in error in stating that half the Boys' Friend serials had appeared in School & Sport. From Mr. Sutton's lengthy protests in this issue of C.D. it is evident that all of them had come from Hinton's defunct paper. I apologise to Mr. Sutton and to my readers. The error was partly due to what Hamilton himself said over thirty years ago. He stated that he wrote two new stories of St. Kit's for the Boys' Friend. From this it was assumed that the last two serials in the Friend had not come from Hinton's magazine. The matter has been mentioned more than once in C.D. down the long years, and I do not recall that either Mr. Sutton or anyone else ever questioned it.

I stated that I never had any reason to doubt that the Boys' Friend serials were in any part otherwise than by Hamilton himself. That was quite true. But I never cared much for them, and it is many years since I read them.

I find that Hamilton introduced St. Kit's into two Rookwood yarns - "Bound by a Promise" and "The Match with St. Kit's". Jimmy Silver, who had always found St. Kit's a walkover at games, promised a place in the team to Gunner. And then Silver discovered that St. Kit's had a great new team, led by the staunch Harry Wilmot. (Surely, in this case, Hamilton did not write of Harry Lovell and have the name editorially changed to Wilmot?) It is possible that these Rookwood stories may have been the "new St. Kit's stories" to which, many years later, Hamilton referred.

In his main article, Mr. Sutton mentioned certain surnames which were familiar in the Hamilton saga. I have an idea that Wilmot was not entirely peculiar to St. Kit's.

The real interest is: Who sold the St. Kit's stories to the A.P.? One would think that, as Hinton never paid for them, he could not have sold them. If Hamilton sold them to the A.P., as I think probable, would he have included even a small part written in by some sub author? It is a mystery to which any solution seems unlikely nearly sixty years later.)

* *

SALE: Magnets 1412 to 1440. Early ones £2 each; later ones £1. Wizards, Rovers, Skippers, etc., 40p and 50p each. Boys' Magazines 1424 onwards, £1.50 each. Schoolboys' Owns £1.50 each. Secton Blakes £1 each. The Boys' Friend Library 1922, £2.

OLYMPUS, Sandford Mill Rd., Chelmsford, Essex. (Chelmsford 72570)

News of the Old Boys' Book Clubs...

CAMBRIDGE

The Cambridge Club met at the home of Adrian Perkins on Sunday, 3 January, for their first meeting of 1982. Bill Thurbon gave the answers to the usual "just for fun" quiz. Arrangements were made for the February and March meetings. The Secretary announced that Mary Cadogan hoped to attend the next meeting to give a talk on "Worrals".

The first part of the programme was devoted to Greyfriars, including the Greyfriars Radio programme, and the playing of "Floreat Greyfriars". During the course of a discussion on Greyfriars Mike Rouse shook the meeting by saying how, while reading to a first year school class, a reference to "Bessie Bunter's stocking" revealed that none of the class knew of either Bessie or Billy Bunter!

After enjoying Adrian's excellent tea, members relaxed while Keith Hodkinson gave an entertaining film display. Beginning with a 1948 "Goofy" film, "Tiger trouble", he followed with a 3 D film, issuing the members first with the red and green glasses - an interesting experience for older members who had not seen 3 D films when these were popular. He followed this up with various black and white silent films, including a rare Charlie Chaplin film "A day's pleasure" and a Lupino Lane film of 1927. It was interesting to see how the comedy of the silent films survived very well in the 1980's.

The Secretary announced that the Club Newsletter should be ready for issue within the next fortnight. Mike Rouse kindly gave members copies of a book he had just written on "Edwardian Ely in Picture Postcards".

The meeting closed with warm thanks to Keith for his film show, and to Adrian and Mrs. Perkins for their hospitable entertainment.

W.T.T.

NORTHERN

9 January, 1982

A goodly gathering of the faithful on this cold winter's evening were given a warm welcome by Chairman Harry Barlow.

After our business meeting Joe Wood presented us with a quiz, for which an elementary knowledge of English literature was required. "Which of the Bronte sisters wrote 'Wuthering Heights'?" Of course it was Emily, and not Anne as our worthy Secretary had it!

But who of us did not experience a wave of nostalgia when we were asked to name six boys' papers of the twenties which sold for tuppence!?

Jack Allison read a letter from the Sunday Times written by a reader who confessed to being appalled at what is presented in children's literature today. 'The Beano' especially was criticized - children who speak well, are decent, respectful and help their parents are reviled and subject to persecution - Denis the Menace is glorified. Baby-Face receives no rebuke or punishment for his highly-successful shoplifting expeditions. And girls' papers, said the writer, seem obsessed with sex.

There were complaints about sex and violence on television, he wrote, but nobody seemed to have noticed what was happening in children's literature.

Our evening ended with a game in which each of us wrote the name of a Hamilton character on a scrap of paper which was then folded up and put into a hat (Jack's hat, to be precise). And then each of us drew a name from the hat and gave a one-minute talk on the character he had picked (without revealing the character's name). The rest of us had to guess who the character was!

LONDON

The Annual General Meeting of the club will take place at the Information Centre, 29 Lordship Lane, East Dulwich, London, SE22, on Sunday, 14th February. Tea will be provided, but bring own tuck.

The Postman Called

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

ERIC RUFFLE (Woking): I thought the December Collectors' Digest one of the very best issues ever. I spent Christmas with friends, and the eldest daughter, aged 12, lent me what was, to my delight, the Hamlyn publication of Bunter's barring-out at High Oaks, with Lord Mauleverer in command. A story I had hitherto not read.

PAT CREIGHAN (Monaghan): Congratulations on a marvellous Annual. It is superb. I enjoyed Princess Snowee's article and the Mary Cadogan one on "cats in Fiction". Would say that Princess Snowee would have a word or two to say to Bill Lofts for introducing that disreputable character, Michael Mouse, in such distinguished company. Imagine a mere mouse on the same pages as Her Royal Highness!. Joking apart, it is a wonderful Annual, and will give pleasant reading for a long time.

DENNIS HILLIARD (Stapleford): Many, like myself, owe you an enormous debt for your investment in the hobby. I look forward to "Digest" as one of the special events of the month. "Danny's Diary" has been a constant pleasure since I was introduced to the publication just over twenty years ago. I have Gerry Allison to thank for that happy day. I seem to have little time for hobby reading,, but THE Magazine is always an exception. I drink it in on the day of receipt, and I always find it to my taste. May you long have the motivation and ability to bring such joy to so many.

(Editorial Comment: I rarely publish an item which is so personal as the one above. But Mr. Hilliard's letter is so generous and so sincere that I felt it had to go in. When I begin to feel that everything is getting on top of me and it's time to call it a day, a letter like this one cheers me up and I get the will to carry on with the job. Thank you, Mr. Hilliard!)

D. B. STARK (Plumpton Green): Re your editorial comment on Biros, I was reminded that way back in '48 or '49, when I was with the Home Fleet, a shipmate had a "new-fangled Biro" for Christmas. I still have a Biro advertisement bookmark offering these new pens with "miles and miles of writing" at about 50/- or £2-12-6d., with "servicing at five shillings".

cont'd ...

Nowadays there is a wide selection of pens, including Berol and Kilometic (!!) sold in Smith's at 7p, and elsewhere at 8p or 9p. Ball pens are big business; a few weeks ago the figure was put in excess of £M600, though the article did not say if this was a worldwide figure.

W. T. THURBON (Cambridge): To revert for a moment to the Annual and the article on "Cooking up the Story". Is it possible that Valda took the idea of the story of "The man with the rats" from one of Austin Freeman's "Dr. Thorndyke" stories, which appeared in, I think, the Strand Magazine? in which an anarchist, displaying performing rats in the East End of London, allowed rats infested with plague or typhus to escape into London sewers. I would think this story was published in the late 1920's or early 1930's. There was, as you know, a great deal of plagiarism in some of the boys' stories of the early years of the century: Rider Haggard and Conan Doyle, were plundered in particular by Reginald Wray and Cecil Hayter.

NORMAN YANDLE (Redcar): How the years fly by! It is now twenty years since I first subscribed to the Digest.

L. SUSANS (Kent): I have recently read once again my collection of Bunter books which were published by Skilton and Cassell after the war. It's amazing how fresh the stories are after twenty or thirty years and made pleasant reading during this wintry weather we have been having during the last few weeks.

I found 'Greyfriars Characters' a jolly fine publication but was not too happy with 'Prospectus', especially the Floor Plans which bore no relation to the stories whatever.

ESMOND KADISH (Hendon): I've had a great time wandering through Digestannual-land. I strolled through Greyfriars and its environs with Leslie Rowley, donning and doffing my overcoat and muffler at the appropriate season; exchanging my Greyfriars titfer for a St. Frank's one in order to accompany Jim Cook and Nic Gayle, respectively, around the famous school; prowled through various fictional alleyways in the company of Mary Cadogan's felonious felines; and, with difficulty, restrained Mr. Buddle's dog, Pongo (alias Mr. Scarlet's

Homer!) from leaping from page 85 to page 46 to do battle with his furry arch-enemies. In short, I enjoyed each and every item in the Annual - it really gets better every year. A lovely issue. Also, a lovely seasonable illustration on the cover of the December C.D.

* *

MORGYN THE MIGHTY by Len Wormuli

Morgyn the Mighty, a name that crops up from time to time, was one of the three top stars of ROVER in the twenties and thirties, the others being Cast-Iron Bill and Black Sapper (see footnote). A rare treat would be the inclusion of all three in one issue, though it was not uncommon to find any two of them together. Billed as the strongest man in the world, with the strength of ten men, there was seemingly nothing he couldn't do when it came to the test. He came to Rover in 1928, when the paper was six years old, and quickly established himself as fiction's "Modern Samson". That he would survive into the age of the picture-strips, and be competing for popularity against the "Incredible Hulk" in the eighties, is something that neither he nor his sponsors could possibly have foreseen in those far-off days. But let us not, as they say, jump the gun.

In a flashback we learn that he was shipwrecked on a small island in the Pacific (Black Island) at the age of 15, a sole survivor from the schooner Hebrides. We meet up with him 13 years on, now a mighty man of muscle, ready to face civilisation again. I don't know how his measurements compare with today's muscle men, or even the "Hulk's", but this was Morgyn's: Height 5 ft. 11 ins. Weight 13 st. 12 lbs. Chest 47 ins. Expanded 55 ins. Biceps 21 ins. Forearm 16 ins. His only attire was a one-piece garment made of skins, passed over one shoulder and around his hips; his protective weapons a fearsome-looking club and a knife. Aboard the rescue ship is a youngster, one Jimmy Willis, who becomes his companion in the opening stories; an encumbrance that was thankfully short-lived. This was a man's world, and the death-defying tasks lined up for Morgyn would require all the skill, courage, and strength at his command.

In true Rover tradition, Morgyn's amazing adventures were to take him all round the world. Obviously, the stories had to be read to

do our strongman justice, but here are a few random samples taken from his vast catalogue of incident: Samson, it was said, slew a lion with his bare hands. Morgyn went six better, and took only thirty minutes. Thrown into an arena with two leopards, it is the leopards who are promptly thrown out - by their tails! In Mexico, he takes on an army single-handed. In Africa, and besieged by 500 Cannibals, he uses a friendly giant octopus as his secret weapon! His biggest single feat was overcoming a giant Mastodon, a survivor from a past age. Down the scale would be wild animals, sharks, crocodiles - in fact, anything that offered a challenge, Morgyn was there. Only once did his great strength prove useless, and that was when confronted by an army of rats. The "Mighty" image was always maintained, and Christmas was no exception. For one yuletide feast he literally went the whole hog and downed a pig and a pudding! When it was time for a well-earned rest, the excuse would be that he was tired of civilisation and was home-sick for his shack on Black Island. I spent a little time with Morgyn as a boy, but cannot recall my reactions. The tales must have been widely popular because, after his first stint, the editor built up his comeback by saying ... 'Only two more weeks to wait'. When our hero returned, he had been given a new title - King Morgyn the Mighty.

The bulk of his stories in Rover appeared in the years 1928 to 1932, after which he was confined mainly to guest appearances. From the mid-thirties up to the war he was virtually a back number. Meanwhole, others were flexing their muscles. There was Strong-Man Steele, the Giant Man. Another was Mike Malone, the Marine with the Mighty Mitts. And to crown it all, there was even a strong boy, named Spiffy Morgan, with the strength of ten men! But try as they would, there was no-one to hold a candle to Morgyn. He really was the Mightiest of them all. And if further proof were needed - well, time would tell.

FOOTNOTE: This trio of characters was to prove one of the biggest money-spinners in the history of the Thomson papers. Cast-Iron Bill (Bentley), the fearless goalie who never had a goal scored against him in First League football, holds the longest-serving record of all Thomson characters. Starting in the early days of Rover, he was seldom out of the paper, and was later to take the picture-strips in his stride. I last saw him in the Wizard of the '70's. Incredible as it may seem, he will again be back on the bookstalls in December, in a

new Thomson publication, called Red Dagger. And still with his goaless record intact! I have the current copy in front of me, and guess who's occupying the 64-page full-length story? Yes, our champion of strong men, Morgyn the Mighty, and looking younger than ever. On the cover is a wonderful picture of him, clad only in tight-fitting leopard trunks, fighting for his life against three Mongolian soldiers. The Black Sapper, who started underground work for Rover in 1930, was last seen (by me) in the Hotspur of the '70's, this time with a more sophisticated burrowing machine, called the "Worm". No doubt he will be boring his way into the pages of Red Dagger before long, if he has not already done so.

* *

A SOFT JELLY AND A HARD STONE

by Tommy Keen

Answering the query in the C.D. for September, yes, I well remember Angelica Jelly, a member of the Fifth Form at Cliff House School, during the very early days of "The School Friend". Not a prominent member of that form, the leading lights being Grace Woodfield (the Captain), and Flora Cann, but as with the famous Picture Gallery 'Who's Who' in the Magnet and the Gem, way back in those far off days, a small portrait appeared weekly of the Cliff House characters, running for a considerable time, and this series included, I am certain, a picture of Angelica Jelly. A girl of nondescript appearance, with long lank hair, rather like one of the Fourth Form characters of that time, Agnes White.

If the 1936 Cliff House story, "Standing By Stella" is Tony Glynn's introduction to Stella Stone, the Captain of Cliff House School, she had by that time, with the help of T.E. Laidler's illustrations in "The Schoolgirl", become a rather sophisticated young lady. However, the original Stella, as illustrated by the strangely fascinating G. M. Dodshon, was rather a taller edition of Barbara Redfern, the Captain of the Fourth Form, with long hair, worn in a little girl style, hanging over her shoulders.

Barbara, Mabel Lynn, Marjorie Hazeldene, and most of the other girls adored her, but when the more modern size "School Friend" was issued in the mid-twenties, the adoration became a little out of control, and in several stories she was idolised by two of the lesser known members of the Fourth Form - Katie Smith and Cissy Clare - causing much jealousy and misunderstanding between the two juniors.

I know nothing of Stella Stone in "The Schoolgirl", except that her

bitter enemy, Connie Jackson, had been replaced by another venomous prefect, Sarah Harrigan, as I had then stopped reading about Cliff House. For me, Cliff House finished when the School Friend closed. When the Schoolgirl took over, neither the School, nor the characters, were of any interest to me. Barbara Redfern and Co., originated by Charles Hamilton, (but passed over so ably to Horace Phillips, R. J. Kirkham and L. E. Ransome), who had been so much a part of my schooldays, were no more.

But I well remember Angelica!

* *

I'M A VISUAL GENT, TOO! says Maurice Kutner

Re Norman Kadish's confession to being "a visual gent". I must also confess to being in that category. Illustrations have remained clearer and longer in my memory than have the vast majority of the stories. Perhaps this is usual with most of us.

Your remarks concerning artists who may have had less than justice, and J. R. Macdonald being the acknowledged artist for the Gem; brings to mind that Warwick Reynolds who "did" the Gem as a First World War-time measure (while Macdonald served his time in the Royal Navy) was, to my mind, a far superior artist, illustrating for such high standard magazines as the Strand, World Wide, Pearsons, etc. I was lucky to have my "purple period" while Warwick Reynolds worked for the Gem. But, I agree, Macdonald and the Gem definitely go together like toast and marmalade.

Another happily "married couple" are C. H. Chapman and the Magnet. No complaints. But when Chapman was chosen to take over after Arthur Clarke's death in 1912 (?) I have often been put in mind of a "fluke" in snooker.

In the Marvel of the First World War was a period of Calcroft School stories by Sidney Drew, illustrated by Val Reading, who did a vast amount of work for the A.P. periodicals. Admirers of Chapman are legion, but I have always thought that Val Reading's schoolboys were more closely related to Arthur Clarke's schoolboys than were Chapman's in "atmosphere" and jollity. Perhaps other "visual gents" might debate the merits or demerits of other A.P. illustrators?

"CRACKERS" WAS A CRACKER JACK!

by O. W. Wadham

There must be many Collectors' Digest readers who can cast their minds back to January 1939. The golden age of boys' papers and of comics had just twelve months to go, but, of course, no-one knew it. What was the outstanding comic paper of that eventful year? I should award the palm to Crackers, that beautiful coloured comic that made number 516 with the coming of 1939.

Crackers and Rainbow led the coloured comic field in that year. Crackers had a more mature appeal than did the Rainbow, and the picture serial on page one, "The Adventures of Bob and Betty Britten" among the savages of Pearl Island was a big attraction. It was the last year when twopence would buy so much, so attractively presented.

If there is anyone with a complete file of Crackers for the year 1939 it should be most valuable. The final six months of 1939 would no doubt begin to tell the tale. I hardly think the excellent standard of January was continued once the War God sounded his Gong. All other boys papers and comics would have the same story to relate, too. It was truly an end to quantity and quality.

* *

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* *

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 233. THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS

"The School Under Canvas" has been a strangely neglected Hamilton story down the years. In this respect, it falls into the same category as "Under Lights Out", which Roger Jenkins discussed recently.

"School Under Canvas", a story of Rylcombe Grammar School, was published as a serial in the Gem through the summer of 1912.

Much after the style of the St. Jim's tales in the Gem at that time, the serial reads well. Some of its success is due to the way that Gordon Gay is presented as the sunny-natured leader, very much from the same mould as Tom Merry.

There are some contrived happenings, which did nothing at the time to impair the tale for the reader. In the middle of the term, Dr. Monk, the Headmaster, announces that the entire school is going under canvas for the remainder of the term. The great camp is sited on the coast of Essex. Classes will go on as usual. It is an immense surprise for the boys and for the staff.

It really is most unlikely that the Head of any school would make such arrangements without sending out notification to parents, and without discussing the matter with his staff.

A new boy, in common with so many Hamilton new boys, arrives in the middle of the term. He is Gustave Blanc, nicknamed Mont Blong by the boys, and he is an attractive character, with his Frenchy-English. To him goes some of the credit for the success of the serial. He stayed on at the Grammar School in later years, but in this tale he has some nebulous link with the Secret Service.

Mr. Adams, the master of the Fourth, is "an old gentleman with a bald spot". Herr Hentzel, the German master, turns out to be a spy, signalling to submarines from the Essex coast. A German officer in uniform is seen on the beach at one stage of the story - and this is 1912.

When the party leaves from Rylcombe station (Trumble, the Gem porter is there) Tom Merry and D'Arcy get permission to have the afternoon off from lessons in order to see the Grammar School off. It

strikes the adult mind as most improbable.

At the camp, Corporal Cutts blows the bugle to raise everybody in the mornings. Just why the Essex coast was selected as the site for the camp is problematical. That coastline is described as having caves and headlands, and I can think of nowhere on the Essex coast to compare with it in real life. The entire coast by way of Clacton, Frinton, and Walton-on-Naze, north to the Suffolk coast, is flat and featureless. Maybe the author did not know Essex very well, or maybe he did not bother.

The closing chapters, culminating in the arrest of Herr Hentzel as a German spy, are quite exciting, and well related. At the end, the camp broke up, and the boys returned to Rylcombe, still in the summer term apparently, and were met at the station by Tom Merry & Co.

There are two "Co's". The original one of Frank Monk, Lane and Carboy, with Tadpole thrown in as makeweight, created by Hamilton years earlier. The second group, Gordon Gay and the two Wootton Brothers, apparently created by C. M. Down in the Empire Library, figure more in this story.

I don't seem to have realised before that Gordon Gay and his two friends, the Wootton Bros., were Australians. To me, a slightly old-fashioned, or long-forgotten, literary mannerism is the constant reference to the "Cornstalks". It reminded me of the early days of Kangaroo, at St. Jim's. Hamilton, himself, often refers to Gay & Co. as the Cornstalks, yet he causes one of the Woottons to say:

"I'm not a Cornstalk".

"I thought all Australians were Cornstalks," said the boy who had addressed him.

"I'm a Bananalander," says Wootton. "I come from Queensland."

It caused me to look up "Cornstalk" in my dictionary. The word was not given at all in Chamber's. However, I found it in my big Oxford Dictionary. "Cornstalk: An Australian, of British descent, from New South Wales." So now I think I know. A Cornstalk is from New South Wales. A Bananalander is from Queensland. We have many readers in both States. Can they confirm?

The following year, 1913, "School Under Canvas" appeared in book form in the Boys' Friend 3d. Library. Though the B.F.L's in

those days contained a great deal of reading matter, the story had to be pruned in that version. Most serials ran to great length, and had to be cut when published later in the BFL.

One can trace its serial origin by the way the plot worked up in excitement at the end of an instalment, in order to make readers certain not to miss "next week's thrilling instalment". (Shades of "The Diamond from the Sky" and "The Exploits of Elaine.") It makes the story slightly episodic when read in the B.F.L.

I have no doubt at all that Hamilton wrote "The School Under Canvas" as a serial - not for the Gem but for the Empire Library. He had already had a St. Wode's serial published in the Empire Library. He had had "Cousin Ethel's Schooldays" published in the same paper. He had written "Tom Merry's Treasure Island" which was to run as a serial in the Empire. And now he wrote "The School Under Canvas" by Prospero Howard, who was the Empire Library's own writer.

But something happened to change plans. In the Empire, as I related in an article long ago, the coming Tom Merry serial was advertised over several weeks. Then the advertisements stopped. "Tom Merry's Treasure Island" was never mentioned again in that paper. In fact, very soon the paper ended, amalgamated with the 'Boys' Realm Sports Library.

And what happened to the Treasure Island serial. It turned up a few months later in the Gem, under the titles "The Mysterious Document", "Tom Merry's Treasure Island", and "The Schoolboy Castaways".

And "The School Under Canvas" was also transferred to the Gem. And even "Cousin Ethel's Schooldays", which had actually appeared in the Empire, was also given another airing as a serial in the Gem.

Two interesting items to wind it all up. "The School Under Canvas" as a serial in the Gem was charmingly illustrated by Leonard Shields. And, some years later, Hamilton wrote of another school under canvas when Rookwood was bombed in the First World War. It was more convincing than the camp adventures of Rylcombe Grammar School.

* *

WANTED: All Rookwood SOL's, Sunny Stories, Enid Blyton's Magazines, Collectors' Miscellany (pre 1945), Golden Hours No. 1. Good prices paid or exchanges.

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