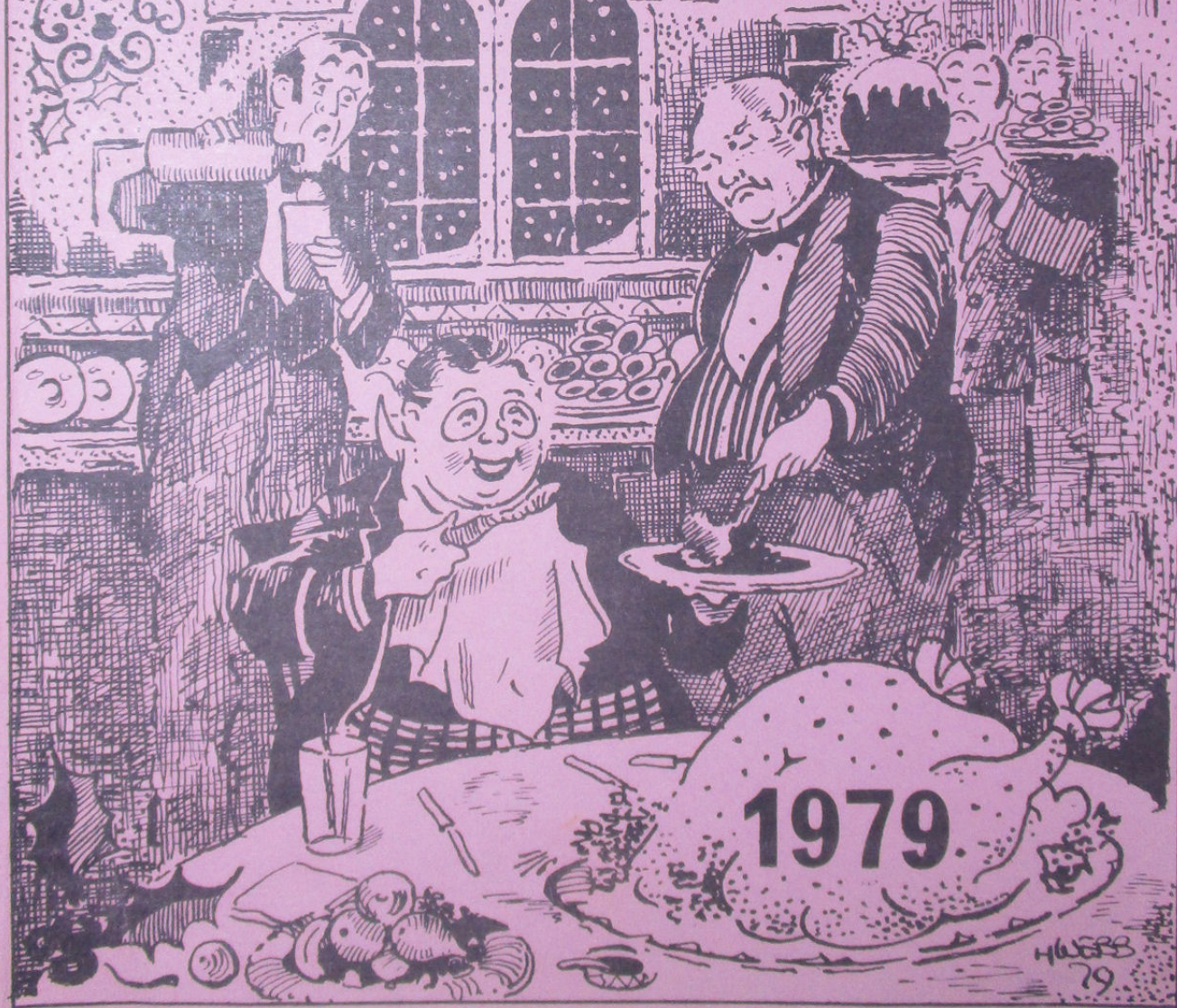


Collectors Digest Annual





COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL

Christmas 1979

THIRTY-THIRD YEAR

EDITOR: ERIC FAYNE, Excelsior House, 113 Crookham Road, Crookham,
Hampshire, England

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

Another Christmas - we're all another year older and, maybe, another year wiser - with another Collectors' Digest Annual to add to the ever-growing number of editions of this famous work. This one is the 33rd - and 33 years is a very long time which ever way you look at it. A publication which has lasted 33 years speaks for itself, without me wasting space to speak about it.

Just why Herbert Leckenby, whom we remember with deep affection and respect, started the Annual all those years ago we cannot say for certain. He must have had a back-breaking load already, with the monthly to bring out regularly. But we cannot be but glad that he did. Even he, optimist though he was, could hardly have foreseen that the Annual would still be going strong 33 years on.

An old hymn that I used to love to join in singing had the words: "Count your blessings, name them one by one ..." I, for one, have had many blessings to count in this year, for, without them, there would have been no Collectors' Digest Annual 1979.

It has not been an easy year, and, way back in the late summer, a delay, at least, in the publication of the Annual seemed likely.

But, thanks to those many blessings, here is the Annual as usual, well on time barring any last-minute hitch. I have a very, very great deal for which to be thankful.

Among my many blessings are our contributors who have given of their very best this year as always; among my many blessings I find the wonderful dedicated workers at the York Duplicating Services who have been expertly printing the Digest and its Annual for about 30 years; and, very much, among my blessings, is each one of my readers, whose loyalty and love have done so much to sustain me down the years. Thank you, all and every one.

I wish you a very joyful and blessed Christmastide. Here's all the best for Christmas, and for the New Year, too; may old friends gather round you, and all your dreams come true.

God bless you all.

Your sincere friend,

Eric Fayne

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C O N T E N T S

Page	1 - Foreword		
Page	2 - Contents		
Page 3 -	9 - The Other Side of Hamilton	...	H. Truscott
Page 10 -	11 - The Birth of The Magnet	...	John Wernham
Page 12 -	13 - The Curious Case of the Once or Twicers	...	Josie Packman
Page 14 -	23 - Do You Believe in Fairies?	...	Mary Cadogen
Page 24 -	25 - A Corner in Union Jacks	...	John Bridgwater
Page 26 -	35 - End of Term Report	...	Les Rowley
Page 36 -	38 - Reginald Pitt - Abdullah	...	R. J. Godsave
Page 39 -	40 - Magnets As An Investment	...	Ian Whitmore
Page 41 -	45 - The Cast	...	Nic Gayle
Page 46 -	47 - Plummer in Pluck	...	Cyril Rowe
Page 48 -	55 - Cliff House/Cliff House/Cliff House - and Morcove		Tommy Keen
Page 56 -	62 - The Sword	...	W. T. Thurbon
Page 63 -	68 - The Rise & Fall of the Terrible Three	...	Roger Jenkins
Page 69 -	70 - Mustard Smith - Hot Stuff!	...	J. R. Swan
Page 71 -	83 - The Sexton Blake Work of Anthony Parsons		Geoffrey Wilde
Page 84 -	91 - Recollections And Reflections	...	Jack Overhill
Page 92 -	94 - The Time Yesteryear Stood Still	...	Alf Hanson
Page 95 -	98 - Memories Were Made of These	...	James W. Cook
Page 99 -	100 - Girl's Own Paper Centenary	...	Mary Cadogan
Page 101 -	118 - The Mischief-Maker	...	Eric Fayne
Page 119 -	125 - The Mystery of the Yuletide Mystery	...	R. Hibbert
Page 125	- The O.B.B. Alphabet	...	G. W. Mason
Page 127 -	129 - Christmas 1939	...	E. G. Hammond
Page 129 -	130 - Early D. C. Thomson Girls' Papers	...	W. O. G. Lofts

The other Side of Hamilton

by H. TRUSCOTT

There are various worlds of school, for lovers of fiction, and undoubtedly the most loved - by us, that is, all the adult children that make up the OBBC (although there are many more such children who do not belong officially to our select band) are the fairy tales by Edwy Searles Brooks. The worlds of Greyfriars, Rookwood, St. Jim's and St. Frank's are, of course, the highest heaven, partly by virtue of their writers' creative ability, partly because they are not real. The real - that is, the mortal - are, at best, fourth or fifth heaven, because they are real: fact turned into fiction. The truly heavenly are reality as it can never be in this world. The real is as it always is in this world, lit, at its best, by a gleam or two of the heavenly, if it is only heavenly madness.

In a totally different sphere, the Tom and Jerry film cartoons share the heavenly unreality of the world of Hamilton. I have no sympathy with those who complain of the violence in these cartoons, or in the world of Greyfriars and Hamilton's other schools. There is no violence in either; all is as the cooing dove. When a golf ball goes through Tom's teeth, so that the pieces gradually drop from his mouth, no-one need have any qualms, for in the next shot he will have all his teeth again, miraculously restored. Every hair may be blasted from his body, but a moment later his coat will be whole again. Similarly, Bunter may awake the echoes with his yells as he is (justly) booted or given six, but a while later the effect will have worn off and he will be eagerly asking for it again. As it was in 1908, so it will be for ever. If the modern pornographic erosion of language had not robbed certain perfectly good English words of their rightful meaning I would say that Harry Wharton, Tom Merry, Jimmy Silver, Bunter, Trimble, Cardew, etc., are as G. K. Chesterton found Mr. Pickwick - they are fairies; they are not within the jurisdiction of time. As Laurence Binyon wrote in another connection, "Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn".

But Chesterton, in his book on Dickens, also commented that Harold Skimpole in Bleak House was in the dark underside of Mr. Micawber in David Copperfield; and there is another side to Hamilton. In the real life (mortal, that is) school story, pains are real. They are, for this, these stories, so much below what I have called the highest heaven; but they are written for our correction and should be noted and appreciated. Many adult novelists have given their attention to school life, sometimes as part of a book with a larger canvas, sometimes devoting a complete novel to it. No-one will need reminding of Rudyard Kipling's Stalky and Co., for instance; and in the first outstanding novelist of school life, Talbot Baines Reed, we have the curious case of a man who thought of himself as a writer of adult novels who, occasionally, wrote a school story. Posterity has reversed this, and sees him either entirely as a writer of school stories, living for ever at St. Dominic's, or, at most, as a school story writer who sometimes took a holiday in the adult world.

One adult novelist who took occasional dips into school life to some purpose

was Hugh Walpole. I have called him an adult novelist, and in the themes he generally used this is true; and yet, in a sense, a great deal of what he wrote was as from a child's mind. Those who know his work at all will almost certainly think first of the great series of novels about the Herries family. The first of these to be written was Rogue Herries, and although the Rogue, Francis, is in many ways the principal character, a good deal of the story is seen through the eyes of his young son, David, and the book begins with a David's-eye view of the things and people of his life, as he lies in bed, a remarkable exploration of a child's mind. This kind of child's-eye viewing was a feature of Walpole's work throughout his career, and there is little doubt that much of it was reflected from the thoughts and feelings of his own childhood, as he retained them in later life; and he forgot very little.

Now, as with many novelists who have displayed a strong spiritual sense, Walpole showed a potent awareness of evil; and even when he is dealing with adult characters, often one senses that they are seeing and reacting to events with a child's vision and feeling - that their vision is coloured and, at times, enlarged, exactly as a child's fears present themselves to his mind. An instance of this was, in fact, one of Walpole's earliest successes. This is Maradick at Forty, which appeared in 1910, and concerns a holiday spent by Maradick and his family at the Cornish coastal town of Treliss. Maradick becomes involved with a specific figure of evil, Andreas Morelli - at least, Maradick sees him as evil. In 1925 Walpole wrote Portrait of a Man with Red Hair (which, as a play, gave Charles Laughton one of his first outstanding stage parts); again, a holidaymaker, this time a young American, Harkness, goes to Treliss, actually at the suggestion of Maradick, and again there is an involvement with a figure of evil, Crispin, the man with red hair. Around and as a result of each of these characters Maradick, in the first instance, Harkness, in the second, see events growing which do not initially concern them but into which each is drawn, or allows himself to be drawn. In each case the innocent centre feels (and ultimately wonders if it really were so) that he has been engaged in a battle with the Devil. But, and this is the point, in each novel there is much in the way Walpole presents, first, Maradick's, then Harkness', mind to indicate that although ostensibly each is a man, what is going on is actually seen as in a child's mind - it is a child's nightmare; the suspicion is strong, in other words, that both Maradick, in middle-age, and the young Harkness are, in fact, each a child - for the duration of these episodes, at least - and that it is as a child that they receive the impress of events upon their mind.

The particular point here is that, on two occasions, Walpole did write a novel of school life. The first was an outstanding success, and it certainly has a panache he did not again capture to the same extent for some time. It appeared in 1911, and is the story of two masters at a public school: Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill. The second was Jeremy at Crale, the third of a trilogy about the growth of a boy from the age of eight to early manhood. It is on the first of these that I want to concentrate. Concerning the genesis of Mr. Perrin, Walpole's own words, in the introduction he wrote for the Everyman edition, are revealing, particularly as to the suddenness with which a creative artist can see an idea whole: "I was walking one afternoon towards Sloane Square ... I was in the very middle of King's Rd. when I suddenly saw Mr. Perrin staring at me. By the time that I reached the Court

Theatre, a brief five minutes, the whole of the story was outlined in my mind. It sprang into reality from the Umbrella incident, which had actually happened ... While the young, buoyant Mr. Traill was what I would have liked to be, the tortured, half-maddened Mr. Perrin was what I thought I was. As a matter of fact, of course, I was neither".

The origin of the book goes back, not to Walpole's childhood, or, rather, to that only in part, but more to a period of about a year he spent as a master at Epsom College - the scene of the Umbrella incident, as he calls it. So a good deal of what appears in the book, however fictionalised, is the result of an acute observation; in fact, Robert Ross praised it for this quality: "The whole character of Perrin is a masterpiece of observation, invention and imagination". This was only one of many comments of genuine praise and appreciation from such widely separated writers as Henry James and Arnold Bennett. Walpole later called it his "truest book", and there is a sense in which this could be correct - which does not, of course, mean that it is the finest. There are many levels of truth, too, and this novel exists on the level of the physically real fully observed and recorded. Imaginative truth goes deeper than this, and imaginative truth we find in later books by Walpole to a much greater degree.

The book concerns the clash of two masters; it is confined at first to one side, Mr. Perrin's, and arises from imaginings in his own twisted mind, later involving a self-defence mechanism from the younger Mr. Traill. We all know the kind of acerbity that can arise in clashes between two of Hamilton's masters: Quelch and Prout, Prout and Hacker, Hacker and Quelch, Ratcliffe and Railton - and have no doubt derived a lot of enjoyment from them. They are handled with amazing character insight; those of us who have spent a life teaching know, too, the very real accumulative tensions of the Staff Room, as the year wears on. Imagine these carried, on one side at least, to a murderous reality, and you have Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill.

Mr. Perrin is, to a considerable extent, Mr. Prout taken to an extreme at which the pompous self-importance of the Greyfriars master ceases to be funny and becomes arrogance, suspicion, viciousness and tragedy, goaded on by the nervous headaches which plague Perrin's life. Now, it is easy for one gifted with a creative imagination to devise exactly the types he needs to bring about the scene which fits what he wishes to put over; but I do not think that this is precisely what Walpole has done. In his introduction he quotes Somerset Maugham as arguing that "it is quite impossible for an artist to put down on paper (if he has any creative power at all) a portrait of someone he knows - the portrait will change in his mind". To which Walpole assents, with this qualification: "but the real trouble lies in the surviving fragments of the actual person. Much is added by the actual creator, but enough remains for the Leigh Hunts, the Savage Landors, the Sidney Webbs, and the others to recognise themselves pretty clearly, or if they do not recognise themselves their friends do the job for them very efficiently. Moi qui parle - I have suffered and I know, and I frankly consider that there has been in my time a great deal too much of this ... I can honestly say that I have never quite recovered in my own spirit from the half-portraits in Mr. Perrin. The facts were very simply that I had been for a year schoolmaster at Epsom College, but I had hated being a schoolmaster and

escaped at the first possible moment. Epsom College is a splendid school with a grand history and has supplied for the world many of its finest doctors. When I was there the masters were undoubtedly too closely crowded in upon one another. But what was more undoubted was that I was entirely unsuited to be a schoolmaster".

Well, there it is; Walpole exonerates Epsom College from any real likeness to the Moffatt's of his story, although he also writes "when I was there the masters were undoubtedly too closely crowded in upon one another". He adds that he received great kindnesses, considering how inefficient he was as a master, and repaid this by putting caricatures of most of these people into his novel. But, he continues, "And yet, at the back of the book there was something real. I know now that, in my immature ignorance, I struck by chance upon an element in modern life which is true of many careers besides schoolmastering". Walpole's preface was written in 1935, but in 1911, when the book appeared, Epsom College was not pleased; it was, in fact, decidedly angry. Now, it is true that the conclusion that the College was pilloried in the novel was partly helped by the knowledge, on the part of the College authorities, that its author had been there for a year. But why so much protestation? Who among the public that read the book would connect Moffatt's with Epsom College? Could it be that, to a certain extent, history repeated itself and we have a slight case of what came to Dickens from the Yorkshire schools after the appearance of Nicholas Nickleby? Cap fit, cap wear, is a good enough maxim, and the College was here putting the cap on itself. The authorities at the College obviously recognised something, even if Walpole, with author's licence, had exaggerated it. But one has met, I have myself, characters, and in the teaching profession, who needed very little pushing to put them over the edge with Mr. Perrin.

On the other hand, no-one, I imagine, would want to lay claim to be the original of the Rev. Moy-Thompson, the Headmaster, who sits, like a spider in his web, devising schemes by which one master would be exposed to and put in the power of another. The motive force which jostles the staff one against another, and affects their wives, all comes originally from this figure, enjoying his games at the expense of those in his employ. Apart from Moy-Thompson, they are too crowded. Birkland, with all his contempt for the rest of the staff, is equally contemptuous of himself. Nonetheless, he tries to save Traill, summing it up in this way:

"Have you ever looked around the common-room and seen the kind of men they are?" "Of course," said Traill; "but," he added modestly, "I'm not observant, you know. I'm not at all a clever kind of chap."

"Well, you would have seen what I'm telling you written in their faces right enough. Mind you - what I'm saying doesn't apply to the first-class public school. That's a different kind of thing altogether. I'm talking about Moffatt's - places that are trying to be what they are not - to do what they can't - to get higher than they can reach. There are thousands of them all over the country - places where the men are underpaid, with no prospects, herded together, all of them hating each other, wanting, perhaps, towards the end of the term, to cut each other's throats. Do you suppose that that is good enough for the boys they teach? ... It's a different thing with the bigger places. There, there is more room; the men don't live so close together; they are paid better; there is a chance of getting a house; there is

the esprit de corps of the school ... But here, my God! ... Get out of it, Traill, you fool! You say, in a year's time. Don't I know that? Do you suppose that I meant to stay here for ever when I came? But one postpones moving. Another term will be better, or you try for a thing, fail, and get discouraged ... and then suddenly you are too old - too old at thirty-three - earning two hundred a year ... too old! and liable to be turned out with a week's notice if the Head doesn't like you - turned out with nothing to go to; and he knows that you are afraid of him and he has games with you! "

Traill is far from convinced - yet; he thinks Birkland is unusually paranoid. Traill is wrong. Young, athletic, noted for his brilliance at Rugby football, he automatically finds himself in charge of football, and this angers senior master Freddie Comber, who has so far organised the game. Comber, too, has been affected by Moffatt's, like the rest of the staff, and has sadly changed, for Mrs. Comber, from the fine young man she married to a twisted, snarling middle-aged man for whom she can do nothing right. Her one consolation is her young friend, Isobel Desart, who periodically stays with the Combers and has seen for herself a good deal of what goes on in the school. She and young Traill are attracted to each other.

Mr. Perrin, alone in the world except for his old mother, who lives a long way from Moffatt's, and to whom he writes every week, is also attracted to Isobel, and has tried more than once to pluck up courage to ask her to marry him; he can never get it out, and she is unaware that he has any special feeling for her, since he seldom speaks to her. He is determined that this new term shall be better, and at first takes to Mr. Traill, the new master - so long as he is deferential and recognises Mr. Traill's superiority. But soon, without realising that he is treading on anyone's corns, Traill has some ideas of his own, and Mr. Perrin begins to revise his opinion. We have seen, at various times, echoes of this situation, kept at comic level, when Mr. Prout finds that a new master he has taken under his wing shows signs of wishing to be independent.

And then comes the Umbrella incident, which, Walpole tells us, actually happened. It is pouring with rain one morning and Traill, taking early school, is faced with a dash of some distance from one building to another; he snatches the first umbrellas he sees, a green one, which happens to be Mr. Perrin's. Naturally, being young and thoughtless, he does not bother to return it to the stand, but leaves it where its usefulness to him ceased. Later, the same morning, at breakfast, Mr. Perrin wants it and cannot find it. He searches everywhere, becoming louder in his requests to know what has happened to it, until at last Traill realises what Perrin is looking for and mentions that he borrowed it. Mr. Perrin at first cannot believe his ears; when it does sink in, the appalling fact that this young upstart, Traill, not content with displaying airs and graces which ill become him, and assuming superiority over his betters and seniors, has actually had the effrontery to borrow his - his, Perrin's - umbrella without leave, he accuses Traill of stealing it, and when Traill brushes aside this accusation contemptuously Perrin hurls himself at Traill and they are fighting, rolling on the floor, knocking the table, bringing crockery down. Clinton, another master, with a particularly sardonic tongue, sits and watches them, deriving entertainment; two matrons and other

members of staff watch from the doorway, horrified - but enjoying it. Naturally, this incident becomes the talking-point, and it divides the school. Most are against Traill, including Comber; this latest event only adds fuel to Comber's anger against Traill - but it also brings to a head his relations with his wife. For years she has given into his bullying ways, and done just as he tells her. Now, she rebels. He forbids her ever to let Traill enter his house, but, more than that, when it is known, as it soon is, that Traill and Isobel are engaged, he forbids his wife ever to have Isobel to stay again. She refuses to agree, and he strikes her. She is hurt, but far more for him than for herself; he is abysmally ashamed of himself. In fact, this ultimately brings about a better relationship between the two.

The announcement of Isobel's engagement to Traill is, for Perrin, the last straw. Not content with taking his umbrella, the young upstart has taken the woman Perrin loved. He manages to convince himself that if it had not been for Traill, Isobel would have married himself, and everything would have magically become marvellous. The desire to kill Traill mounts in Perrin's brain, the feeling that only then will things go right for himself. The killing is attempted, as Traill walks on top of a cliff, but actually turns into Perrin's rescuing Traill and then committing suicide by drowning.

Much is left out of this bald outline, and I have given nothing of the art and sympathy with which Walpole conveys it. The study of Mrs. Comber is superb, instinct with understanding; so, on a different plane, is that of Isobel. And in the midst of it all Walpole has not forgotten to pillory himself. In Perrin's class there is a boy - "the dullest, fattest, and heaviest boy" - to whom the author has given the name Pomfret-Walpole. Pomfret was a family name and appears later in the Herries saga, again attached to a fat, ungainly man.

Since this is mortal school life, the masters, most of them, do have wives, and they, and the school matrons, do help to complicate life in the school. Hamilton wisely kept women off the scene, for the most part; Mrs. Kebble and Mrs. Mible have no active part to play in the Greyfriars stories, Aunt Judy is a visitor and a figure of fun, and, significant, none of the masters have wives, except the Headmasters; and the wives of the latter play no part in the stories. I cannot help feeling that in real, mortal, life younger masters like Mr. Lascelles and Mr. Dalton would be either courting or married, but in this highest heaven, of course, they are not because they cannot be. Strife between the sexes at the serious level of married life would not fit in at all. There is no marrying nor giving in marriage in heaven. (I have often wondered at Hamilton's time-scale with regard to Dr. Locke. Would a man of the venerable years Hamilton accords him have a younger daughter only eight years old?)

Greyfriars (and this applies to other Hamiltonian schools) is not a Moffatt's; it is one of the great public schools, as any Greyfriars boy or master, worth his salt, would tell you. But do we not see and hear signs, at times, of the thinness of the dividing line between heaven and earth? Of the closeness of the masters to each other? Of their rubbing each other up the wrong way - of their, at times, deliberately pouring acid into the wound? When Mr. Prout buttonholes Wiggins, or Capper, or Quelch, and will not let them go, do not feelings arise in the breast of

each of these which, if not murderous, are the reverse of friendly? Mr. Quelch's long-running History of Greyfriars: is this not a visible sign of a hidden feeling on Mr. Quelch's part that he has let time pass him by, his ambitions as a writer unrealised? Or is he unaware that he is fixed for all eternity? And is Prout, when, with first one black eye, then a swollen nose, and finally a second black eye, all innocently collected, he becomes more and more savage and goaded, especially as he realises his explanations are not believed? And Cappter, when he slips into Prout's study, ostensibly to commiserate with the Fifth Form master about Widgers, but actually to gloat?

The world of Hamilton has been a heaven for me since I first encountered it at the age of eight; but, having re-read Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill recently for the twelfth time, I wonder how much more Hamilton knew about the private lives of his masters than he ever told us. Prout's exploits in the Rockies, yes; but how did he come to be there, and how did he become a schoolmaster? Monsieur Charpentier's poor family, which he supports - we know this much of him; but what else, apart from his perennial failure to keep order, and his generally tender heart? Even Vernon-Smith's famous feud with Mossoo does not tell us more about the French master than we already know, although it tells us quite a bit more about Vernon-Smith. Apart from his nephew, what of Hacker? Apart from his niece and nephew, what of Quelch? Except for the occasions when Quelch turns up at Wharton Lodge, what do they do, these masters, in their holidays? Where do they go? We really, after so many years of these stories, know no more about the private lives of these men than I knew about the private lives of the teachers who taught me when I was at school.

It had, of course, to be a closed circuit. These characters were fixed in an endless round of which, presumably, they were ignorant; fixed, for our delight, in an eternity which is always new. They gave up a lot for us - and so, of course, did the boys. But it was, possibly, that sacrifice for our pleasure that saved them from what happened to Mr. Traill, Mr. Comber, Mr. Birkland and the rest; and provided Hamilton with a problem he surmounted magnificently, controlling the forces that lay beneath the surface - sizzling and bubbling just below the lid he kept so firmly jammed on for over thirty years.

* * * * *

The School Friend - copies dated 1925, 1926, 1927, eagerly sought after.

MR. NORMAN LINFORD, 18 THE GLADE, STREETLY

NR. SUTTON COLDFIELD, WEST MIDLANDS

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An absolutely topping Christmas to you all, especially to our revered Skipper, dear Darrell, Norman Shaw, Jim Cook, John Kirkham, John Hunter and Mum and Dad Slowley. Can anyone help with these desperately wanted o.s. Lees? 130, 222, 224, 225, 227, 251, 264, 289, 292, 293, 347, 490, 492, 536. Will pay ridiculous prices!

NIC & JAYNE GAYLE, 4 QUEEN ST., BUDLEIGH SALTERTON, DEVON.

THE BIRTH of the MAGNET

by JOHN WERNHAM

The passing of seventy years, and two world wars, has left surprisingly little imprint on this well-known corner in the City of London. But how different the traffic noises must have been; and no fumes, only the sweat from the horses. The pace of movement too, at the top speed of ten miles an hour was gentle enough to suit the mood of any tired city worker. Horses everywhere, and not a traffic light to be seen.

On the reverse side we find a splendid example of copper-plate calligraphy, even to the final wave, beautifully rhythmic and adorned with tiny stars at every curve. It is 12.15 a.m. on the 10th of February, 1908. No doubt it arrived at the coast the very next day (all for a ha'penny) and on the 15th the Magnet was born.

If we now take a closer look at Cheapside a couple of years later, we find that the traffic has thickened somewhat and the ominous rumble of the motorbus is hard on the heels of the horse-drawn vehicle. The times were still tranquil, however, the Empire, the Navy, the Pound were still intact and the Magnet, now a lusty infant, was busy collecting together the cast with which to populate the epics of the future.

We are reminded, also that Mellins is here. Mellins Baby Food was much in vogue at that time and there is no evidence that it was ever used in the Bunter home but, if it was, we may be sure that the newly christened W. G. had more than his share. Perhaps it is a pity that Bunter's life story begins at the age of fifteen. Like his creator, whose life-story began at the age of eighteen, the early years were never recorded and we shall never know what sort of antics went on in the Bunter nursery.

This is the world that Frank



Richards knew, lived in and, really, stayed in. If he emerged at all into the modern world it was with the greatest possible reluctance. The times were propitious, and the stars favourable for the development of the school-story paper and the establishment of Greyfriars as the greatest of these. The Magnet changed but little in style as the years went by which, perhaps, is essential, if immortality is to be attained. The old fashioned gallantry, the top hats, the sturdy maxims, the everlasting good humour, garnished, of course, with hard knocks and plenty of pluck; these are the ingredients of longevity and a kind of invincible permanence that yields nothing to time, change or fashion.



POST CARD.



8/2/08.
I arrived up here quite safely last Tuesday, but I am jolly sorry to get back here again. I suppose all your lessons are in full swing, aren't they? Have you or Bobby heard a blowthistle from lately. I suppose you went to Basingstoke on Wednesday and also today, did you kill on either days. Give my love to little Bobby. I don't expect you have seen much of him yet. I hope to see him soon. How are you? West Over. Hugh.

Miss R. Wilson,
Morden House,
Littlestone-on-Sea
Kent

The Curious Case of the Once or Twicers

by JOSIE PACKMAN

Yes, I know what some of my readers will say - what a silly title - what on earth does it mean. Let me explain. Up to the end of 1918 the Union Jack authors remained fairly constant. Very rarely did one notice an unknown name creep in. A look at the Sexton Blake catalogue will show the regular appearance of tales by familiar authors. However, in the years from 1919 to the end of the Union Jack run in 1933 a number of new writers appeared on the scene, perhaps writing only one story and then disappearing into limbo. A small number became "twicers", i.e. wrote two stories and then were never heard of again, but when that splendid book "The Men Behind Boys Fiction" by Messrs. Lofts and Adley was published it was discovered that many well-known authors, not only of boys' fiction, had written Sexton Blake tales under assumed names. It almost seemed as if they were ashamed to be associated with the Union Jack but had no such thoughts about writing under their real names for the so-called "posh" papers like the Captain and Boys' Own Paper. Some authors also wrote once or twice under different names. These included Cedric Wolfe who only wrote one tale under that name for the Union Jack but wrote many for the Sexton Blake Library under his real name of E. W. Alais. A curious case if ever there was one. He was also the creator of the brother and sister detectives Kit and Cora who appeared in various other papers.

R. H. Poole was another author who wrote under his other name of Michael Poole. Richard Goynne was another writer whose contribution to the Union Jack was a mere couple of stories both of which were very good - out of the ordinary - which makes one wonder why he did not follow them up. Very curious, but no doubt editorial policy as he was also writing for the new paper The Thriller, but then so were some of our other well-known authors.

William Shute wrote two very good tales for the Union Jack but his third and last one was that disastrous one in which he killed off George Marsden Plummer with a death ray. Why Shute should have had such a story published when Plummer was still appearing live in the Sexton Blake Library at the same time is anyone's guess. Teed was writing some of his best Plummer tales at that time.

The next "oncer" on our list is D. Thomas, who wrote a very brilliant tale called "The Black Spider" which could very well have been used in a series of tales about the main character. Another "oncer" was Anthony Baron who contributed a very good yarn called "The Secret of the Dutch Garden" and then disappeared from the pages of the Union Jack. Our old friend, J. N. Pentelow of school story fame, wrote one story about an ingenious method of projecting images of ghosts. I should imagine that must have been the first of its type and much used by more modern authors and especially film and T.V. plots. Nothing new under the sun eh?

Norman Wood-Smith, one-time assistant editor of the Magnet, wrote two stories for the Union Jack under his own name, plus a third one as Norman Taylor during the "gangster period" of the Union Jack. In my opinion almost unreadable.

Our next new author was Dr. W. H. Jago who only wrote one tale. This was a very interesting tale called "The Scarab of Ament Ra" and introduced a Dr. Gorlax Ribart, Hypnotist of whom I should like to have heard more. The next author - F. W. Young - was a oncer who wrote an extremely readable tale called "The Scarecrow Clue". T. Stenner was a "twicer" both stories having a horse-racing background. Another oncer was W. Tremellin who wrote a rather poor story. A case where "once was enough".

Francis Warwick wrote one story for the Union Jack under that name, but wrote many tales for the Sexton Blake Library as Warwick Jardine, Donald Stuart only wrote three tales for the Union Jack as did David MacLure, so I suppose one could hardly call them once or twicers. W. J. Elliott wrote one Christmas story for the Union Jack as a stand in for Gwyn Evans who was indisposed at the time. It was a good yarn which could very well have been followed by more. D. W. Pile wrote two Union Jack yarns under his own name and two under his pen-name of Stawford Webber. What curious pen-names some of these authors invented for themselves.

A. Sapt wrote one tale, using the characters of Sir Richard Losely, etc., a very poor effort.

Our last "oncer" was A. J. Palk who wrote "The Call of the Dragon" a good story, but as it appeared almost at the end of the Union Jack run no more was heard from him.

To answer the question "Why the curious case of the title" well, on the whole all these writers were good authors and could very well have continued to contribute to the Union Jack saga which could possibly have eliminated the need for reprints and re-writes, as well as some of those ghastly gangster yarns which very few readers appeared to like.

I append a list of all these stories quoted above just in case anyone is interested enough to want to read them and also pass an opinion on them. All are available from the Sexton Blake Lending Library.

<u>AUTHORS</u>	<u>UNION JACK NUMBER</u>
C. Wolfe	832
R. H. Poole	840 and 900
M. Poole	845
A. Sapt	988
R. Goyne	1034 and 1058
Dr. Jago	1055
W. Shute	1068, 1069 and 1093
D. Thomas	1095
A. Baron	1107
J. N. Pentelow	1108
N. Wood-smith	1124 and 1253
F. W. Young	1146
T. Stenner	1223 and 1232
W. Tremellin	1351
F. Warwick	1403
D. MacLure	1408 and 1515
D. Stuart	1422, 1488 and 1523
W. J. Elliott	1470
Stawford Webber	1502
D. W. Pile	1514
A. J. Palk	1525

Do you believe in Fairies?

by MARY CADOGAN

"No mortal, or fairy either, can tell where Fairyland begins and where it ends."

(From George Macdonald's 'Dealings with the Fairies')
 writer for the Sexton Bible Library as W. Young - was a once where "once was enough"

My own interest in fairies and witches and giants and goblins goes back, I suppose, to the day when I played the Fairy Queen in a school play. (I was only five, and the opening line which I had to speak was 'The day after tomorrow it will be Christmas Day ...' I wonder if any C.D. reader can identify the play from this, as I'd love to read it again!) All I had to do was to glitter, and to speak my part with as much magical feeling as possible. My mother had, for many days before the performance, struggled nobly with more material things as she transformed pink sateen, white crepe paper, wire and tinsel into a 'gossamer' dress, a wand and wings for me. We were hard-up and she managed magnificently, also splashing out on the final and for me never-to-be-forgotten luxury of silver shoes.

I was invested with magic - in my own eyes at least - and projecting the same kind of enchantment as the Lyceum theatre pantomime queens whom I had admired. Growing up in the 1930's we were of course beset by fairies on all sides: they fluttered into our imaginations out of our picture books and comics, which we read at home. At school too we read fairy stories and poems, which we acted, and illustrated and



Mabel sees two lovely fairies.

[See page 1.

From MABEL AND THE GLASS SLIPPER (Young Folk's Tales)

became thoroughly involved in. In fact the first thing I ever wrote for publication was a fairy story, as my mother reminded me a year or two ago when she sent me an ancient and battered copy of it. This story won the Junior Prize competition in our elementary school magazine (which I think ran to only one issue!) in 1938, and it is signed proudly 'Mary Summersby' - my maiden name - 'Age 10 years'. I still possess the prize that it brought me, which is a beautifully illustrated volume of the stories of King Arthur. My story is short, and to set the mood of this article I am quoting it in full. It was, by the way, written long before I had ever read the tale of The Sorcerer's Apprentice, with which it seems to have distinct similarities:

Once upon a time there lived in Fairyland an old witch. She had a bent back and was very ugly. Lots of pixies said that she had lived hundreds of years, but I do not think that is true. She kept a shop full of all the things that she used, but it was not often that other fairy-folk wanted them.

One day a little pixie named Pompy came into the old shop. "Well", croaked the witch, "what do you want?" "Gerga-ga", stammered the little pixie, for when he saw the witch's beady eyes, long nose and huge teeth, he felt rather frightened. "I - I wondered if you could give me a job in this shop?" he was able to say at last, "for I'm a good pixie and I have had a very fine education." The witch's thin lips broke into a smile, for really she had some good in her old heart. "Very well", she said, "you can work for me and I will let you have an apron".

Then she gave him a bright yellow apron with silver stripes on it. He tried it round his waist and felt very important. Then the old witch said, "Now I will have a little nap in the back room, and you must go behind the counter and serve the customers."

So saying, she hobbled into the back room with the aid of her stick. After much squealing and squeezing Pompy was at last able to get behind the counter. A few moments later he heard the witch snoring deeply, but all that afternoon no-one entered the shop. This happened every day for a week and Pompy was getting tired. One Monday afternoon he saw the witch put on a blue shawl and wish for a bag of gold. Before you could say, "Fanta panta", one bag had appeared. Then Pompy felt rather angry, because the witch gave him only one grain of gold dust each week for wages. The next day the witch went out and the little pixie made up his mind to find the shawl. He soon found it and put it on and asked for a packet of lump sugar, and as sure as his name was Pompy it appeared. Then he wished for chocolate ice-cream, and all sorts of things, and then he wished that he could eat them all. After that he wished for lemonade, but when he wanted to stop those good things coming he could not. If the witch had not come home he would have been drowned in lemonade. The witch made him clear up the mess, and then she forgave him and let him have the blue shawl.

At this time I was an avid reader of Tiger Tim's Weekly and The Rainbow, comics which adeptly produced touches of magic that were both cosy and exciting for small children. I was fascinated by Tiger Tim's regular 3-picture feature

called the Wonderful Tales of Tinkle-Bell Tree. An appealing character called 'Fairy' was the central inhabitant in a 3-storeyed tree dwelling, with an elf upstairs and a rabbit down below. She was pretty and helpful, but with a sense of fun, and she worked most of her spells simply by leaning out of the tree-trunk hole that was the entrance to her home and touching people or things with her wand. In Rainbow, Marzipan the good-natured black-faced magician used a walking-stick-shaped wand that was striped like a humbug rock; it made things bigger or smaller, and he used it to good effect in thousands of happy stories. In some of the annuals he teamed up with the Bruin boys; usually when they were doing something naughty he managed to convince them of the error of their ways so that at the end of the story they were back in Mrs. Bruin's good books once again!

Fairy magic was well established in comics, of course, long before I was old enough to begin to enjoy it. A very early nursery comic called Playtime (1919 to 1929) included stories and picture strips about pixies, gnomes and fairies, as well as dolls and pet animals of many kinds. (Although its simple and colourful pictures must have been designed for the tiny tot readership, it also catered for older children, running regular school serials by Henry St. John Cooper, like The Coward of the School (1919) and Jimmy's Luck (1920) which was illustrated by Leonard Shields, who produced some nice-looking schoolboys in Etons who strongly resembled Harry Wharton & Co.) There were also some girls' school tales - but cosy magic was more usually the keynote of the stories, many of which were illustrated by Harry Rountree, who of course had a particular flair for drawing story-book animals.

The Amalgamated Press brought out another nursery comic with high quality art work in 1919; this was The Sunday Fairy (later known as The Children's Fairy) and one of its distinguished illustrators was Helen Jacobs, who drew for many schoolroom books in the 1920's and 30's, as well as for the lighter ones which we enjoyed at home. This comic had a strongly religious flavour which was modified when the editors realized that its appeal would have to be broadened if it was to survive. (It lasted only to 1921, when it literally and figuratively dissolved into Bubbles.)

The fairy tradition continues in some of today's comics for younger children. These still have dolls that come to life, or classic fairy-tale characters like Princess Marigold and Wizard Weezle, who started in the 1960's in Treasure (a learning-for-little-folks type of paper) and crop up regularly in I.P.C.'s current annuals and comics. As well as these good, traditional characters there are some intriguing updatings in comics like Bunty, Debbie, Mandy, Judy, etc., which are designed for girls from about 9 to 13 years old. Some of the heroines in these have magical powers which are of the bionic rather than the enchanting variety; they are girls with super strength, or incredible athletic prowess. Others find themselves involved in dramatic shifts of time and space, as well as moments of apprehension and horror, through the agency of seemingly humdrum, but actually magnetised, objects like pens, shells, rings or bottles. These, of course are all picture strips, as today's comics for this age group do not include stories as we used to know them. There is also a kind of very rough magic in today's boys' papers, but it too is of the science-fiction type; the simple spells of Playtime or The Rainbow are too tame for the children of the 1970's, except when they are extremely young.

Distinct from the comic is the children's magazine. Little Folks from its beginnings in 1871 did not neglect the fairies, who appeared in stories for various age groups. I particularly like The Girl Who Found The Fairies (1919), which is described as 'A Midsummer School Story by Ethel Talbot'. This author is best-known for the 'bracing and business-like' atmosphere that she usually creates in school adventures, but The Girl Who Found the Fairies shows her skill as a story teller in brilliantly combining the very different themes of school life and woodland magic. Olwen - Welsh and full of Celtic fancies - is desperately worried about Jean the Head Girl, who is seriously ill. On Midsummer's Eve Olwen disappears, and is later found outside in the grounds fast asleep. She claims that at midnight she was taken there by the fairies - and at the same hour Jean apparently took a miraculous

KING PIPPIN AMONG THE GIANTS.



King Pippin awakes and sees Queen Titania standing before him.

KING PIPPIN IN MAGICAL SITUATIONS (from 'YOUNG FOLK'S TALES')

turn for the better. One of Olwen's form-mates goes to investigate and sure enough:-

Down by the pond that morning she found Olwen's hair ribbon, all covered with dew; it must have dropped off as they lifted her up when they found her lying there, and - it was lying in the middle of a green fairy ring!

W. T. Stead started to publish his penny (later two-penny) Books For the Bairns and The Bairns' Magazine in 1896. These were 70-pages long (reduced to 50 during the Great War) and the pages measured about $4\frac{1}{2}$ by $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches. They included several black and white line drawings, and were almost certainly the model for other small fairy-story booklets which were to follow. Although by today's standards some of the stories in Books For the Bairns are wordy and heavy-going, they must have been extremely popular in their time. For 1d. they provided a jolly good read of re-tellings of classic fairy-tales, or original stories, magical plays and poems, etc. The pink paper covers, with simple line-drawings, were slightly austere, although compared with some of the larger and more elaborate children's magazines of the period they had a certain lightness and freshness.

During the Edwardian era, James Henderson's Young Folks Tales produced a wealth of lively fairy-stories. It was another small format paper; there were three separate books each month, and they cost one penny for 50 or so pages. Each title-page carried the line, 'Simply Told, with Pretty Pictures' - an extremely apt description of this little paper. There was humour as well as magic in the pictures and stories; authors' and artists', names were not always given, although the later adventures of the magazine's most famous hero, Prince Pippin, are by-lined 'A. E. Bull'. Prince Pippin had a career full of the most dashing exploits into areas of enchantment and chivalry. In 1911 he is still a Prince, but by 1913 he has become King Pippin; always, however, he is known as 'our hero', and hero he certainly is, in the knight-crusader tradition. Travelling on a Fairy Hawk, equipped with a Mystic Mirror which keeps him informed about what his enemies are doing, and a Coat of Darkness that conveniently makes him invisible when necessary, Pippin rescues Princesses from monsters and ogres, and breaks evil spells all over the known and the unknown world. A random list of titles indicates the scope of his activities: Prince Pippin and the Ruby of Enchantment; Prince Pippin and the Enchanted Sword; King Pippin Among the Giants; King Pippin and the Wizard's Treasure; King Pippin in the Land of Nowhere, etc.

Although the stories are for rather young people, the mystical overtones convey a satisfying seriousness. As well as reminding us of the Arthurian legends, Pippin's symbolic journeys and struggles also hark back to the aspirational atmosphere of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, especially when 'our gallant young hero' (who rather surprisingly is mildly named Timothy) destroys the Band of Double-Headed Giants in one characteristic adventure.

The other great character in Young Folk's Tales is a golden-haired little girl called Mabel, who has many fairy friends. As well as appearing in original stories she is sometimes slotted into the traditional fairy-tales playing a key rôle in them. In Mabel and the Glass Slipper, for example, she is forced by the Ugly Sisters to perform some of Cinderella's duties. Typical titles of the Mabel stories are Mabel in the Magic Cave, Mabel in Tweedle-Land, Mabel in Upside-Down Land, etc.

The first series of Tales for Little People, from the Aldine Publishing Co. arrived in the Edwardian period. Each booklet was one penny, and about 70 pages in length. It usually comprised several short stories. The covers truthfully proclaimed 'Pretty Pictures, Large Type', and the publishers stated that Tales for Little People had the 'Largest Sale of any Fairy Book in the World'. It was certainly an extremely attractive publication, having good stories and plenty of black and white line illustrations. The magical adventures were not quite so dangerous and dramatic as those of Prince Pippin in Young Folk's Tales and a warmer note was being introduced into the enchanted worlds. Typical stories titles are The Magic Melons, Winsome and the Wishing Stone, The Sea Maiden and Her Dress, etc.

A later series of Tales for Little People came out in the 1920's. The page size was the same, but the books had full colour covers, which were most appealing. The line drawings that punctuated the texts were lively, plentiful and attractive. Many issues were illustrated by Savile Lumley, whom we associate with the Rookwood stories that appeared in some of the 1930's Holiday Annuals. He was an excellent artist, and it is good to see examples of his work in colour, and black and white, in the realm of the fairy story. He was probably at his best in this publication when called upon to produce drawings of historical scenes, especially with the adventures of Poppy and Peter, by R. J. Finch. This pair is frequently carried back in time by a Phoenix, and, perhaps even more important, he 'always brings them safely home again'. Savile Lumley illustrates their trips back to Cavalier days, to the Great Fire of London, to Ancient Persia, etc. Another boy-and-girl duo, John and John, in stories by P. Mortimer-Evans, nips off on a Magic Beetle all over the world, from the tropics to the polar regions, and Savile Lumley demonstrated his versatility and talent in illustrating these stories too.

The leading characters in Tales for Little People nearly always came in pairs - Douglas and Daphne, and Peggy and Paddy are further examples. Obviously the publishers must have felt that these boy-and-girl partnerships would pull in a very wide range of readers. Florence Hardy was another regular illustrator of the series, and in many ways she was better equipped than Savile Lumley to create the really pretty, fairy-and-forest-magic type of picture. There were stories about The Witch of Bluebell Wood, Pinky and Bobitt, who were frisky squirrels, The Dandelion Clock, Little Dolly One Leg, Tuffy the Tree Elf, and Billie Bouncer, who was a Humpty-Dumpty-like character.

Enid Blyton's stories began to take over the world of the small page fairy books during the late 1920's when George Newnes produced Sunny Stories which was edited, and largely written, by Enid Blyton. This book managed to keep its price at twopence then, and throughout the war, although somewhere in the 1950's it went up to 4½d. Its red, blue and white covers heralded something new and special for many children. Though much maligned, there is no doubt that Enid Blyton managed to open new worlds of excitement and interest for thousands of children who indeed often learned to read so that they could get the most out of her stories, and not have to rely on overworked Mums to read these aloud. Sunny Stories, illustrated by different artists, most of whom were extremely skilled, survived for well over thirty years. Enid Blyton gave up the editorship in the early 1950's, when Marion

MARZIPAN THE MAGICIAN WITH THE BRUIN BOYS

(From 'THE RAINBOW')



"You've made me smaller, Tim!" Jumbo wailed. "Just look at my suit!"



"Oh! I am proud of you, boys!" exclaimed Mrs. Bruin.

Crawford ('Crawfie'), who had been governess to Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret, was appointed. The celebrated children's author Malcolm Saville edited it later on in the 1950's, and though he kept in plenty of fairy adventures, he also introduced more of the country holiday type of story that he himself writes so well.

Sunny Stories of the 1930's and 40's had traditional tales with an Enid Blyton slant, like The Boastful Prince, The Enchanted Wood, etc. There were, of course, snowmen and scarecrows, teddy-bears and golliwogs that came to mischievous life; there were also lots of 'funny little', 'naughty little', 'silly little' and 'cheeky little' chimps, hedgehogs, saucepan-men, pixies and children. Sandwiched between these were Enid Blyton's adventure sagas about The Famous Five (though not of course the chums of the Greyfriars Remove), and her school stories. One has only to flip through a year or two of Sunny Stories to be amazed at her output and versatility. By the late 1950's she was editing Enid Blyton's Magazine, firmly described as 'The Only Magazine I write'. The mixture was almost as it was before in Sunny Stories, except that Noddy was now on the scene, and there was rather less fairy enchantment; the emphasis was more on earthy gones and goblins, and stories for slightly older children.

Sunny Stories, continuing into the 1960's without Enid Blyton, remained vivid and well tailored to the needs of young children. By then it had been slightly updated, with fairy characters like Tina through the T.V. set, but there were still lots of straightforward nursery rhymes, and stories and pictures, like those relating the adventures of Poppet the Jolly Pixie. It is a little startling now to see one of its regular features at this time, which was 'a picture-story about jonny and jaen' written in 'the ordinary and the initial teaching alphabet'. One column is in strange and almost unreadable "phonetics" but fortunately by its side the story is also told in the traditional type of English that was probably the only language which parents could understand! It is nice to know, in retrospect, that 'ordinary English' is still with us and that this particular innovation in the teaching of reading seems to have died the death it deserved.

The last small fairy story paper that I have discovered is Modern Fairy Tales, which appeared in the 1940's. It was a very slim, wartime affair, at 2d. a copy, and all the stories seem to have been written by Bernard Buley (who used to be associated with the Amalgamated Press papers). These are very readable, and often funny. There is an oriental wizard called Hassan Ali who materializes every-time Betty and Bobby Carefree rub a magic ring; he grants their wishes, but sometimes his magic goes slightly awry. He is, despite his turban, flowing silken trousers, red Turkish slippers and the swirling smoke that surrounds him, a rather modern figure; in one story he becomes The Wizard Detective, capturing a gang of coining crooks. The other leading character in Modern Fairy Tales is June West, an engaging schoolgirl in the broad-brimmed black velour hat, scarf, gymslip, etc. that were popular in the 1930's and early 40's; she had all sorts of skirmishes with hobgoblins, dragons, dinosaurs and dodos.

Of course, when we were children we enjoyed basic stories of this nature. The magic of fairy-tales, however, can remain with us through adult life, and offer an escape from the materialism that often surrounds us. Their value is surely in

stretching our imaginative horizons, and as we mature we can read more meaning into the classic fairy stories which, like Shakespeare and the Bible, can be re-interpreted at many different levels to express an individual's spiritual quest, or what we know of the development of man. The stories cover a wide range of experiences, from the friskings of Noddy-like pixies, to the numinous. Rose Fyleman, who wrote many fairy poems, sums up the simpler approach in a 1910 piece:

"Oh dear, oh dear!" said a tiny mole,

"A fairy's fallen into a hole.

It's full of water and shiny things,

And she can't get out 'cos she's hurt her wings."

At the other extreme we have the grandeur and abiding beauty of Shakespeare's fairy scenes in A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Tempest, of course - with all sorts of gradations in between.

One of the most interesting themes in legend and fairy-tale is that of the sleeper who is hidden from mortal eyes - like Brynhilda behind a wall of fire, Merlin sleeping until he has once again a rôle to play, Snow White long dead, but eventually resurrected by the force of love. The Sleeping Beauty with her petrified court is perhaps the most celebrated of the sleepers. She can be seen as part of a nature myth, suggesting the earth's awakening after winter; or as the spiritual seeker dying to one level of life, and awakening on another; as representing the mystery of death and rebirth, or as the sleeping soul submerged by the pressures of materialism. (P. L. Travers, the author of Mary Poppins has written a fascinating study of this story in The Sleeping Beauty, published by Collins.)

There are too the transformations that so often occur in our favourite tales - the frogs who become princes, the birds who change into princesses - and it is tempting to see these as reflections of man's spiritual understanding, and eventual progress into enlightened beings.

All this is perhaps beyond the scope of this article, which is primarily concerned with the children's fairy story. Although I have written about those which we find in the comics and magazines, some readers may like to be reminded of the magic that glows undimmed by time in books by E. Nesbit, stories like Ruskin's The King of the Golden River, and those by George Macdonald published under the title Dealings with the Fairies. (There are so many others, of course, that even to list them would half fill this annual!) We are unlikely to forget the fairies in Kingsley's The Water Babies (the punitive Mrs. Be-Done-By-As-You-Did, and the forgiving Mrs. Do-As-You-Would-Be-Done-By), or in Hans Andersen. Those of us who have read Barrie's Peter Pan always remember Tinkerbell, particularly if we have seen her tiny light nearly extinguished in the play, and responded to Peter's desperate plea 'Do You Believe in Fairies?' - in order to save her life.

The fairy tradition permeates our lives as well as our literature in strange and often only half recognized ways - in beliefs and superstitions, customs, games, skipping rhymes, etc. In literature and popular culture, the old symbols survive, though in new guises. In today's comics there are still cosy fairies inhabiting little

girls' dolls-houses; there are witches, both wicked and golden-hearted; there are boys winning matches because they are wearing magical football boots and girls becoming great dancers because they wear enchanted ballet shoes! In Jackie, a 'trendy' teenage paper, the spells and magic rub shoulders with pop-stars and punk: in a recent picture story a Fairy Hyacinth is proud of her gossamer 'gear' run up from rainbow silk; she is in love with Hobgoblin Hal, and on Midsummer's Eve her spells go as wrong as those of Puck in Shakespeare's 'Dream'. The battle between good and evil goes on, crudely perhaps in some of the sport and war stories, but now and then the magic is allowed to surface. Moving away from the comics to something which has probably in recent times had an even greater influence on children, the film Star Wars is also a symbolic representation of the struggle between good and evil, between knowledge and ignorance. It is conveyed in spectacular space travel sequences, but also in the old symbols - the beautiful princess; the young man given strength and purpose by the magician/prophet; the evil fairies in the shape of the baddies. The robots are modern, of course, and they are, like so many 'immortals' in nursery fairy tales, transmogrified - made cosy and chummy, like the mischievous gnomes and pixies of our childhood fairy stories.

Magical tales, at so many different levels, are an affirmation of our belief that there is more to life than just the material. Whether we accept them literally, or merely symbolically, we can draw great delight from dipping into them now and again. Let us then - whatever our physical age - act on the advice of W. B. Yeats:-

Come away, O, human child!

To the woods and waters wild,

With a fairy hand in hand,

For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

* * * * *

Season's Greetings from Laurie Young to all friends in the hobby circle. Special thanks to Josie Packman and our tireless Editor for help and pleasure given.

WANTED: S.B.L's 1st and 2nd series. Union Jacks, Detective Weeklies. FOR SALE/EXCHANGE: various O.B.B's, Gems, Bunter Books, oddments. S.a.e. for details to -

LAURIE YOUNG, 211 MAY LANE, KING'S HEATH

BIRMINGHAM, B14 4AW. Tel. (021) 444 5208

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Seasonal Greetings to all from Bob Blythe. The St. Frank's Jubilee Companion is still available, containing 13 articles by leading contributors. It's a bargain at £3.50. Also the last few copies of the E. S. Brooks Bibliography. A must for N.L.L. collectors. Price £3.25.

BOB BLYTHE, 47 EVELYN AVENUE

KINGSBURY, LONDON, NW9 0JF.

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A Corner in Union Jacks

by JOHN BRIDGWATER

In winter when the days are short and wind howls round the eaves
 When rain beats down in torrents and the trees are stripped of leaves,
 I am reminded once again of that dire dreadful day
 When dozing by the fireside I heard a strange voice say,
 "Well, that's the last load Philip², this time we'll do the trick
 No more meddling in our business by that interfering dick"
 I roused myself and fearfully looked out the open door.
 There was nobody to be seen but there upon the floor
 A printed sheet of paper lay, a page, to me well-known,
 With UNION JACK across the top, as if the wind had blown³
 It there. But how? I could not tell. It should have been in place
 Within a volume on my shelf. I looked at my bookcase
 And to my horror saw that all my treasured UNION JACKS
 Had gone. I gave an anguished cry, but then I noticed tracks
 Of wheels with many prints of feet and also, crouching low
 To study them, a man I thought I'd seen before. But no!
 It can't be Sexton Blake! It is! He knelt with lens in hand
 Clad in a faded dressing gown of red. He rose to stand
 Beside my chair. "I'm sorry John" he said. "I had to tear
 That Union Jack to get away or else I should be there."
 He pointed with his pipe towards a distant ruddy glow
 "That fire must be a large one and its purpose I now know
 Tinker with Pedro and Mrs. B.⁴ were close behind but they
 Might have been captured by the fiends and even now they may
 Be in need of my help. Before on level terms I meet
 These crooks I must find out who did this act." He picked the sheet
 Up from the floor. "Ah! Reece's Revenge.⁵ Just as I thought
 Only he would scheme to burn all UNION JACKS in which we fought.
 What irony it is that rusted staples made such holes
 They could slip through to freedom and, once out, reverse our roles
 Round me up in my paper⁷, win the contest finally.⁸
 I really cannot say just how a warning came to me,
 The slightest sound could be enough, the movement of a shoe
 Upon a stair, perhaps and quite suddenly I knew
 The deadly danger I was in. The UNION JACK destroyed
 With me. If I escaped I couldn't complete defeat avoid.
 Of the Criminals Confederation there's now no story left
 In which I can catch up with them. So they imagine. Bereft
 Of memory is Reece. He must be really slipping. He's
 Quite forgotten that old tale in S.B.L. first series⁹
 Number 41. I'll have them yet. Quick hand me that book John."
 I passed the one he pointed to and, laughing, he was gone

Into the pages. The red glow faded: the sky began to clear
 "He's done it!" My excitement turned to shame. I woke to hear
 A well loved voice behind me say "Look at the toast. You let
 It burn to cinders. You can't do a simple job and get
 It right when reading SEXTON BLAKE'S. King Alfred would be proud
 Of you." I looked towards Blake's bust upon the shelf "Now how'd
 He manage in my place?" I wondered. His answer came straight back
 "I saved your UNION JACKS from harm whilst your toast turned black
 By popping out at the right time. Deduction from these clues
 Makes clear the action you should take, a pop-up toaster use."

Notes - for those unacquainted with the Criminal Confederation Epic the following
 allusions are used in the text.

1. The Title. This refers to Union Jack No. 1469, "A Corner in Crooks".
2. Philip. Sir Philip Champion, one of the leaders of the C.C.
3. The wind had blown it there. A reference to Union Jack No. 1480, "Wind Blown Blackmail".
4. Mrs. B. Mrs. Bardell, Blake's Housekeeper.
5. REECES REVENGE - Title of Union Jack No. 1175.
6. Round me up. The final story in the 2nd series of Criminal Confederation tales in Union Jack No. 1196 is called "The Great Round Up".
7. In my paper. Back in the 1920's Union Jack used to carry the slogan "Sexton Blake's Own Paper".
8. Win the contest finally. The final story in the reprinted and abridged Confederation series in Union Jack 1529 is entitled "Sexton Blake Wins".
9. Sexton Blake Library No. 41. This early volume in the first series appeared in 1917 and predates the first Confederation story in the Union Jack in 1918. It is also the only story outside the Union Jack which featured a Confederation character. The title is "The Mysterious Mr. Reece".

The whole concept of the Criminals Confederation was originally Robert Murrays (real name R. M. Graydon), but some of the later stories in the 1920's were written by Gilbert Chester and No. 1196 (the worst of the lot) was by an unknown author. The series of reprints (or rewrites) of the original stories began in Union Jack No. 1469.

* * * * *

Merry Christmas and a contented New Year - STAN PURSLOW and all O.B.'s.
WANTED: No. 18 H. Baker facsimile. Your price.

= = = = =
 Seasonal Greetings to everyone. Would like early S.O.L's (Charles Hamilton
 Schools).

MRS. KEOGH, 78 GREENVALE RD., ELTHAM, LONDON, S.E.9

= = = = =
 Each December we count the cost. Inflation has won and pleasures lost. There's
 still no price to a greeting small. So a Happy Christmas to you all.

JOHN BURSLEM

= = = = =
 Can anyone please help with "Biggles Flies East"?

R. HODGSON, 7 LANCASTER DRIVE, BAWTRY, DONCASTER
SOUTH YORKS., DN10 6PH.

End of term report

Les Rowley examines an unfamiliar ingredient of Christmastime, and wonders whether certain school reports conveyed what really happened in term time

Christmas, with all its thrilling expectancy of carols, presents, turkey and plum pudding; all the tantalising possibility of snow, of holly, and of church bells pealing their message across field and meadow; seemed to be an interminable time arriving when I was a young boy. The interval between the stirring of the rich, dark, mixture into which were popped many a threepenny joey, many a silver charm, and the arrival of the finished product at the festive table, could surely be measured in years rather than the few days the calendar indicated.

Amid all the seemingly breathless speculation as parcels and packages of varying size and tantalising appearance that would arrive as the holiday neared, and attendant upon the delicious smells that came from the kitchen, there was a feeling too, of apprehension.

Somehow this apprehension enhanced all those other emotions. It added spice to the occasion, bringing with it a touch of drama that made the Christmas experience all the more exciting. This apprehension was caused by the bearing home of one's end of term report. What did those sealed envelopes addressed to hopeful parent or wondering guardian contain? Were the contents to be the cause of disappointment or of joy? One would anxiously scan the face of parent or guardian for some expression of pleasure or dismay. There were end of term reports for other seasons, it was true, but none held that sense of

urgency and importance as those one would take home at Christmas.

My own reports were, in fact, fairly predictable, but the apprehension - almost as though one was living dangerously - was there nonetheless. I have often wondered, though, whether this feeling was experienced by the scholars at the other School of my youth and my maturity. That School where the term's events were chronicled so entertainingly in book and story. How were those events reflected in those End of Term Reports?

The large log settled more comfortably in the fireplace, the sudden movement sending a cascade of sparks into the open hearth and an invigorated flame up the ample chimney. The flickering glow reached out to embrace the panelled walls and was reflected a score of times in the diamond panes of the bookcase. Through the windows of the study the grey, leaden, light of the winter's day reached in to fight its battle with some corner recess of time-blackened oak.

Mr. Prout sighed, but it was not a sigh of content! His ample form filled or rather overflowed the padded chair in which he sat, his heavy jowl supported in the palm of his left hand, his pen clasped in his other podgy fist as he gazed at the form on the blotter before him. On that form he had written - in characters as round and as imposing as Prout himself - just three words. Just three words and nothing

more and to the Fifth Form-master it seemed an eternity since he had written them; certainly longer than the twenty minutes since he had inscribed the name of that member of the form, Horace James Coker.

A bead of perspiration started its sluggish journey across Prout's extensive brow; a product of agonised contemplation rather than reaction to the fire's warmth. Prout was considering what to write in Coker's end of term report, and it was one of those ever-increasing occasions when the master of the Fifth felt that he really earned his pay. It was rumoured that when Coker had got his remove to the Fifth Hacker had danced with joy while Prout had danced with rage. That, of course, was an exaggeration for if Prout had danced at all it would have been with despair. Dance or no dance, he was saddled with Coker and had to report on that youth's abilities - or lack of them.

It was not as though Coker had failed to supply material on which to make a report, Prout reflected bitterly. There had been the instance where Coker had punched him in the eye! True, it had happened in the dark and the blow had been intended for some other address. But it had happened. There had also been the matter of the footer that Coker had kicked in the quad and which had landed on Hacker's nose, and the defiance with which Coker thereafter had refused to be caned. Perhaps it would have helped if the fifth-former's record in class had shown sufficient promise to allow mitigation for these heinous crimes. Coker, however, still spelled 'occiput' with an 'x' and a couple of 't's'; still cited 1066 as the date of the Armada; and continued to insist that Elizabeth I was the daughter of Hereward the Wake!

Nor was there any relief to be found in Coker's record in Games! Had Coker been one wit as good at football and cricket as Coker imagined he was, then Prout could have got cracking. But the sole report on Coker's prowess from Lascelles had been a complaint that Coker had practically brained him with the one ball he had been allowed to bowl.

Undoubtedly Prout had just cause and licence to record these things against Coker. Coker's failings were as numerous as the sands on the sea shore - or so it seemed to Prout. Yet the pen in his hand remained suspended, rather like the coffin of the prophet, in mid-air. Even as he hesitated, Prout knew he was lost. Let him dare to be a Daniel and write as events and conscience dictated; let him dare this, and the consequences would be dire! It was not that he was concerned what Coker would think of that catalogue of woe; nor even the effect that it would have upon Coker's parents - they had, after all, begat Coker, so to speak, and on their heads be it! It was not these thoughts that caused another and yet another bead of perspiration to follow the first. It was the thought of the effect that that report would have on Miss Judith Coker that made Prout sweat! He had made the acquaintance of the lady before and the experience had not been a happy one. According to Miss Coker, Prout was honoured among men in that he had her precious Horace in his form and it was as certain as night must follow day that any adverse report about her dear nephew would be challenged with asperity. In previous encounters Prout had finished up feeling as though he had been through a mangle; it was the kind of performance for which he was not prepared to give an encore.

Yet even Prout realised that he could not sit there all day in a state of suspended animation. That report had

got to be written. Surely there was something he could say in Coker's favour; something on which to build? As he cudgelled his brain for some elusive anodyne phrase, putting aside all thoughts of black eyes and damaged colleagues, Prout found the beginning he wanted.

Quickly his pen travelled across the form simply filling in the abysmal statistics, ignoring the comments column against each subject. At the foot of the form, in the space for his general remarks, he paused for one last time. No need to comment on the poor marks that Coker's work had earned in class; after all, they spoke for themselves! Perhaps such discretion was the better part of valour and Prout did not like shirking his duty. He thought again of Miss Coker but, after all, it was not that which prompted him to write:-

"I know of no boy who holds the interests of his form and school to heart more than Coker. Perhaps his sense of values in regard to honesty and loyalty outweigh any more academic consideration ..."

He lifted his pen again, but this time the pause was brief. Prout was Prout, after all, and he had never been wanting in words. Perhaps he would, now that he had made his beginning, be able to include some of his favourites. 'Unprecedented' and 'Unparalleled' came readily to mind.

Further along Masters' corridor, Mr. Quelch reluctantly put the dust cover over his faithful Remington. Much of his 'History of Greyfriars' remained to be written although, if Skinner was to be believed, that labour of love had already embraced

thirty-five volumes. Still, Skinner was not a truthful youth and the estimate must be accepted with the proverbial grain of salt.

Nevertheless, this particular 'History' was a monumental work - a work in which Mr. Quelch tended to forget time and space once his fingers wandered over the noisy keys! Sheet after sheet of neat draft and carefully annotated comments bore witness to his scholarship and industry. In his form, the Remove, it was opinioned safer to rob a lioness of her cubs than to jape with Quelch's MSS. It was an opinion based upon exciting precedent for there had been times - thankfully few - when that manuscript had suffered loss or damage at the hands of misguided youth; such youth being made aware, painfully aware of the error of its ways.

One such case in point involved Harold Skinner who had received something in the way of a record flogging for his misdemeanour. Long after Skinner had managed to sit without wriggling, this piece of villainy had remained in the forefront of the Remove master's mind. Now, having put the 'History' to bed, so to speak, Quelch was going to turn his mind to the writing out the form reports and among those favoured with prior consideration was that which bore the name of Skinner. The Remove master was a just man and realised that once the criminal had paid his debt to society no further punishment should accrue. Skinner's flogging had seemed terribly lenient at the time - at least it had to Quelch, who would have probably favoured something lingering with boiling oil in it! But he had had to be satisfied with that flogging and, in the circumstances, Quelch felt that he was justified in making some reference to the matter in his report. Perhaps

Skinner senior might feel moved to impress on a wayward son the enormity of such an offence. Mr. Quelch pressed on having recorded Skinner's transgression, to the more agreeable task of commending Linley and Penfold; commendations that would make welcome reading in distant Lancashire and nearby Friardale. He found, too, that it was a pleasure to comment favourably on Robert Cherry, and something faintly resembling a smile suffused his crusty visage as he thought of that flaxen haired youth. Cherry had the disconcerting habit of shuffling his feet in the formroom, and perhaps his application to work left something to be desired. Quelch was not a man to cultivate favouritism; of course he wasn't, yet deep inside him Quelch liked the honest, open nature, the ebullient personality, of the owner of the biggest feet in the form!

Any trace of a smile, any feeling of pleasure, vanished like a ghost at cock-crow as he turned his attention to the form relating to William George Bunter. The form master had long since felt that Bunter's father could have invested his son's school fees to better purpose. True, the School would lose a customer as it were, but Quelch thought that it could well withstand the loss and there was no doubt, no doubt at all, that Quelch could stand the loss of Bunter himself. The fat Removite's form-work would have disgraced the inkiest fag in the Second. Every time Quelch had marked Bunter's papers that term he, Quelch, had felt in need of a wash. This may have been due to the traces of toffee and the occasional fragments of aniseed balls with which those papers were not infrequently embellished. Bunter's aptitude - or lack of it - in his written work was only

matched by the obtuseness shown in his oral exercise. The Remove master had not been amused on learning from Bunter that the Scots had been defeated at Flodden by Manchester United, or that Florence Nightingale had married Charles the Second. He had, of course, caned Bunter for these and similar errors, just as he had caned Bunter for lying and pilfering. Fellows who knew, wondered where Quelch packed all the muscle! The probability was that it developed from the practice and exercise that Quelch's right arm was given in showing Bunter the error of his ways. What Bunter's form master had to write in Bunter's report was terse and to the point. Any other parent would have taken the cue and removed the boy from school and set him to work. Not so, Mr. Bunter. He had tried it once and had learned that the School fees were a more worthwhile commitment than having William George working in his office by day and ransacking the larder at home by night.

From Bunter Mr. Quelch found that his next assessment referred to Herbert Vernon-Smith, and the frown on his brow intensified. Vernon-Smith could turn in quite a good paper - if he chose. The boy was astute and intelligent and could work hard - if he chose. There was the nub; it should have been whether Henry Samuel Quelch chose not Smithy. There were other, darker, reasons for the intensification of that frown on the Quelchian brow! Vernon-Smith had been found out of bounds - more than once. Vernon-Smith had been found smoking - more than once. Vernon-Smith had been flogged - more than once. In fact, Vernon-Smith had been expelled - more than once. Perhaps Quelch wished that Smithy had stayed expelled and made life a happier experience for Quelch by

doing so. Yet the boy enjoyed a certain popularity with the rest of the form. There had been good reports on his football and cricket from the Head of Games. Quelch did not, in common parlance, go a packet on games perhaps, but he was a just man and the boy would get his mede of praise in that direction. There was also the matter of Vernon-Smith's friendship with the boy Redwing. Quelch had a lot of time for the sailorman's son, giving graciously of his scant leisure time to enhance the boy's chances in life. Quelch found himself thinking of the friendship between the millionaire's son and the boy from Hawkscliff. The relationship had had its ups and downs, it was not to be denied, but it had endured. That this was due more to Redwing's sterling qualities than anything else Quelch was well aware, yet some smaller degree of credit must attain to Vernon-Smith. Loyalty to a friend less provided for than one's self was a virtue not so evident in an age when greed and selfishness were rife. Probably the Bounder would have been most surprised had he but insight into his form master's reasoning as Quelch abandoned the caustic remarks he had intended about that pupil's waywardness and dwelt, instead, on this more praiseworthy aspect.

The tray at his side was now full with completed reports, only one of which remained to be written. The Remove master had left Harry Wharton to the last so that he could write at greater length and in more detail about the form captain. The office of Head Boy was one on which Quelch probably laid more stress, and regarded with more seriousness than did the present incumbent! Wharton could be relied upon to round up the slackers for games practice just as he could be relied upon

to counsel certain form fellows not to kick over the traces. Mr. Quelch recalled how he had spoken to him about his suspicions that someone in the form was so lost to propriety as to engage in common usury, and how, later, he had come across Fish doubled up in the Remove passage trying to extricate a ledger from the back of his neck. Of course a form master could not approve of such drastic action, could not approve at all, but though he could not approve of it he found some satisfaction in that it had taken place rather than nothing at all!

So far, so good - as it were. Not only did Wharton carry out his duties as Head Boy conscientiously, but his work in form was of a high standard. Not quite up to that of Linley and Penfold, but very good nevertheless. Wharton had undoubted qualities of leadership and could be counted upon to throw himself into both work and play with enthusiasm. Yet, for once, Quelch hesitated. That happy state of affairs had not existed at the beginning of term! And though he didn't want to call it to mind, the memory came back nevertheless.

Due to a misunderstanding Wharton had been suspected of visiting places of ill repute like the "Cross Keys", the "Three Fishers" and the "Bird in Hand". On being questioned he had been indignant and insolent in reply. Quelch could have made allowances for that indignation if he hadn't for the insolence but, at the time, he had been assured of Wharton's guilt when the keeper of the "Bird in Hand" had returned a school cap with Wharton's name written inside. He recalled too, the scene afterward in Dr. Locke's study when Wharton had proved that he had been in the company of Sir Hilton Popper at the time he was supposed to have been at the inn. The

dear old Head had been very diplomatic about it all but Sir Hilton, never at a loss for a biting turn of phrase, had been decidedly unpleasant. Afterwards, passing Wharton in the passage, Quelch had seen - or fancied he had seen - a grin of sardonic triumph on the junior's face. Even now it was not nice to reflect that one had erred in one's judgement; still less nice was it to feel that one had been outwitted by a boy who had forfeited his master's good opinion.

Much else had transpired that had made it seem that Wharton's expulsion was imminent. Certain charges laid at Wharton's door on the evidence of Loder of the Sixth - evidence that Quelch later learned was at best unreliable, at worst malicious trickery. Fortunately, the cooler judgement of the Head had prevailed. Loder had lost his prefectship and, with that loss of authority, had followed the vindication of the Remove captain.

All this was now history. Wharton had managed to control his spirited and headstrong nature; to restrain his temper and, above all, to respond once more to his form master's authority. Quelch felt that the time had now arrived when he could tell Colonel Wharton that his nephew had regained that good opinion that his form master had once had of him.

His pen sped across the paper and a moment later Wharton's end of term report had joined the other in the tray.

Dr. Locke glanced at the Tompion clock on his study mantelpiece. He was expecting his dear friend Quelch on the hour and it now wanted fifteen minutes to the happy time when both men could lay aside the cares of the

day and relax in a man to man discussion on the more obscure passages in the classics! Like lesser members of the school staff he had been engaged on end of term reports - in his case for members of that august body, the Sixth.

With another term under his belt, so to speak, the Headmaster reckoned that he had earned that relaxation. In fact it seemed to him that he had a lot in common with the poet who wrote of "the cares that infest the day, folding their tents like the Arabs, and as silently stealing away."

The past term had been a trying one, and not without its embarrassments. A senior member of the Staff, pacing the hallowed precincts of the School, with a discoloured eye was guaranteed to bring authority into ridicule. He had spoken to Prout about that eye and, whilst he had not exactly curled Prout's hair for him (as was rumoured in the lower echelons at Greyfriars), he had made the Fifth Form master conscious, very conscious, of his displeasure! The boy Coker, who had been responsible for this outrage, was hardly a credit to Prout, or indeed to the School. He hoped Prout would produce a better Coker in the next term.

There was, too, that disquietening phase when even his esteemed Quelch had been less than just regarding Wharton. A temporary lapse, it was true, but a lapse nonetheless and affecting a boy whose uncle was on the Governing Board. Dear Quelch had, of course, been misled by Loder! And somewhere inside him a little voice told the Head that it was he who had appointed Loder and so could not, himself, escape responsibility. Loder had just managed to scrape by on grounds of over zealousness and a mistaken sense of duty. On these grounds the Sixth Form bully had been deprived

of his prefectship, but Dr. Locke had entertained suspicions - grave suspicions - that Loder had been lying his head off. Suspicion alone was not enough to justify expulsion and so Loder had escaped that direst of penalties. But the Head had spoken to Loder on the matter in a way that was calculated to make the bully quake in his shoes. Now he had written to Loder's parents and explained to them why the confidence he reposed in his prefects could no longer be extended to their son. Maybe, at some future date, it would be possible to reinstate Loder to the prefectorial body, was the hope that the Headmaster had expressed in his report. It was a hope that found no echo in the rest of the School, especially the Remove!

The term had also witnessed its quota of floggings. Opposition was being voiced abroad; opposition to the use of the cane and the birch in the great public school. There had been heated debate at the Headmasters Conference in which the Greyfriars Headmaster had taken a leading part. He was a gentle, kindly man, who hesitated to use either cane or birch, but he had also a belief in the old adage that 'to spare the rod was to spoil the child!' Herbert Vernon-Smith could testify that there was no sparing of the rod as far as bound breakers were concerned, and it would be a long, long time ere Harold Skinner saw fit to play pranks with Quelch's 'History of Greyfriars'.

The bell on the clock registered the hour and was echoed with a polite tap on the door. Punctual to the minute, Quelch had arrived. Dr. Locke rose and went forward, his hand outstretched to that of his friend of many years. He was pleased to note that the Remove

master had brought a well-thumbed, calf bound volume with him. The revels were about to begin!

Horace Hacker snorted with irritation. The end of term reports relating to members of his form were stacked in a neat pile on the corner of his desk. It was a task well done with and which, he considered, he had done well. Whether the parents and the boys upon whom he had reported would share that point of view was another matter. In his own opinion, Hacker was a just man. Doubtless, in his time, Judge Jeffreys had held a similar self-evaluation!! Of course it would be unfair to draw other comparisons between the Master of the Shell and the Master of the Bloody Assize - one must only recall history, not tamper with it.

That snort from Hacker had been caused by the persistent ringing of the telephone. That task of reporting done, Hacker was at his ease and toasting his toes before his study grate. On the morrow the great school would disperse; the boys going to their homes to enjoy the festivities their parents had arranged, the masters to some quieter havens where they would observe the season of goodwill in more restrained fashion. Hacker was booked in at a modest hotel where it was just possible that the management might observe Christmas Day with a portion of pudding and the odd mince pie. Which would suffice for Hacker's acidulated system. Of all things, it would not be the food that Hacker missed; nor would it be the decorations of coloured glass, of tinsel and of paper. Yet something would be missing and the master of the Shell was wondering what it was when the telephone interrupted his train of thought.

"Hacker here, what is it?" he almost barked into the transmitter.

"Hello! Uncle this is Eric," came the reply.

"What? Who? ----" Mr. Hacker stopped himself in mid-bark as it were, for he realised that the caller was no other than his nephew, Eric Wilmot.

"Happy Christmas, uncle!" continued the youthful voice.

The hard lines on Hacker's face softened. There had been a time when Wilmot had been a Greyfriars boy and there had been misunderstanding between them. But that was in the past and, in any case, most of that misunderstanding had come about through the Shell master's avuncular concern for his nephew. There was no bark now in his voice.

"My dear boy, how are you?"

"Fine, thank you uncle. I am ringing about Christmas. Won't you come and spend it with us? It would be spiffing if only you would!"

"Eric, you must not use such expressions!"

"Sorry, uncle, but it would be good to see you again. Do say you'll come!"

Mr. Hacker paused. There was no doubting the boy's sincerity but even Hacker realised that his company was bound to pall after the first twenty-four hours. Between fifteen and fifty a great gulf was fixed and, though his heart warmed to that invitation, he demurred in accepting. From the remote depths of his being, the Shell master discovered a long unused shred of tact.

"It is kind of you to think of me,

Eric, but such an invitation for Christmas is quite out of the question ----"

"But, Uncle ----" urged Wilmot.

"However," his uncle continued, "however, perhaps I can find time later - in the New Year, perhaps - to come for a day or two before you return to Topham. I shall expect to find that you have brought home a good end of term report." Hacker found his mind wandering to that neat pile of end of term reports on his own desk! Had he been a modicum too harsh or a trifle too severe in some of them?

After a few more greetings, Wilmot rang off. He had said that it would have been "spiffing" if his uncle could have joined him for Christmas. He was probably the only youth in the length and breadth of the British Isles that would have so described such an eventuality! Nevertheless, he was glad that he was going to see his uncle.

Mr. Hacker resumed his seat at his desk. Outside, the snow had gently started falling, the flakes flurrying against the window panes. A wind was rising, gently stirring the leafless trees and, if anything, the greyness of the day had intensified. It may have been his imagination, but his study seemed to have increased in its comfort. It was good to have heard from Eric.

The master of the Shell reached out a bony claw toward that pile of reports. It would do no harm to read through a few of them again, just in case

In the Fifth Form Games Room, Blundell was holding court. He was holding it, as he so often did, in spite of Coker. In the eyes of most of Greyfriars Blundell was a great man.

It was, perhaps, unfortunate that Coker was not of that majority. Not that it mattered to anyone excepting Coker. The crowd were too busy hanging on every word that the Form captain uttered to worry about trifles!

"I think the Sixth will rather have to look to their laurels next term in regard to the footer ---" opined Blundell. "Prefectship is not the only thing that Loder has lost, his wind has gone as well ---"

"Too many smokes," muttered some lesser acolyte with great daring.

"Jaw, jaw, jaw!" bellowed Coker. "Can't you asses listen to a chap for a moment?"

"Quiet, Coker, Blundell's talking," interjected Hilton.

"Yes, Coker! Give it a rest, old man."

Coker looked round indignantly. His stock, never high, had struck a new nadir that term. The punch he had inadvertently given Prout had paid harsh dividends in form. Prout had regarded his form with an eye that was blue as well as baleful, and the slightest suspicion of a grin had caused lines to fall thick as the leaves in Vallambrosa. Prout - usually the matiest of masters - had come down heavily on the most minor of infractions. True, on the credit side could be reckoned the fact that he had abandoned the habit of dropping in on the Fifth for one of those chats, not as master, but as friend. But in form, Prout had been like unto a bear with the sorest of heads. And all this due to the actions of that crass fool, that foozling dummy, that frabjous ass, Coker!

Coker did not see all this in the same light as his form-fellows, but

then Coker never did see anything in the same light as the rest of the form! He tended to dismiss their opinions as unworthy of his lofty consideration but, dismiss them or not, the opinion of the form had had a telling effect. He had not been sent to Coventry, but he just as well might have! Even Potter and Greene, usually the staunchest of pals at tea-time, had given him scant attention, such was the feeling in the Fifth. Now, being told to be quiet as though he was a snivelling fag, Coker's thoughts turned to the cause of all his woes - Prout. It was all Prout's fault for butting in and so bagging that black eye. If he guessed that, at that moment, Prout was wracking his brain for something good to put in Coker's report, then Coker did not reciprocate. Indeed, his thoughts on Prout were bereft of seasonable goodwill. Well, he thought darkly, Prout had better watch out next term!

Down the stairs and along the next corridor a feast was toward. Coker might be thinking of Prout but Herbert Vernon-Smith was not thinking of Henry Samuel Quelch! Study No. 4 was like unto the land of milk and honey, and Smithy, who was rather given to splashing his money around, had invited most of the Form along to an outsize in spreads and even Bunter, who had not featured on that invitation list, was present and had been allowed to stay.

Wharton, as he squeezed into the window seat beside Frank Nugent, looked back over the eventful term and the misunderstanding with Quelch. He harboured, no longer, those feelings of resentment toward his form master; that was all finished with and it was good to have regained the good opinion that Quelch had previously held of him. But his brow darkened as he thought of the culpability of Gerald Loder whose false witness had so nearly caused his

own expulsion. Now Loder was no longer a prefect, his teeth being drawn, as it were. Would that be so in the new term? Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof! He turned and smiled at his pal as the latter passed him another doughnut.

Harold Skinner sneered as he looked across at his form captain. He had rejoiced when Wharton had been at loggerheads with Quelch and it did him no good to know that that breach had been healed. The sneak of the Remove gave a reminiscent wriggle as he recalled the flogging he had received. He wondered whether Quelch had mentioned the matter in his report and what effect the news would have at home. The evil of his miserable act found no remorse within his equally miserable being. Serve Quelch right if something happened to his precious MSS in the future.

William George Bunter was thinking of no-one. He was too occupied making inroads on that terrific spread to consider Quelch or his end of term reports. Form masters and all their works were of all too scant an importance to hinder the present consumption of grub and the hope of sticking someone for the hols on the morrow.

In another wing of the School, far from the jubilation in the Remove passage, Gerald Loder lit another

cigarette. His ashplant lay neglected on the top of a bookcase where he had thrown it after coming back from that painful interview with the Head. Only he knew how close to the wind he had sailed when, in contriving the downfall of another, he had come within a hair's breadth of expulsion himself.

He knew, also, how lucky he had been when the Head had accepted his rather lame explanation. Yet, in the blackness of his heart, he held no sense of gratitude to a Headmaster who was just. As his thoughts turned to Wharton, so did he strengthen his resolve for revenge. Next term the Head would probably reinstate him and, if he did, let that young rascal in the Remove watch out. This time there would be no escape; no reprieve. Loder, as he drew heavily on his cigarette, made those resolutions without waiting for the New Year!

An ever deepening blanket of snow lay upon the Quad, its crystalline white enhancing ledge and buttress, bush and tree, with a seasonable tracery that no artist could hope to imitate. One more roll call, one last assembly, and the School would disperse, sending on their various journeys both the authors and recipients of those end of term reports.

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Seasonal Greetings to all O.B.B.C. friends.

DON and ELSIE WEBSTER

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Xmas and New Year Greetings to Eric, Ben, Roger and all fellow collectors.

EDWARD THOMSON, 6 RITCHIE PLACE, EDINBURGH, EH11.

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Reginald Pitt - Abdullah

by R. J. GODSAVE

In the autumn of 1921 E. S. Brooks wrote a powerful series which served as a fitting end to the 1½d. Nelson Lee Library era which had lasted for a period of some 3½ years.

The previous summer the St. Frank's juniors as guests of Mr. Jim Farman - Justin B's father - had had some stirring adventures in North West Canada. It was on the return from this holiday that Reginald Pitt found that his family home in Duncan Square in the West-end of London was occupied by a Mr. Simon Raspe, and that his parents were living in a third rate boarding-house in Fulham. From what Mr. Raspe told Pitt, it appeared that Mr. Pitt had made some bad speculations and had lost everything he possessed, and that Raspe, much against his wishes, had to seize everything including the house and its contents.

It was fortunate for Pitt that the fees for the coming term at St. Frank's had been paid before his father's financial crash. Had he had his way Pitt would have left the school and devoted his energies to earning some money. His efforts to obtain part-time employment in the Belton district met with little success until he met Tom Howard, a professional footballer who played inside left for the Bannington Football Club. Howard having heard of the high standard of the St. Frank's junior football eleven had dropped in at the school to see for himself the quality of play on Little Side, and had been favourably impressed by the performance of Reginald Pitt.

The upshot of this meeting was an invitation for Pitt to call in at the Bannington Football Club's ground any time he chose to see the professional team at practice. Pitt took up this offer and found that a practice match composed of an intermingled game between the first team and reserves was about to begin, although one team would play a man short. Tom Howard had a few words with the manager - Mr. Page - and was able to inform Pitt that if he liked he could take the place of the absent player.

The net result of Pitt's inclusion in the game was that his side won the match by eight goals to two. Five of Pitt's centres had been converted into goals. Such was the impression made on the professionals by the junior's play that they could not bear the thought of not having him play for them in future league games. Mr. Page offered Pitt £6 per week regular money to turn out for the club on Saturday afternoons, whenever possible. It was so arranged that he would play under the name of 'Abdullah' and use a harmless brown dye to disguise himself as a native of North Africa. It was hoped that nobody connected with the school would recognise 'Abdullah' as the Remove junior Reginald Pitt.

E. S. Brooks has always been able to weave the detective and domestic elements in his writings with a result that the reader had two stories of the same subject running side by side. In this particular series it was Nelson Lee who told Pitt that if Raspe had defrauded his parents he would put matters right. By a

coincidence, Pitt who had had a slight accident with a car while cycling home from the Bannington Football ground was taken to a large house by the driver and his companion. It turned out to be the country home of Simon Raspe - Thornton House.

Now a certain 'Colonel Skinner' literally forced his way into Thornton House to complain about a fallen tree from Thornton House which was lying across the road and preventing him from continuing his journey in his car. It was an extremely windy day which wrought havoc with many trees and tiles in the neighbourhood making fascinating reading. The previous week a tunnel from the ground of Thornton House leading to a passage behind the panelling of the library had enabled Nelson Lee to listen to a conversation between Raspe and his associate in which the combination of the safe was mentioned. This had enabled 'Colonel Skinner' to appear to fall into a fit in the library after having forced his way into the house to complain about the fallen tree. While Raspe had gone to get some water the 'Colonel' had been able to open the safe and abstract a package marked "Pitt". It was by this means that Nelson Lee was able to produce evidence which proved that Raspe had deliberately swindled Pitt's father out of all he possessed.

It was usual for Brooks to insert a humorous incident in a series - usually it was E. O. Handforth who supplied the humour which was done quite unconsciously. In this case he was out to prove to Church and McClure that he could disguise himself so successfully that he could not be recognised as Handforth even by his chums. Needless to say, Handforth gave himself away by his strange remarks and an equally strange parcel which was strapped to his bicycle carrier. The mysterious parcel turned out to be a convict's prison garb, and by wearing a mask Handforth thought he could never be discovered. It was Handforth who suggested a bicycle ride after tea to his chums. When the chums reached the Caistowe road Handforth suggested that he should go to a rather lonely farm to obtain a drink. He showed considerable alarm when his chums suggested going with him and would not allow them to follow him. Waiting for the return of their leader they were suddenly confronted by a convict who threatened them with a revolver. Except for the loose folds of the convict garb which was obviously made for a tall man, Handforth was completely disguised, the only trouble being that he took no trouble to alter his voice. This incident was really funny, and was cleverly woven into the Raspe section of the series.

The covers of some of the Lees in this series gave some remarkable drawings of football play. No. 334 o.s. entitled "£10,000 to a Shilling" or "Lord Dorriemore's Wager" was a thrilling writing of a league match between Porthampton and Bannington in which Pitt had to score five goals to win the wager or if he did not then he would have to pay Lord Dorriemore 1/-. This, of course, was a generous gesture by Dorrie who knew the circumstances of Pitt's family troubles. The house in Duncan Square and its contents was to be auctioned on the Monday after the Porthampton match. Pitt, by playing a game that was foreign to his usual play in that he ignored his fellow players and kept the ball to himself. It was as the final whistle went that he scored his fifth goal by a long shot which completely defeated the goalkeeper.

It was through the keyhole listening by Teddy Long of the Remove that the fact that 'Abdullah' was in reality Reginald Pitt was known and he was able to play

the game of his life in his own name supported by the St. Frank's juniors. Although he had not broken any school rules he would not in future be able to play for the Bannington team.

Reggie Pitt with his chum Jack Grey attended the auction with his winnings. Fortunately, Lord Dorriemore also attended the sale and as the house and its contents was knocked down for £10,500 he was able to advance the extra £500 as a loan in order that the house and its contents was returned to the Pitt family. Although Nelson Lee had been instrumental in putting Raspe and his associate behind bars, it would be some time for Raspe's affairs to be sorted out.

In the year 1921 £10,500 was a fortune and had the buying power to purchase a large house and its contents in the West-end of London. In the year 1979 £10,500 would not be enough to buy a small terrace house in a London suburb, let alone its contents.

No. 337 o.s. "The Secret of the Boxroom" was the last Nelson Lee to be issued before the price rose to 2d. A clever piece of advertising using the St. Frank's story as the main plank to project No. 1 of "Nipper's Magazine" which was to be the supplement given away with the increased pages of the new style Nelson Lee.

* * * * *

Warmest seasonal greetings to our esteemed Editor, bless him; to Tom and all Midland Club friends; Uncle Ben and all the London Club; to Cyril Rowe, Albert Watkins, new Zealand; and especially to Henry Webb and family.

STAN KNIGHT, CHELTENHAM.

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WANTED: Finnemore novels, "Secret Entrance", "House of Kaid", "Animals Circus", B.F.L. 216, 222, 281, 295, 606, 623, 624. Regards all friends.

ROWE, "LINDENS", HORSFORD, NORWICH.

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Season Greetings to all friends and "C.D." Members. Bound volumes wanted: "Jester", "Puck", "Chips", "Girls' Friend", 1905/6/7; also "Girls' Home", "Our Girls", any dates.

LEN HAWKEY, 3 SEAVIEW RD., LEIGH-ON-SEA, ESSEX.

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WANTED: Greyfriars Holiday Annuals, 1920, 1940; "Lord Billy Bunter"; Greyfriars Book Club, No. 3; any others. Dandy, Beano Annuals.

JAMES GALL, 49 ANDERSON AVENUE, ABERDEEN.

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A Merry Greyfriars Christmas to our Editor and all hobbyists from -

JOAN GOLEN, 41 CHERRYWOOD RD., STREETLY, SUTTON COLDFIELD.

MAGNETS As An INVESTMENT

by IAN WHITMORE

To many of you reading the title of this article your first reaction may be "Perish the thought".

It is, however, an interesting subject as the cost of buying Magnets (and therefore the value of them) has so outweighed inflation that they have probably proved one of the most profitable forms of investment ever.

Part of my job as a Bank Manager is to advise my customers of the various forms of investment available for their spare funds. Amongst the obvious options are those normally associated with investment such as National Savings Certificates, Post Office and other Savings Bank accounts, Unit Trusts, Insurance, Stocks and Shares. Some of these are safe but unexciting whilst others are speculative and could prove disastrous as well as rewarding. Even those which show capital gains, however spectacular, can hardly compare with the paper profit we see in our collections of old boys papers.

Have you ever thought how much one would have paid between 1908 and 1940 for a complete collection of Magnets? If each copy had been bought weekly at the Newsagents then the total cost would have been as follows:-

104 copies at $\frac{1}{2}d$	=	£0. 4. 4d
424 copies at 1d	=	1.15. 4d
241 copies at $1\frac{1}{2}d$	=	1.10. $1\frac{1}{2}d$
914 copies at 2d	=	7.12. 4d
		<hr/>
		£11. 2. $1\frac{1}{2}d$
		<hr/>

£11. 2. $1\frac{1}{2}d$! It seems staggering doesn't it? What would a complete collection of Magnets be worth today? Even at a conservative estimate I would guess between £4 - 5,000.

I was reading the other day that £1 today is worth the equivalent of $6\frac{1}{2}p$ in 1908 so even allowing for the ravages of inflation the value of Magnets is now very much higher.

Let us assume for the sake of argument that over the 32 year period of the Magnet it would have cost the equivalent of one month's average wage to acquire the complete collection of the paper. The average monthly wage today is perhaps £300 so the comparison, even oversimplified, is startling.

This is, of course, all very well, but how many of us would have been in a position to acquire a complete collection of Magnets by original purchase? Most of us now were not born in 1908, many of us were not even born in 1940.

Therefore we have to build up our collections by purchasing from other collectors and dealers - the chances of picking up papers from secondhand book shops for a song are now so remote as to be non-existent.

However, look at prices over the past thirty years. In 1948 we were able to buy Magnets for 3d, 4d or 6d according to age. Ten years later they cost between 2/- and 3/-. In 1968 prices had increased by a further two or three times and now, Magnets range from £1 upwards. This gladdens the heart of the speculator but it should not dampen the enthusiasm of the collector.

We do not collect with profit primarily in mind, but we must pay today's prices with the thought that if our enthusiasm should wane or if we become financially stretched we can always recover our money. This has always been the case in the past and can hardly be any different in the future. Hence the theme expressed in the title to this article. We are buying for pleasure. We are reading and retaining our collections for the same reason but underlying our acquisitive hobby is the sub-conscious knowledge (or even full awareness) that our collections represent a good investment.

At this point I must reassure the reader that in my capacity of financial adviser I do not propose to extol to my clients the virtues of collecting Magnets or any other old papers. It would be a sad day if we were competing with the professional investor for our favourite papers.

I have an altruistic view and I wish to ensure that I can continue to acquire my precious Magnets at a reasonable cost but being a conservative Banker, I am happy at the thought that my collection is also increasing in value.

If I had an original copy of No. 1 Magnet, I would not personally sell it even for £100. Therefore, I disagree with an editorial comment made a year or so ago that this is a ridiculous price to pay. In the same way as for stocks and shares, the market for our old papers is determined solely by two factors - supply and demand. Provided artificial demand is not introduced by the intervention of the professional investor, then the cost of Magnets will be calculated by the normal forces and this is why we all must hope that our hobby remains largely restricted to the enthusiasts. This is the only way we shall all be able to add reasonably to our collections, and in the process to gain maximum enjoyment from our hobby. The building up of our collections over the years gives immense pleasure and even if our pockets become stretched at times, we do not grudge too much paying "over the odds" for the occasional elusive number.

We therefore enjoy our hobby, but we should occasionally bask in the knowledge that whatever we collect we have a good investment and one which is almost certain to increase in value in real terms over the years.

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ELLIOTT, 01-472-6310. Many U.S.A., British old boys' books, comics, Fantasy, Science Fiction. Merry Christmas, Happy New Year to all friends old and new. Long life to "C.D.",

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Season's Greetings to Madam, Eric, readers, writers and friends everywhere.

BERT HOLMES, BARROW-IN-FURNESS

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The Cast

by NIC GAYLE

Look at this pathetic appeal.

"Well, what do you think of the old paper this week? Back to the good old times, eh? This week's long yarn is the kind you all want, I am sure. It marks the beginning, so to speak, of a new era - and yet, at the same time, it is a return to the old order. Anyhow, it gives you a good opportunity of writing up to slang me: or praise me, just as the case may be."

Thus Edwy Searles Brooks to what was left of his readers in April 1931. But it was far too late. Within two years the Nelson Lee Library had finished, amalgamated with the Gem. We all know by now the sad story of how a change of editors, editorial wrangles and the restrictions placed on Brook's freedom as a writer resulted in the end of the paper, but these were only the outward causes. How did they actually effect the St. Frank's saga from within? How indeed DOES a paper that for ten consecutive years is one of the most popular start to disintegrate? ... The answer for the N.L.L. is the same as for the Gem. Because of the cast.

The comparison between the two papers is deliberate. Having accepted that St. Frank's rather stands apart from other schools in this genre, it nevertheless compares more readily with St. Jim's than any other. For instance, they both shared overlarge casts at school and on holiday, they both used the internecine strife that results from a house system as a central pivot to many plots, and in the Gem's case while the demise of the paper can be fairly laid at the doors of the substitute writers and the author rather than the editor, the mechanics of disintegration were the same as those of the N.L.L. - that is, working from within the cast. There is one important distinction to be made about the last nine months of the Gem, but more of that anon. For the moment let us consider St. Frank's.

Firstly, consider the internal balance. In 1933 when the N.L.L. finished, the cast consisted of 176 boys still present at the school. Incredibly, 110 of these were in the Remove, which by then was split into two, the Remove and the Fourth. But that still left two classes of 55 each, which is quite unacceptable. This nonsense was the direct result of sixteen years of new boys being allowed their moment in front of the footlights then being left at the back of the stage as driftwood. Just as happened at St. Jim's, in fact. Of course experimentation is an author's lifeblood, no-one is denying that; but Brooks never cleaned up the mess afterwards, and Hamilton waited until the last nine months of the Gem to do so. The end product was an impossibly cluttered stage, which in the case of St. Frank's resulted in a number of identical and superfluous sub-groups, many of which were interchangeable in their roles.

To illustrate how absurd this became, consider the question of titles. We are told that the English dearly love a Lord, and maybe this is so; certainly most of

us find it pleasant to have the Hon. Arthur Augustus D'arcy as a member of the Fourth, if only for a touch of variety. But one such representative of the nobility is sufficient. By 1933 the Remove at St. Frank's contained two Baronets, two Lords, one Viscount, one Duke, and a King! Seven in all! Clearly this is absurd and unnecessary. And while in the realm of numbers, it is worthwhile noting that St. Frank's had six headmasters in its time, five dramatically useless and detrimental changes. The point behind this is that the paper began to fall when the first, best-loved, and longest lasting head, Dr. Stafford, went. This senseless abandonment and cutting out of popular figures, coupled with the even more senseless flooding of the stage with characters who were superfluous and for the most part unwanted, was a strong contributory factor to the demise of the Lee.

Yet, despite all this, it need not have fallen. The Gem, after all, despite years of the most hectic and ill-becoming change - almost mutilation, some would say - rallied in its last nine months and managed to reappear after the war in different format with moderate success. Why could the N.L.L. have not have done the same? ... The answer - and this is really my theme - is that the NUCLEUS characters, that is those few individuals that formed the heart of the continuing saga, had themselves been changed by circumstances, and not for the better. To use an analogy, you can rebuild a house, no matter how damaged, as long as the foundations are still secure. If the foundations are faulty, then it is impossible. Martin Clifford added a note of triumph to the collapse of the Gem by ruthless pruning and the return to the 'good old times' as Edwy Brooks put it; back to the simple structural unity of the Terrible Three and Gussy and Co. Much of the deadwood was, at a stroke swept away. The point is, he was able to do this as the seven boys who formed the nucleus of the saga were substantially the same as they had always been. There were minor changes, of course, but all for the better - Tom Merry taking a more leading role as in days of yore, and the interesting broadening of Manners. But they were still the same boys that they were in 1910 in essence. In contrast, by 1933 when a similar last ditch attempt was made in the N.L.L. to get back to the 'good old days' by reprinting again from 'No. 1' as the Gem had done years before, the paper folded within 25 issues. The reason is not hard to find; the difference between the same nucleus characters of 1917 and 1933 was too great. Let us trace the origins and patterns of this split in more detail.

Most people know that the N.L.L. was divided into four stages - the 'old series' (568 issues), the first new series (194 issues), the second new series (161 issues), and the third new series (25 issues). The numbers alone speak for themselves. However these divisions are unhelpful; the only real ones that matter are 1) O.s. 485 when Nipper ceased to relate the stories and they were from then on written in the third person, and 2) the start of the first new series in 1926. Both these divisions struck at the heart of the nucleus.

But what WAS the nucleus? ... Or rather, of whom was it made up? We shall consider just the boys rather than the adults, otherwise our stage will become too cluttered. For the first five years of the St. Frank's saga, from 1917-1922, it was fairly stable. There was a comfy, almost cosy feel to the stories of this period; in many there is a strong (and let it be said, delightful) feeling that Nipper is chatting to us personally rather than just recording narrative. The nucleus of this

period could be said to consist of Nipper, Watson and Tregellis-West of study C; Handforth, Church and Maclure of study D; and perhaps Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey. Bob Christine and Co. were the leading lights of the opposing house, corresponding roughly to Figgins and Co. at St. Jim's. (The two houses called themselves the Monks and the Fossils respectively.) The cads were represented by the usual trio, in this case Fullwood, Gulliver and Bell, and there was a small but pleasant supporting cast of non-nucleus characters such as Cecil de Valerie, Fatty Little, Timothy Tucker, and Justin B. Farman. New boys of course arrived throughout this period, but the equilibrium was not really disturbed until No. 349 in 1922 when Archie Glenthorne appeared. Archie remains one of the best loved characters, not just in the N.L.L. but probably in the whole realm of old boys' literature, but the point is, he brought in his wake two companions, Willard and Brent, both of whom starred in their own series, then stayed on as two classic examples of nondescript driftwood. It was a disturbing trend, but a certain hint of things to come. Archie of course joined the nucleus - but so did Brent.

Willy Handforth, Edward Oswald's younger brother, arrived soon after that, and what a wonderful character he was. He and his two chums, Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, though only in the Third, also joined the hard core nucleus of characters, which as you can see by now was beginning to grow quite large. Perhaps rather too large. The first real crack however appeared in 1923 with the arrival of Buster Boots, who although a great character in his own right, brought with him his own chums, Denny and Bray, who were just more driftwood. They joined the Monks of the College house. But the really disturbing feature of Buster's arrival was that he and his two chums displaced Bob Christine and Co. as leaders of the Remove section of the Monks. Bob and his friends just faded away into obscurity and stayed there for the rest of the paper's history. It was a small but significant body blow.

This brings us up to the first real division in No. 485 when Nipper ceased to relate the stories. There is no doubt in my mind that this change was accompanied by a marked improvement in grammar and syntax in the story telling, but also a comparative lack of warmth when one considers what had gone before. The personalised, chatty style of Nipper's writing was gone, and in its place was something more professional and detached. It was a mixed blessing, though it must be said that series such as Grimsbey Creepe, Ezra Quirke, and Steven's father's Play showed a great deal of warmth of their own, but it was reflected in the characters rather than communicated to us directly. You can see this demonstrated in one more change, the last that this tightly stretched nucleus could accommodate, the arrival of the magnificent William Napoleon Browne, who joined the Fifth as captain in 1925, a year before the old series ended. He was to remain a central character by the force of his personality rather than anything else. And in 1926, the old series ended in triumph.

So what went wrong? ... I have shown some of the areas where the cracks were becoming apparent, but they were hardly insuperable. Some judicious pruning of the nucleus and general cast and all would have been fine yet. Basically, the N.L.L. was as sound as a bell. When the old series ended in 1926, only the Magnet could touch it in terms of quality. Yet that said, it was the N.L.L. that was chosen

to be reprinted in the shilling Monster Library; and continue to furnish material for both the S.O.L. and B.F.L.; and be permanently enlarged with no increase in price. St. Frank's was certainly riding the crest of the wave then. Yet from No. 1 of the first new series, the second and last important division in the paper's history, a subtle but dramatic change took place that was to strike at the very heart of the nucleus of characters, and thus by inference, at the whole paper. We must first however, define our terms.

The very centres of the nucleus were the personalities of Nipper and Handforth. The dramatic change that rang the death-knell of the paper was the pushing forth of Handforth and his assumption of Nipper's place. Nipper was relegated to the background, and Handy took the centre of the stage. It was a bold and bad move. No longer was Handy just the loveable brawny clown who had provided us with so much amusement in the past, but by slow degrees he became decisive, firmer, less fatuous - in fact, a figure to be far more respected than was his wont. To emphasise this development Nipper was increasingly referred to as 'Dick Hamilton', and this served to exacerbate his alienation from the limelight. It was a reduction to the ranks with a vengeance.

But the laurels of victory sat ill upon Handforth's head. He was, by nature, the leader of study D, not the leader of the St. Frank's Remove. Of course Nipper remained the leader in name, but that's all he really was. I think I can demonstrate this.

The China series of 1926 (1st N.S. 12-19) has long been a much praised favourite holiday series. It is exciting, and the scene where Handy reverts to type by pretending to be a Chinaman in order to escape is for me one of the funniest things in Old Boys' literature. Yet it amply demonstrates the points raised. Nipper is little more than a cardboard figure for most of the story, and never once is he referred to as 'Nipper'. Always it is 'Dick Hamilton'. Two small incidents show just how far the rot had set in already. The first, when some of the Removites are crouched in a boat waiting to launch an offensive to aid Nelson Lee, amongst them Dick Hamilton and Handforth, it is Handy who leads the attack, not Dick. Unthinkable even two years before. Secondly, (and this is a sad one), when Handy leads a futile and hare-brained attempt to rescue Yung Ching when he knows he shouldn't, Dick Hamilton observes them rowing away into the night and turns to the officer on watch and says helplessly, "What shall we do? ..." Nipper could have told him.

Of course this situation was a fluctuating one. There were a few times in the next few years when Nipper was given back the reins, but somehow the spell was broken by then. The character developments of Handy were ineradicable, and it is interesting to note that 'Nipper's magazine' of the early twenties (which roughly corresponded to Tom Merry's weekly) returned in the late twenties as 'Handforth's Weekly'. But there was one change that E.S.B. was not allowed to get away with. I feel sure that it was his public that forced him to reintroduce calling Dick Hamilton by his proper name of Nipper. Within six months of the China series quoted above both names were in alternate use. It was a sensible alliance, and that is how it stayed to the end.

I will not bother to chart the ever increasing array of new characters that arrived at St. Frank's after this point, because whether or not it would weary the reader, it would certainly weary me. I for one have nothing but an academic interest in Jimmy Potts, Lionel Corcoran, Stanley Waldo, Claude Gore-Pearce and the rest. Perhaps out of all of them only Vivian Travers had a certain Cardew-like charm, but he arrived upon the scene far, far too late. By making him the member of an already fragmented nucleus, and a leading one at that, he merely forced the pace of Nemesis and nothing more. The final insult came in the middle of the second new series when St. Frank's imported wholesale from another school the detestable Kirby Keeble Parkington and eleven of his comrades, so we now begin to read about the 'red hots' and the 'old-timers'. Guess which was which. Never was such a misnomer as 'old-timers' applied to the boys of St. Frank's, and with such unconscious irony.

Truly, change is not always as good as a rest.

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WARMEST SEASONAL GREETINGS to all O.B.B.C. friends and especially Eric Fayne and Madam. Still wanting and will pay up to £5 a copy for Popular Book of Girls' Stories 1935, 1936, 1941; Girls' Crystal Annual 1940, 1941; Golden Annual for Girls 1939; School Friend Annual 1943. Also Mistress Mariner, The Serendipity Shop and Sally's Summer Term by D. F. Bruce; and Prefects at the Chalet School, and The Chalet School and Rosalie, by E. B. Dyer.

MARY CADOGAN, 46 OVERBURY AVENUE, BECKENHAM

KENT. Tel. 01-650-1458

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CHRISTMAS GREETINGS to Josie, Bertie, Norman and our esteemed Editor, Eric. Still hoping to find Bullseye Nos. 15, 16, 24, 28, 39, 40, 72, 85, 100, 101 and Boys' Magazine 276, 278, 316, 317, 318. Can anyone supply photo-copy or loan last two instalments of "Scarbrand" serial, and instalments 3, 4 and 5 of "Iron Army" serial? Offers cash or swaps for any above item.

JOHN BRIDGWATER, 58 SPRING LANE, MALVERN

WORCS., WR14 1AJ.

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SEASONAL GREETINGS to all hobby followers everywhere. Special greetings to all the members of the Northern O.B.B.C. and thanks to them for yet another year of happy meetings. Each year, the circle of my hobby friends gets larger - and many people I have not met. Not only to those friends in the United Kingdom do I wish a Very Happy Christmas and happy reading, but all those in Australia, New Zealand, U.S.A., and Israel.

DARRELL SWIFT, 22 WOODNOOK CLOSE, LEEDS, LS16 6PQ.

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Merry Xmas! - Happy New Year! to one and all!

JIM SWAN, 108 MARNE STREET, PAD., LONDON, W10 4JG.

Plummer in Pluck

by CYRIL ROWE

Every persistent reader of the Union Jack and having acquaintance with the Sexton Blake Library will have come across the name of and pursued the adventures of George Marsden Plummer, the renegade Detective Sergeant of Scotland Yard. After Plummer's dismissal or resignation from Scotland Yard several tales of his early adventures in crime appeared in Pluck at intervals, commencing with "The Rajah's Diamonds" in No. 558, 10th July, 1915, followed by the house of mystery in No. 561, "Masks off" in No. 562, "The Second Will" in No. 564, "The Double Chance" in No. 565, "The Outwitting of Plummer" in No. 566, "Plummer the Patriot" in No. 574, "Plummer's Impersonator" in No. 576, "Plummer's Kingdom" in No. 578 and the "Crystal Gazer" in No. 580.

I have no copies of Pluck later than this issue so cannot be sure if this ended the series, but so far there had seemed no build up to any climax, the tales being slight and episodic as in the earlier ones, with no growth of character only bearing on Plummer's quick mind and great ability to disguise himself.

Lewis Carlton wrote a story of Plummer called "The Mystery of the Diamond Belt" which appeared in the Boys' Journal and republished in No. 567 of Pluck, September 11, 1915. Carlton wrote another tale "The Great Cheque Fraud" from the film of that name but this was never reprinted.

Between these serials there ran a series of short stories of four or five pages each - no author named - ten in all, on the theme of how Plummer commenced his criminal career and his resignation in due course from the Yard. They started in Pluck No. 543 and ran for ten weeks till No. 552, 29th May, 1915. Later on in 1915 there appeared ten other tales, three of which contained the Baker Street trio as his adversaries and one with Will Spearing against him in the rule of law.

Plummer first meets John Marsh in the Pluck stories and as Marsh was a creation of Norman Goddard I assume that he is the author of the ten tales to some degree confirmed as in a later tale Will Spearing (a Goddard creation) is pitted against Plummer.

The Pluck tales are very slight with little true detection in them with Plummer a veritable "Leon Kestrel" as disguising himself at a moment's notice; and quick to seize an opportunity of robbery and fraud. Really they add little to the character of Plummer as originally established by Michael Storm. His eccentricities are played on unmercifully to establish that it is Plummer; and the character has not gradually developed as the criminal instinct came to the fore, in all the tales he is so to speak fully fledged. And how odd of authors or editors, to allow Plummer to resign from the service when in his initial appearance in the Union Jack No. 222 called "The Man from Scotland Yard" dated 1908, he is still in the service till arrested at the end of the tale for the murder of the Earl of Seveonoaks".

To sum up I feel these tales were rather slight, no real development which

was not really necessary as the name and reputation of the character was already developed in the Union Jack. The Pluck tales were merely a stimulant to sales and many readers must have been disappointed.

* * * * *

A Merry Xmas to ye Editor and all hobby friends everywhere is wish of STUART WHITEHEAD, YEW TREE COTTAGE, 4 BUTTSASH COTTS., FAWLEY ROAD, HYTHE, SOUTHAMPTON, HANTS.

Chairman's Greetings to all Members of the London O.B.B.C. (and associated Clubs), especially to our indefatigable Secretary, Ben Whiter, the ever-industrious Eric Fayne, Editor of Collectors' Digest (our official publication), to John Wernham, our President and Publisher of the invaluable Museum Press Books, and to all our kind hosts and hostesses - ROGER JENKINS.

St. Frank's and the Moor View girls with myself wish you all the compliments of the Season and a Happy New Year. - JIM COOK

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Cliff House / Cliff House / Cliff House - and Morcove

by TOMMY KEEN

Perhaps this article is a waste of time. Are any readers interested in Cliff House and Morcove? Mary Cadogan - yes, Ray Hopkins - yes, Esmond Kadish - yes, but who else? Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Rookwood, St. Frank's, through the years they have all had their legions of admirers, and in their time, so had Cliff House ... and Morcove. But the interest in the boys' papers of our youth seems to have remained, whereas the interest in the girls' papers has, maybe, waned.

When I first became aware of the girls of Cliff House School, I had never seen a copy of the Magnet, and although I was young enough to still be enjoying Tiger Tim's Weekly, and the Rainbow, I became intensely fascinated by two weekly magazines which my sister, who was several years my senior, decided to buy weekly. These were the Schoolgirls' Own, and the School Friend. The stories of Betty Barton & Co. in the Schoolgirls' Own were, I must admit, my favourites, but I also enjoyed greatly the adventures of Barbara Redfern & Co. in the School Friend.

Way back in 1922, there appeared in the School Friend for ten consecutive issues, stories featuring the most popular girls in the Fourth Form at Cliff House, each story, concerning one of the girls, complete in itself. Also, and this was the great thrill of those days, a charming coloured picture, by the famous Cliff House artist, G. M. Dodshon, was given free. I remember, even now, the order in which the girls were featured:- Peggy Preston, Clara Trevlyn, Philippa Derwent, Mabel Lynn, Bessie Bunter, Marjorie Hazeldene, Barbara Redfern, Dolly Jobling, Phyllis Howell and Augusta Anstruther Browne. These, therefore, to me were the girls of Cliff House School.

However, two elder brothers, even older than my sister, thought it was time I read the Magnet and the Gem, periodicals which they had read a decade before (and which, I was to learn, they wanted to read again), and so I became acquainted with, and enraptured by, the boys of Greyfriars and St. Jim's. These books did not however, lessen my interest in the School Friend and the Schoolgirls' Own, and so, to my utter amazement, in an issue I bought of the Magnet, Marjorie Hazeldene, Clara Trevlyn, and Bessie Bunter of Cliff House School were featured. This was during the Levison brothers' return to Greyfriars series. I was astounded, but delighted to read of Marjorie & Co., and was absolutely enthralled by the strange drawings of the Cliff House girls, by Mr. C. H. Chapman, Clara and Marjorie with flowing ringlets, and tiny straw boaters, whereas in the School Friend, as depicted by G. M. Dodshon, both these young ladies wore bobbed hair, in the style of the period. Naturally, I assumed, like many other readers, that Frank and Hilda Richards were brother and sister. How wrong we were.

Of more recent times, I discovered that Marjorie Hazeldene first appeared in the Magnet in 1908. Bessie Bunter was introduced in Magnet No. 582, dated 5th April, 1919, in "The Artful Dodger", and by the time she appeared again in issue No. 595, 5th July, 1919, "Bessie versus Billy", the School Friend had made its

NOW ON SALE:

"THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN ANNUAL"

The Schoolgirl's Own



2P

A SHOCK FOR PAULA!

An amusing incident from this week's long complete tale of the girls of Morgue and their rivals.

appearance on the bookstalls, the first issue dated 17th May, 1919, and Bessie was installed in Cliff House.

I became increasingly puzzled by the Magnet Cliff House characters, hardly any mention was made of Barbara and Mabel, the leading lights in the School Friend, and especially when I read some early Schoolboys' Own Libraries, reading for the first time in the Greyfriars stories of Phyllis Howell, and Philippa Derwent, and of a plump young lady called Wilhelmina Limburger. At the time, I did not realise I was reading the early adventures of Harry Wharton & Co.

Right - so far, so good. I knew nothing about substitute writers, and that Phyllis and Philippa were figments of a Mr. Pentelow's imagination, nor that the first five or six issues of the School Friend Cliff House stories were written by Frank Richards, (Charles Hamilton), but recently, reading an issue of a Magnet from May 1925, "The Feud with Cliff House", and having been given to understand that Wilhelmina Limburger vanished from the Greyfriars stories during the Great War (owing to her German origin), to my amazement, her name cropped up again, in the same sentence as Bessie Bunter's. This story featured Phyllis, rather more than Marjorie and Clara, and still, in 1925, Clara was sporting her ringlets. I therefore wonder who wrote this story, was it Frank Richards, or was it Pentelow? Evidently there was little or no co-operation with the School Friend.

Referring to another Magnet, dated 17th January, 1920, on the Editor's page, a girl reader writes suggesting that a paper should be issued about the Cliff House girls, and the Editor, making a few remarks, wanted other readers' opinions as to whether this would be a popular idea. As the School Friend, had by that time, been on sale for eight months, it seemed a most peculiar remark. Neither, as I can trace, was any mention made in the Magnet in the month of May 1919, of the new publication for girls. Curiouser and curiouser, Alice would have said.

In March 1925, a new series of the School Friend began. Instead of the old size, like the Magnet and the Gem, it was now nearer the size of the Schoolgirls' Own. Marjorie and Clara were the leading characters in the first issue, but who was 'Hilda Richards' now? Horace Phillips? L. E. Ransome? (This may have been explained in past articles by Mary Cadogan, or other writers.) The characters in the School Friend from 1919 to 1925 remained almost the same, various new girls came, and went, and until the end of 1925, the Fourth Form were as follows:-

Barbara Redfern
Mabel Lynn
Bessie Bunter
Clara Trevlyn
Marjorie Hazeldene
Dolly Jobling
Phyllis Howell
Philippa Derwent
Peggy Preston
Augusta Anstruther-Browne
Lucy Morgan

Katie Smith
Cissy Clare
Gwen Cook
Freda Foote
Nancy Bell
Marcia Loftus
Agnes White
Annabel Hitchens
Hetty Hendon
Vivienne Leigh
Bridget O'Toole

One other girl, called Meg Lennox, left Cliff House in 1924, but strangely enough was mentioned in the hard-back, published after the last war, 'Bessie Bunter of Cliff House School'. In January 1926, Jemima Carstairs commenced her career at Cliff House, but more of Jemima later on.

Regarding the characters in the School Friend, apart from enjoying stories of Phyllis and Philippa, to me, the most interesting girl was Augusta Anstruther-Browne, the female equivalent of Herbert Vernon-Smith of Greyfriars, who, when she was bad, was very bad, and when she was good, was very friendly with Peggy Preston, the scholarship girl. Rich girl, poor girl, as Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing were rich boy, poor boy.

In 1925, as Greyfriars and Highcliffe had been completely ignored in the School Friend, (although in an issue late 1924, at Friardale Station the announcement is made "Alight here for Cliff House and Greyfriars"), a Boys' School nearby was introduced, Lanchester College, and the first story featuring Jack Tolhurst & Co. in 1925, was called "Barbara's Boy Friend" (or "Chum" - I forget which). In the early days of the School Friend, there was also another Girls' School in the Friardale/Courtfield locality, Danesford Hall, but the girls of Danesford Hall did not appear too often in the stories. However, this means, that in this small rural Kentish district, there was Greyfriars, Highcliffe, Cliff House, Danesford Hall, Lanchester College, and when Cliff House appeared in The Schoolgirl in the 1930's, yet another Boys' School cropped up. On a half day, the bun shop in Courtfield must have been crowded!

Now, back to Jemima Carstairs. In the Christmas issue of the School Friend in 1925, when Barbara & Co. were staying at the home of Clara Trevlyn's parents, Jemima arrived as a guest of the Trevlyns', who became a popular favourite immediately. But the introduction of Jemima Carstairs to the Cliff House girls was rather intriguing, as for the previous four weeks, she had appeared as a new scholar at Morcove School, the famous scholastic establishment of Betty Barton & Co. in the Schoolgirls' Own. For the first time, in the history of the two papers, there appeared almost an involvement, but Jemima, after the Christmas vacation, joined Babs & Co. at Cliff House, with never a mention or reference being made that Jemima had spent a brief sojourn at Morcove. This was a great pity, it would have been a chance for the Morcove and Cliff House girls to meet, but evidently Jemima was not an invention of Horace Phillips, but was introduced into the Morcove stories by L. E. Ransome. This, however, has all been explained before in various earlier articles by Mary Cadogan.

Of one thing I feel certain, Jemima's arrival at Morcove School altered the appearance of the Morcove girls. Within a few weeks of Jemima's departure, the long tresses of the Morcove girls were bobbed and shingled at an alarming rate. The illustrations of Jemima in the Schoolgirls' Own, by Leonard Shields, were magnificent, and therefore, seeing her first in the Schoolgirls' Own, I was not so impressed with G. M. Dodshon's drawings of this very modern schoolgirl in the School Friend.

The School Friend ran to a close at the end of the 1920's, but by now, although

still an avid reader of the Magnet and Gem, I was becoming interested in the film magazines, but after the School Friend, another paper soon appeared, "The Schoolgirl", which included a long story each week of Barbara Redfern & Co. of Cliff House School. Naturally, I bought the new paper to see how Babs & Co. fared in different dress.

I was shattered, and after a few issues, I read or saw the Schoolgirl no more. This was not the Cliff House I knew, and although realising the stories had to more or less keep up with the times, the girls weren't the same. Where was Dolly Jobling? Vivienne Leigh? Augusta? And how did such girls as Janet Jordan and Leila Carroll materialise? No explanation was given, and although I am certain these stories and fresh characters must have appealed to new readers, they were not for me. Even though the girls, illustrated by T. E. Laidler, were much prettier, I resented that Barbara, Marjorie, and of course Bessie Bunter, did not even faintly resemble the (I must admit) rather strange Cliff House girls as portrayed by G. M. Dodshon over the previous decade.

So, at long last, for me, three different Cliff House Schools were over, C. H. Chapman's (whose very early illustrations of the girls, prior to the School Friend, still absolutely fascinate me), G. M. Dodshon's and T. E. Laidler's. As by this time, the stories in the Magnet were being illustrated by Leonard Shields, whenever Marjorie and Clara were depicted in the 1930's (as in "The Feud With Cliff House" in 1937), they appeared to me as if they were two Morcove girls, escaped from the Schoolgirls' Own. So, good-bye Cliff House.

MORCOVE SCHOOL

Why did I like Morcove School? Perhaps, because they were the first school stories I ever read. Certainly, with the exception of Betty Barton, and Cora and Judith Grandways, the early characters were not too clearly defined. There was little, or no humour in the stories, but maybe that appealed to me, for in later years I was to become an addict of the Talbot, Levison, Cardew, Vernon-Smith, Tom Redwing, etc., emotional stories in the Magnet and the Gem. So called humorous characters, Billy and Bessie Bunter, Horace Coker, Fisher T. Fish and even Naomer Nakara (later to appear in the Schoolgirls' Own as the imp), left me quite cold. The appalling way in which poor Betty Barton was treated by the vicious and snobbish girls of Morcove School upon her arrival, gave one little cause to chuckle. Then, as the weeks went by, and Betty, by proving her worth in all kinds of difficult situations, found a few good friends in girls such as Polly Linton, Madge Minden, Trixie Hope, Dolly Delane and Tess Telawney. By the fourteenth issue, Betty was Captain of the Fourth Form.

Madge Minden, the Morcove musician, became (and remained) my favourite character right from the time she was introduced. At first she was rather a complex character, very handsome, but moody and temperamental, but as time passed, she became known as staid, clever Madge, a great favourite of all the members of Betty Barton's coterie (and, I always suspected a favourite character of 'Marjorie Stanton's). Also, she was a special chum of Polly Linton's brother, Jack.

There was depth and mystery too, in many of the Morcove series, especially

The Penny Popular

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EXPOSED!

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Harry Wharton & Co., contained in this issue.)

with the introduction of unwelcome, and (way back in 1921) rather frightening visitors from Morocco, which included the beautiful Rose of the Desert, but the many series of Betty & Co's adventures in Morocco, have been described before in full by Ray Hopkins, (Collectors' Digest Annual 1974).

Evidently the Marjorie Stanton stories in the Schoolgirls' Own were not all written by Horace Phillips, an example of a substitute author being the Jemima Carstairs series (as mentioned in the Cliff House chapter). These stories appeared in December 1925, but there were also two other series which appeared in the autumn of 1924, which, I am almost certain were not written by Horace Phillips, and maybe could even also be the work of L. E. Ransome. These were Nos. 191-195, "The Mysterious Three", and 196-199, "Stolen Honours". Even when I read those stories many years ago, they seemed different from the usual Morcove tales. Two or three leading characters of Betty's group were not mentioned - Naomer Nakara, Helen Craig and Dolly Delane - not even Batty's arch enemy, Cora Grandways, but as soon as the two series were over, back came Naomer, Helen and Cora. Strangely enough, Naomer and Helen were also ignored again in the Jemima stories. Was the author writing about characters who were in the stories a year or so earlier, before Naomer and Helen had arrived, and whilst Cora was away from Morcove?

The accepted Fourth Form at Morcove from 1921 to the end of 1927 were:-

Betty Barton	Polly Linton	Diana Forbes
Madge Minden	Paula Creel	Mabel Rivers
Tess Trelawney	Trixie Hope	Kathleen Murray
Dolly Delane	Helen Craig	Stella Munro
Grace Garfield	Etta Hargrove	Jess Lingaird
Norah Nugent	Elsie Drew	Monoca Holden
Ella Elgood	Eva Merrick	Cora Grandways
Ursula Wade	Sybil Farlow	Judith Grandways (late to become Judy Cardew)

Beginning with the first term in 1928, a new girl arrived, one who was to become one of the most popular characters in the Morcove saga, and who, after the first early misunderstandings, became the final member of the little band known as Betty Barton & Co. This girl's name was Pamela Willoughby.

Betty's intimate circle consisted of Betty herself, Polly Linton, Paula Creel, Madge Minden, Tess Trelawney, Dolly Delane, Trixie Hope, Helen Craig, Naomer Nakara and then Pam. Unfortunately, a character I always had a soft spot for, Trixie Hope, vanished from the stories soon after Pam arrived.

Betty Barton was a finely drawn character, she had far more appeal (to me, at least) than Barbara Redfern of Cliff House. After the many trials during her first few terms at Morcove, Betty did not appear as the featured lead in too many stories. Series starring Polly Linton or Pam Willoughby cropped up all the time, and even Madge Minden was featured regularly in various series. Betty, I suppose, could be almost the female counterpart of Tom Merry of St. Jim's. An excellent leader, but never pushing, loyal, pretty (as Tom was handsome), and adored by Polly and the rest of the girls.

Now - back to an earlier paragraph regarding Jemima Carstairs in the Cliff House review, and the idea of a meeting between the Morcove and the Cliff House girls.

Morcove School was in North Devon, and Cliff House, of course, was in Kent, and it seemed as if 'never the twain would meet'. Then, just before the Schoolgirls' Own Annual for 1926 was due to be on sale on the bookstalls (approx. 1st Sept. 1925), large announcements were made in both the Schoolgirls' Own, and the School Friend, for readers to ensure that they quickly bought their copies of the new Annual, to read of the great and historic meeting between the girls of Morcove and Cliff House Schools. Absolute excitement ... but disillusionment followed. Many a hard earned six shillings was spent on buying the Annual to read of this momentous occasion, but alas, I, for one, was terribly disappointed. It was merely a one-act play, not even a story, with Barbara Redfern and Mabel Lynn calling at Morcove to arrange a hockey match with Betty & Co. With such a distance between the two schools, even the idea of a hockey match was ridiculous. The play was called "The Biter Bit", written by Marjorie Stanton AND Hilda Richards, but it was very weak, and must have been a great let-down for the readers. Never again did the idea of a meeting crop up.

Now, I often think back to those far away days when I lived in Aylesbury, in Buckinghamshire, and how, with two or three other schoolmastes, we often imagined meetings with Harry Wharton, Reginald Talbot, Madge Minden, Phyllis Howell, Cardew, Clive and Levison, and though we have now learned of substitute writers, nom de plumes, etc., I can only thank Charles Hamilton/Frank Richards/Hilda Richards/Martin Clifford/Marjorie Stanton/Horace Phillips/L. E. Ransome and Uncle Tom Cobley and ALL, not forgetting C. H. Chapman, G. M. Dodshon, and Leonard Shields for all the pleasure they have given us for so many years.

With regret, one can only say "Farewell Cliff House, Cliff House, Cliff House, AND Morcove".

WANTED: Champion Libraries by Herbert Macrae and Rupert Hall. Best Wishes for Christmas and the New Year to Norman Shaw, Josie Packman, Bob Wilson, the Editor and all Members of O.B.B.C.

JOE ASHLEY, 46 NICHOLAS CRESCENT, FAREHAM
HANTS., PO15 5AH.

Best wishes for Xmas and the New Year to all readers and to the hobbyists I have corresponded with over the years, especially Josie Packman, Eric Fayne, Bob Blythe, Roger Jenkins.

H. PEMBERTON, MANCHESTER.

Greetings from Cambridge Club to all fellow collectors and grateful thanks to Eric for all his work - BILL THURBON.

The Sword

by W. T. THURBON

When Pooh Bah's "Protoplasmal, primordial" ancestor first climbed down from his ancestral tree, and looked around, he saw many other creatures. Some of them looked good to eat, others looked as if they regarded him as good to eat.

As he saw his somewhat larger next door neighbour approaching, presumably with intentions other than those of discussing the usual Englishman's conversational subject of the weather, he looked round for something to improve his own chances of survival. If his eye first lighted on a handy chunk of rock, which he heaved at his neighbour's skull, with, to him satisfactory results, he had set up a chain reaction that would lead in due course to the Inter-continental Ballistic Missile. But if no convenient lump of rock was available, his next thought would be to tear a branch from the ancestral tree.

If this was a long branch with a sharp point, he had invented the first pike, spear or lance. But if the branch had instead a sharp edge, he had discovered an even more important weapon. For, from that first rough, cutting weapon would develop the sword. Now Pooh Bah's ancestor had a problem. How could he cut or stick the other man before the other man cut or stuck him? He must find some sort of protection. If possible a shield; for the shield is "the most obvious, the simplest and therefore the most primitive form of defensive armour"⁽¹⁾ But if he cannot find a shield, what then? The most obvious alternative is to use his new weapon for defence as well as offence. So he has, unconsciously, invented the new art of fencing. From this crude beginning will come in due time, rather a long time in some cases, masters to teach and schools in which to learn the art of fencing. So, too, will come swordsmiths and armourers to improve his swords. So, too, will come something else. For, unwittingly, he has added to the literary scene of the far distant future a whole library of "cloak and sword" stories, he has given an excellent metaphor to Biblical writers like St. Paul, and he has given great pleasure to a host of readers of old boys' books.

Pooh Bah's ancestor has invented two weapons; the spear and the sword. The Greeks and Alexander's Macedonians with their long pikes, borne by the Phalanx, a body of armoured warriors, marched across the ancient world to the borders of India. But the sword was to prove itself a battle winner. The Roman Legionary, armed with sword and shield, and carrying a load of equipment that would make a modern infantryman turn pale, turned aside the point of the Macedonian pikeman with his shield, and went in with his short, stabbing sword, and it was "curtains" for the pikeman. Centuries later the Spanish Infantryman, with sword and buckler, was to repeat the Roman triumph against the Swiss Pike's.

But the art of the swordsmith was not confined to the short blade. The Bronze Age smith would make his long rapier, and with the coming of the harder metal, iron,

(1) Oakeshot "The Archaeology of Weapons"

later to be converted to steel, as the smith learned to leave his first rough iron forging for several days in a bed of glowing charcoal, the long sword of the Vikings and Saxon Warrior, and of the mounted knight emerged. For the horseman needed a long cutting sword, once the invention of stirrups had given him a firm seat in the saddle. To counter the sword the art of the armourer evolved. Mail, first of bronze, then of iron link construction failed to fully protect the wearer from the stroke of the heavy sword of steel wielded by Viking or crusader. Gradually armour became stronger until finally the fluted, heavy plate armour protected the knight. As this armour turned aside the stroke of the cutting sword the fighting man began to carry a second sword, the estock. Of stiff, four-sided section, and sharply pointed, this was used to thrust at the weak points and "chinks in the harness" of the wearer of plate armour.

But at the supreme moment of the art of the armourer, along came some spoilsport. Mixing together charcoal, sulphur and saltpetre he, or more likely his companions watching at a safe distance, had invented, possibly too suddenly for his own wellbeing, Gunpowder. Though some form of armour was to be worn for quite a long time, and indeed to be revived in different form in the present century, the day of plate armour in war was finished. The armoured knight had curled his fingers round the crosshilt of his sword as he thrust with his estock. The heavy, two handed sword was to be carried for a time yet by the German mercenary soldier, and its use taught in the German Brotherhoods of swordsmen, named after the four Evangelists - which is why you must be careful not to confuse the "Mark Brudders" with the Marx Brothers. In the 16th Century for a while the conservative Englishman, and the Scottish Highlander were to retain their cutting sword or claymore, and buckler. But first the Spaniards, then the Italians and French were to produce the long sword, primarily intended for thrusting, the rapier. The rapier of the 16th Century was not the slender weapon appearing in magazine stories and pictures of the late 19th and early 20th Century. It was a long, heavy weapon for cutting as well as the more deadly thrusting. Also, it was to be used both for attack and defence, for it was necessary to move faster than when in full armour. The mailed gauntlet of the armoured knight had protected his fingers as he thrust with the estock. Without the mailed gauntlet his hand was vulnerable. So extra circular guards were added below the cross guard, until finally these were fused into a cup, and the cup hilted rapier of the 17th Century, the rapier of Dumas's novels, was perfected. With the addition of cloak or dagger, or sometimes with the "case", pair, of rapiers, the great age of fencing was beginning.

Attack and defence! Let us quote Sir Walter Scott:

"Ill fared it then with Roderick Dhu
That down his target shield he threw.
Whose massy boss and tough bull hide
Full 'oft the foeman had defied;
For, trained abroad his arms to wield,
Fitzjames blade was sword and shield."

There is a mystique about the sword, a thrill felt by anyone who has handled a fine sword in some collection, or used foil or epee in the fencing Salle. Little

wonder that the smiths who produced the fine bronze age rapiers, or the first sword of the tough, new metal, iron, were regarded with awe. They were credited with special powers, like the legendary Wayland or Weland Smith, the smith of the Norse legends, who forged the sword in the first story in Kipling's "Puck of Pook's Hill" - "By oak, and ash and thorn I tell you, Weland was a Smith of the Gods".

"Behind the sword lies thousands of years of history, of legend, romance and fable; enchanted swords, magic swords, and swords whose names are as famous as those of the heroes who used them".⁽²⁾

Historically good, personal weapons were rare until the middle ages, and were primarily carried by leaders. Because of their rarity and value in war, certain weapons, particularly when bronze was replaced by the revolutionary new metal, iron, were credited with supernatural history and charmed powers, and given names.⁽³⁾

Thus we have King Arthur's "Excalibur"; "Durandel", legendary sword of Hector of Troy, cast by the dying Roland into the poisoned stream at Ronscesvalles; Hereward's "Brainbiter"; the Viking "Legbiter" of the Laxdaela Saga.

Tolkien, whose "Lord of the Rings" is steeped in old Norse and Anglo-Saxon legend, gave charmed swords to the Ringbearers' Company. Eleven swords, Frodo's "Sting" and Gandalf's "Glamdring" glowed warningly when the evil Orcs were near, as also, Mallory tells us, Arthur's "Excalibur" on occasion gave off a light "as of thirty torches". And Tolkien gave too, to the King, Aragorn, the "sword that was broken", and reforged by the eleven smiths and renamed "Anduril", "Flame of the West".

With the decline of the wearing of heavy armour, and the development of the rapier, the age of the Fencing Master came into full flower. There must always have been teachers of swordsmanship. Egyptian tomb painting show men practising with swords. There must have been instructors for the Roman Legionary, and also for Gladiatorial schools. But with the 16th Century arose the "Schools and Masters of Fence", whom Castle lists in his famous work. First the Spanish school; though the conservative English teachers, such as Silver in his "Paradox of Defence" (1599), still clung to sword and buckler. Then rose the Italian School.

One mustn't confuse the 16th-17th Century fencer with the modern fencer. Fencing in those early times has been described as "a great deal of careful stalking, interspersed with some very reckless rushes". In this period the language of the fencing school was usually Italian. The modern fencer comes on guard, turned sideways to his opponent, right leg advanced, left arm held back to balance him. The 17th Century fencer came on guard, standing square to his opponent, dagger in left hand, or cloak over left arm, moving quickly from side to side, waiting the right moment to attack.

Here is a passage from a very good "cloak and sword" story of the early

(2) Henderson: Sword collecting for Amateurs.

(3) See Ruth S. Noel "The Mythology of Tolkiens' Middle Earth".

1920's, where the account of the duel reads like a chapter from Castle's book:

"De Brassy broke ground once, twice, then came forward with a carricado, a passing step followed by a lunge; a low, flashing stoccata to the hip became an imbroccata to the left breast, but I put it aside neatly with the dagger and cut down straight at his head with a stramazone. Stepping back, he caught this easily on crossed dagger and sword. ---- I feinted a mandriitta to bring him back to his right, changed to a stramazone right down at the head and had the mortification to see it caught easily on his sword hilt. Then death brushed me with his wing.

From the high parade the sword darted at my face like a striking snake. I had a fraction of a second to stoop, when de Brassy's blade seared through my hair and carried away my hat. 'Monsieur fights like an archangel' remarked my gallant antagonist as he danced out of distance to hand me my hat on the end of his sword. 'A magnificent coup de Nevers, Monsieur' I replied, not to be outdone." (4)

Stoccata and Mandriitta were cuts; Imbroccata thrust; stramazone a cut from the wrist.

Among the many fencing masters who wrote treatises at this time, perhaps the most interesting is Capo Ferra. His book differs little from others of his period. Indeed, Alfieri uses much the same illustrations. At the end of Capo Ferra's book, however, there is an illustration, not referred to in the text, of a figure in the position of the modern low lunge. Right foot advanced, body turned sideways to his opponent, left arm back to balance himself as he thrusts at the full extent of his reach. Interestingly, I recall, in an old "Union Jack" of the pre 1914 period, Sexton Blake in a duel being shown in the illustration making just such a lunge. This, too, was the thrust with which Andre-Louis wounded La Tour D'Azyr in Sabatini's "Scaramouche".

The Coup de Nevers, mentioned above, brings us to another aspect of fencing, the secret thrust. In the great age of fencing many men sought for the secret thrust or the universal parry. Now there is no thrust that cannot be parried; no guard that cannot be evaded. Though this was so, nevertheless many fencing Masters in the course of their professional career, invented tricks which might catch an unwary opponent off guard. The most famous of these, and one of the most celebrated duels in the history of swordsmanship, took place in 1547. A quarrel arose between the Sieur de Jarnac and La Chastaigneraye, the finest swordsman and wrestler in France. There was much wagering on the fight, everyone backing Chastaigneraye. De Jarnac placed himself under the tuition of a fencing Master, who taught him a surprise stroke. When the duel began, each attacked with vigour, and after several strokes and trifling wounds on both sides, de Jarnac cut low at his opponent's left leg, inflicting a severe cut, following this up with a similar stroke which half severed Chastaigneraye's right leg. So mortified was Chastaigneraye that he refused medical aid and bled to death. So mortified was the king at losing his wager that he issued an edict banning duelling. The hamstringing cut was to go down to history as "the Coup de Jarnac". A secret thrust the "Coup de Nevers", forms the subject of a very good story by J. H. McCarthy, "The Duke's Motto", which he also turned into a play; this later making a very good silent film.

(4) "Raymond the Dangerous" (c. 1920).

Until the end of the 18th century every gentleman, and many who were far from being gentlemen, wore a sword. The rapier was a heavy weapon; as skill developed in the art of fencing, this weapon was gradually lightened. While men wore swords duels were frequent occurrences, and fencing was a very necessary part of a man's education. The blade of the rapier was first lightened by being made thinner, retaining the hilt and a short length of the original width of the blade, thus becoming the "colichemard", or transitional rapier. With the rise of the French school of fencing the sword became still lighter, and finally the court or "small sword" with cup hilt and knuckle bow, intended mainly for thrusting evolved. This, in the hand of an expert was a very deadly weapon. From the French Masters of the 18th century, and from the Angelo family in England modern fencing developed.

The development from heavy slashing sword to the small sword, is covered by Ronald Welch, a teacher of history as well as a fine writer of historical tales for boys, in a series of stories. For example the heavy sword of the armoured knight in "Knight Crusader", the 16th Century rapier in "For the King", and both the small sword and the fencing foil in "Escape from France". The French school of fencing of the 18th Century gave us a scientific series of attacks and parries, numbered as prime, seconde, tierce, etc. This is the period which gives the setting for stories like Sabatini's "Scaramouche", Jeffrey Farnol's "The Honourable Mr. Tawnish", and one of the better Henty's, "The Cornet of Horse".

For the stories of the rapier and dagger age we turn first to Dumas. Not only to D'Artagnan and the immortal Musketeers, but also to many other of his stories. "Chicot the Jester" is based on a real duel, perhaps the most famous of all duels in French history, the "Duel of the Mignons" in the reign of Henri III, fought between two of his favourites, who had quarrelled over some ladies of the Court. Quélus and d'Entraques and their two seconds apiece met near the ramparts of the Porte Saint-Antoine in Paris in a duel from which only the severely wounded d'Entraques and one second emerged alive.

As fencing became more an art the foil developed as the practice weapon of the fencing school. Before the invention of the fencing mask the danger of injury to the eye, especially when the first, stiff, poker-like early foil was used, was a very real one. The loss of an eye was a frequent sign of the habitue of the salon, and one Seventeenth Century Fencing Master was murdered at the instigation of a nobleman who had suffered such an accident in his school. Prints and drawings of the early fencers show them adopting, what the modern fencer would think a stiff and awkward position, leaning back. The target was confined to the trunk, and among the better fencers to a mark over the heart. Masks were invented to avoid such accidents, but at first many fencers refused to adopt them, either because they were regarded as effeminate, or as a slur on the skill of the fencer. Gradually fencing became formalised, time attacks, beats, finger play, were introduced, and this in turn gave way to the ritual of attack, parry and riposte ... It was in revulsion to such formalism in the later nineteenth century that epee fencing was adopted; using the actual duelling sword, with the point guarded, and the whole of the body as target. Meanwhile from the sabre of the soldier, especially the Polish cavalryman, the light cut and thrust fencing sabre was developed.

Throughout the ages certain districts have been noted for the excellence of their swords - Solingen in Germany, which produced blades for people as historically apart as Cromwell and Hitler, Spanish blades, and the swept hilt rapiers of the Italian, Andrea Ferrara. The value attached to these special blades is allegorised by Bunyan in Part 2 of "The Pilgrims Progress" where Mr. Standfast's sword is described as "a right Jerusalem blade".

The sword is as attractive for the writer of historical stories and romances, as the Colt revolver is to the writer of Westerns. Warwick Deeping, Stanley Weyman, ("Under the Red Robe" and "A Gentleman of France"), Rider Haggard in his historical stories, especially the saga-like "Eric Brighteyes", Henry Treece in his Viking tales, all make good use of swordplay. Readers of "Chums" will recall S. Walkey's sword-wielding heroes. Sienkiewicz in his "With Fire and Sword" trilogy writes of Polish sabreurs, as does Conan Doyle of French sabreurs in his "Brigadier Gerard" stories. Edgar Rice Burroughs, when he left Tarzan for his Martian stories, made "John Carter" a master swordsman. John Edson's "Duty Fog" was also a master of the sabre, as well as of his twin colts. Clarke Hook, in his early and better "Jack, Sam and Pete" tales made Jack a swordsman. In an early Marvel (ld.) series, No. 187, of 24 August, 1907, Jack is challenged to a duel and easily defeats his challenger: "With a swift turn of his wrist he circled his sword round his adversary's, and that worthy's sword went flying through the air". Watching the Duel is Fall, a fencing Instructor: Says Fall "'Look here, Mr. Owen, you and I will have a turn for love --. I should be proud to have a pupil like you.' 'Right you are' laughed Jack.

Then the two crossed weapons, and there was some really pretty fencing. It looked dangerous from the spectators' point of view, and several times Fall lunged exactly as though he intended to wound his adversary, but the point of his sword always stopped an inch or so from Jack's breast; and when Jack lunged short, his thrust was always turned aside.

'I am facing a master of the art' exclaimed Jack when they stopped. 'Well, well, I have been all my life at it' answered Fall. 'It is the professional against the amateur. All the same, you are a grand swordsman.' "

Readers of pre-1914 "Pluck" and "Union Jack" will recall the serial "On Turpin's Highway", reprinted as "Dick of the Highway", in which there were several duels. Herbert Leckenby reminded us, long ago, in his articles on the Aldine Libraries that one "Dick Turpin" title was "With bullet and blade", and there was plenty of swordplay as well as Archery in the Robin Hood Library stories.

The sword is as attractive for the playwright, or film maker, as for the story teller. Who among the older of us, for example, can forget Douglas Fairbanks senior in his swashbuckling roles. Plays of the end of last century and the beginning of this, in the "sword and cloak" era, included apart from the "Duke's Motto", such plays as "The Garden of Lies". Finally we recall the duels in Shakespeare's plays, particularly in "Romeo and Juliet" and the famous climax of "Hamlet". Many years ago, when my daughter was Captain of her school fencing club, she was asked to stage the duel scene in Hamlet. She and I, together, carefully worked out each move, which

includes the scuffle and exchange of the poisoned rapier. It went off very well, but I confess to a sigh of relief when the last performance was safely over.

* * * * *

Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year to all collectors.

JOHN COX, 'HARDEN FOLLY', EDENBRIDGE, KENT.

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All who read the Digest, Merry Xmas and a healthy happy 1980.

BOB MILNE, 21 DURHAM TERRACE, BAYSWATER, LONDON, W2.

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The Rise and Fall of The Terrible Three

by ROGER JENKINS

When Tom Merry arrived at Clavering College, there were already three occupants of the study to which he was allocated - Lowther, Manners and Gore. From the very beginning, Gore was depicted as an unpleasant character, disgruntled, unreliable, malicious, and envious of Tom Merry and his open nature. It was not a grouping that tended towards harmony, and readers had to wait until Clavering College closed down for a more satisfactory state of affairs to emerge. Tom Merry (dressed once again in a velvet suit) arrived at St. Jim's in No. 11 of the halfpenny Gem, whilst Manners and Lowther followed at the end of the same story. It was No. 12 that was entitled "The Terrible Three" and it was a name that stuck for decades.

The transference of the St. Jim's stories from Pluck and the transference of the Clavering College boys to St. Jim's was a re-organisation that needed considerable care. St. Jim's already had two main centres of interest in the Fourth Form - Blake & Co. and Figgins & Co. - and the grafting of a third (and major) centre of interest in the Shell with Tom Merry & Co. was a delicate operation indeed. As a result, St. Jim's was depicted on a very wide canvas and it lacked the sense of security which existed among the more intimate groupings at Greyfriars and Rookwood. The Fourth and Shell at St. Jim's co-existed almost as one unit and the Gem stories appeared to revolve around the Middle School rather than a particular form: there was no cosy intimacy at St. Jim's. At any rate, by using the term 'The Terrible Three' Charles Hamilton did attempt to focus attention where he felt it ought chiefly to lie, and removing Gore from Tom Merry's study was a great help in this direction.

Alliteration was the keynote for a successful soubriquet for any group. At Greyfriars there was a Famous Four which later became the Famous Five when Johnny Bull joined the Co., but it was still an alliterative title. The Fistical Three at Rookwood were obviously destined from the start to become the Fistical Four when Jimmy Silver was admitted to friendship. But the Terrible Three was not a truly alliterative phrase, and it is easy to suspect that the name was not intended to be permanent, for shortly afterwards Monty Lowther left St. Jim's because his uncle felt he would do better with a tutor at home, and Tom Merry and Manners then constituted the Terrible Two, which sounds correct, odd though it may be to modern ears. It was also logically sensible, since two's company and three's none. Furthermore, very little had been done to fill out the characters of Lowther and Manners, and to have lost Lowther permanently at this time would have been no real loss at all. When Lowther left, Manners began to receive more attention, being depicted as quiet and studious, with a liking for photography. His first compromising photograph was taken as early as No. 26 of the halfpenny Gem!

Of course, Tom Merry's character was clearly drawn from the very beginning. In No. 7 of the halfpenny Gem, Wingate of the Sixth said to the Headmaster,

Mr. Railton, "He puts down bullying in his own form and the lower ones also, and the fags adore him." In No. 11, when he had rolled Dr. Holmes in the mud, thinking him to be a moneylender who was going to foreclose the mortgage on Clavering, Dr. Holmes said to Mr. Railton, "I like that lad Merry. He has a fine frank face," which was an astonishing tribute in the circumstances. Like a true hero, Tom Merry risked his life more than once for others in these early days. He also met more than his fair share of adversity in a form-master called Amos Keene who tried to disgrace him in Nos. 13 and 14, and later a cousin by the name of Philip Phipps who succeeded in getting him expelled in Nos. 24 and 25, but his friends backed him up in refusing to go. If these series seem to remind Gem readers of events in future decades, it can perhaps be recalled that there is nothing new under the sun.

A novel and more interesting dilemma presented itself to Tom Merry in No. 38 entitled "A Sneak". Gore had got Gibbons into trouble with Herr Schneider by whispering the wrong answer, and Tom Merry intervened:

"Sneak!"

Tom Merry's cheek burned red at the taunt, but it did not alter his decision. He had never been called a sneak before and the bitter word struck deep.

This is a new situation for a hero: should he name the culprit to ensure that the innocent victim is not flogged? A form meeting was called to determine the matter, and Jimson acted as judge:

"The finding of this court," went on Jimson, who was growing more and more magisterial every moment - "the finding of this court, therefore, is that Tom Merry is not a sneak, but that he acted injudiciously, owing to Gore having acted like a cad."

Tom Merry's attitude to the court was one of disdain, and his remarks were far from politic, and the general opinion was that Gore was a cad, Tom Merry a duffer, and Gibbons a howling jackass, and it was not until the end of the story that Tom Merry regained the position of hero.

Monty Lowther came to life in No. 27 of the halfpenny Gem when his uncle left him in the care of Miss Fawcett, who was persuaded by Monty to let him return to St. Jim's in disguise in order to slip medicines in Tom Merry's food when he wasn't looking. The story is pervaded by a sense of fun that represented the first attempt to bestow upon Monty Lowther a distinctive character. At the end of the tale his uncle relented and allowed him to stay at St. Jim's, and the Terrible Two became the Terrible Three again.

It might be interesting at this stage to stop and ponder on the exact reason why the Terrible Three became the main characters after the merger of Clavering and St. Jim's. The St. Jim's stories in Pluck had had a longer life than the Clavering stories in the Gem, and the chums of Study No. 6 were much more clearly defined characters than Tom Merry & Co. Blake, D'Arcy and Herries were a well-drawn trio and their reactions to one another were full of amusing possibilities, whereas Manners and Lowther were just names at this time.

The answer obviously lies elsewhere. First of all, St. Jim's had not filled the majority of Pluck whereas the Clavering story in the Gem was a main attraction.

Secondly, Blake was not a truly heroic character. He was too down-to-earth, too blunt, too inclined to make fun of Gussy, whereas Tom Merry had a concern for others and a desire to do the right thing at all costs without losing a sense of fun and adventure that must have made an immediate appeal to readers of the time. Such was his impact that after only a handful of Clavering stories he took command at St. Jim's and remained the hero of his form ever afterwards. It was not a title that could have been applied to Harry Wharton by any stretch of the imagination. It may be objected that Tom Merry was too sunny natured, too predictable to play the central role in dramatic stories. In the peculiar circumstances of St. Jim's, however, this objection is not so important.

The driving force behind any school story is conflict. At Greyfriars most of the sources of conflict came from new boys or outsiders, whereas at St. Jim's there was a built-in mechanism for conflict. It could be Shell v. Fourth, or School House v. New House, and in this set-up Tom Merry could play a part without being untrue to his nature. There was also external conflict in the form of Rylcombe Grammar School, and this brings to mind the two famous stories in the Boys' Friend Library. The first was No. 30 entitled "Tom Merry & Co.", published in November 1907 and the second was No. 38 entitled "Tom Merry's Conquest" published in January 1908. It can be seen from contemporary advertisements that they quickly sold out and they have now become collectors' items. They were both published in the era of the halfpenny Gem, they were both new stories, and they both underlined Tom Merry's complete ascendancy in the feud with the newly-established Grammar School.

"Tom Merry & Co." related how the St. Jim's juniors met with disasters because each group tried to tackle the Grammarians alone, but when they united under Tom Merry's leadership victory was assured, and Frank Monk & Co. were obliged to sign a document acknowledging their inferiority. There was a quarrel over the ownership of the document and it was torn in the struggle into three pieces. The success of this story probably prompted the sequel, which Charles Hamilton had plenty of time to write, as the halfpenny Gem stories were on the short side and the Magnet did not then exist. "Tom Merry's Conquest" rang the changes on the previous theme. The juniors decided to select leaders by lot, each one to retain command until a defeat, but disasters occurred and the Grammarians ransomed various St. Jim's juniors for sections of the famous document. It was not until Tom Merry's name was drawn out of the hat that victory ensued. This story was notable for the return visits of Marmaduke Smythe and Digby (who was destined for a school near his home in Devon). "Tom Merry's Conquest" was reprinted in Gems 167 and 168, the first time that the Gem featured a reprint, and by the time the story came round again in Gems 1359 and 1360 it was a mere wraith of its original self, but nevertheless the atmosphere of bubbling good humour and inconsequential episodic adventure still remained to carry it through in 1934 as it had done in earlier years. Tom Merry was still running his fingers through his curly hair in perplexity, and he continued to remain Merry by name and merry by nature. Only in the early days would Tom Merry have trapped Gussy and led him around the House with a bag on his head, and only in the early days would Tom Merry have pretended to let Gussy defeat him in a boxing match for the sheer fun of it. As the years passed by, Tom Merry became more staid and respectable but nothing could quite erase the memory of that unpredictable and unforgettable year of the halfpenny Gem.

The first number of the penny Gem was really a sequel to "Tom Merry's Conquest" since it dealt with the second return to the school of Marmaduke Smythe and Digby, which presumably justified the title "The Gathering of the Clans". The feud with Rylcombe Grammar School was also transferred to the pages of the Gem. The pull of study No. 6 was still strong, and the development of Gussy's character perhaps detracted a little from Tom Merry's predominance; so the following Gem brought back Miss Fawcett to St. Jim's, which certainly restored the limelight to Tom Merry, though whether it was altogether wise to saddle him with such a naive old sketch for a guardian is another matter altogether. D'Arcy's cousin, Ethel Cleveland, accompanied Miss Fawcett to St. Jim's, and she was an undoubted asset who reflected glory on Gussy.

To redress the balance, Tom Merry in No. 3 was given one of the parts that he played so successfully in the halfpenny Gem - the hero of his form. He was chosen by Kildare to run with him as a hare in the school paperchase, and he saved Ferrers Locke's life and assisted him in the recapture of a criminal who had featured in earlier days. Tom Merry really was "King of the Castle", as the story was called. It is interesting to note that, although Manners and Lowther were sometimes critical of Tom Merry when the Terrible Three were alone, they did not accept similar criticisms from outsiders - a sign of the closeness of the main characters. It was about this time that Monty Lowther became noted for punning as well as humorous remarks of a general nature.

Certain clouds came across the horizon to cast shadows, even in these idyllic days. In the halfpenny Gem plots were laid against Tom Merry, and in No. 8 of the new series Mellish in that famous story "The Tell Tale" was cast in the role of mischief maker, a remarkable psychological study. Friction was caused among the Terrible Three as well as elsewhere in the school, and it was a fascinating account of someone who enjoyed creating ill-feeling for its own sake and with no other end in view. This was a role that was taken over by Levison when he arrived some three years later, and it was Levison who on many occasions was to grate on Tom Merry's nerves. Nevertheless, despite this, despite Monty Lowther's passion for acting, and despite Manners' hobby of photography and his concern for his younger brother, the unity of the Terrible Three was never seriously threatened until the arrival of Talbot in the year 1914. Here the damage that was done was incalculable.

In a way, the first two Talbot series were the masterpieces of the blue Gem. They were stark and unadorned and written with a vivid simplicity that succeeded at times in touching the reader's heart. The trouble was that the friendship between Talbot and Tom Merry was so strong that study No. 10 lost its cohesion. Anyone who recalls the Gem cover with Talbot leaving and Tom Merry at the gatepost with his head buried in his arms will realise what had happened, especially as Talbot became a permanent character in the Gem. Talbot was too much of a potential rival to Tom Merry to be allowed to stay. You cannot have in the same form two popular characters who are both excellent sportsmen, outstanding in every way, and in short more than qualified to be junior captain. Yet that was the situation at St. Jim's which obtained after Talbot came to stay, and Tom Merry (not to mention the Terrible Three) never played quite the same part in the stories again. It was true that Talbot always declared he would never usurp Tom Merry's place, but the fact

was that he was still at St. Jim's and his pre-eminence cast a dark shadow over Tom Merry.

This was not just a matter of passing importance: it was in evidence as late as 1927:

Tom Merry did not doubt - he would never have allowed himself to doubt. Talbot was his chum; and Tom was not likely to doubt his chum's honour. But he looked troubled and dismayed as his search failed to find Talbot in the House. And Manners and Lowther exchanged some very uncomfortable glances as they accompanied Tom in his search.

It was not unknown for the Fistical Four or Famous Five to disagree, and there was an occasion when Jimmy Silver's advocacy on Oswald's behalf led to a rift in the lute. But nowhere else was one member of the Co. persistently more friendly with an outsider and to the exclusion of his old companions. The unity of the Terrible Three suffered a grievous blow when Talbot arrived, and Tom Merry's unfailing trust in Talbot (a trust which Manners and Lowther were not always able to share) served as a constant reminder that the old order had changed.

Of course, nothing stands still, and the innocent happiness and sense of adventure that pervaded the early stories would inevitably have changed and developed in any case. Nevertheless, St. Jim's seemed to suffer most from shifting balances and new centres of interest. As Eric Fayne has pointed out, it was the Gem that introduced a large number of new characters at a late stage, many having a coterie of their own, so that there was Grundy and his followers, Cardew and his friends, and Racke and his cronies, as well as loners like Talbot and Trimble. Perhaps Charles Hamilton himself felt at times that the stage was too cluttered, because in the holiday series he restricted the characters to the original groupings, and in the Caravanning and Old Bus series, for instance, the Terrible Three came into their own once more, as they did in the new stories written in 1939.

The strength of the Terrible Three lay in their mutual tolerance: on a half holiday Lowther could go off to a cinema, Manners could wander away with his camera, and Tom Merry could arrange extra cricket practice. In 1925 Martin Clifford wrote in the Gem:

It was one of the ways of the Terrible Three, perhaps one reason why their friendship remained unshaken, that they could always part company cheerfully and amicably when different desires drew them in different directions.

This was a unique feature that did not seem to apply to the Fistical Four or the Famous Five. The Terrible Three also possessed another advantage in that they were the smallest group and, unlike the Famous Five, they were in the same study and not scattered up and down the passage. Monty Lowther was also unique among central characters as a humorist: Newcome possessed the gift for quiet sarcasm but only Lowther perpetrated horrible puns and practical jokes, and (another example of Charles Hamilton's powers of observation) he could never see the funny side when he was the victim of a joke himself.

The final question remains: were the Terrible Three as attractive a grouping as the Famous Five or the Fistical Four? Each one possessed a weak

link in my opinion. Johnny Bull had his feet too firmly planted on the ground and how he deserved it when he was bumped for being right! "I told you so!" is the one insufferable remark. Lovell was too obstinate and intellectually feeble to deserve the friendship of the other members of the Fistical Four, but his actions were the motivating force behind a large number of actions at Rookwood, and he was thus an indispensable character in the scheme of things. Monty Lowether appeared most of the time to be drawn without much affection by Charles Hamilton: his jokes were not particularly amusing and it was difficult for the reader to warm to him. Perhaps it would have been better if Charles Hamilton had stuck to the Terrible Two after all.

* * * * *

WANTED: MAGNETS - only good ones please, suitable for binding.

B. SIMMONDS, 4 NUTFIELD ROAD, LONDON N.W.2. 7EB.

THE GREYFRIARS CLUB. The CHRISTMAS (24th) MEETING of Friars, Saints and Connoisseurs will be held at COURTFIELD on 16th December and will be duly reported in the Christmas Treble Number of the COURTFIELD NEWSLETTER'S which as usual will be "jam packed" with scores of letters and articles (see last year's announcement in the Annual by your Hon. Sec.).

This date will also be the official opening date of the FRANK RICHARDS MUSEUM AND LIBRARY at COURTFIELD and in this regard I, as Curator and Chairman of the TRUSTEES, would like to place on record my very deep appreciation and thanks to our PRESIDENT, TRUSTEES and all donors (a full list appears in the museum and CHRISTMAS NEWSLETTER) for the hundreds of relics originally used by FRANK RICHARDS, on show. See the current edition of the COURTFIELD NEWSLETTER'S for full details.

Your Courtfield Correspondent and hostess extend CHRISTMAS GREETINGS to all our friends, subscribers and donors from all the clubs, whose support and encouragement have done so much to make our hobby the enjoyable pastime it is.

R. F. (BOB) ACRAMAN, COURTFIELD, 49 KINGSEND

RUISLIP, MIDDX.

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Mustard Smith - Hot Stuff!

by J. R. SWAN

When a collector recently informed me that almost everything must have been written about boys' papers by now, I could not help giving a quiet chuckle. Whilst it may be true to some extent with such popular collected papers as *The Magnet*, *Gem*, *Nelson Lee* and *Sexton Blake*, it is a fact that there have been many popular papers in pre-second war days hardly been touched or mentioned at all in any articles. Included in this category was one of my most favourite boyhood papers and belonging to the D. C. Thomson group from Dundee, and that was *The Skipper*.

Mention of *The Famous Five*, automatically makes one think of *Harry Wharton & Co.*, yet there were two other famous - *Famous Fives* in children's literature. The *Enid Blyton* group, and the Thomson group of boys' papers consisting of *The Wizard*, *Adventure*, *Rover*, *Skipper* and *The Hotspur*. There were actually two others that had short runs and were obviously unsuccessful because of reprinted tales *The Vanguard* and *The Red Arrow*. Each paper had its own most popular characters that kept returning in various series. Probably the greatest were *The Wolf of Kabul* or *Wilson* in *The Wizard*. *The Black Sapper* and his burrowing machine in *The Rover*. *Adventure* seemingly had stories of *Dixon Hawke* detective of *Dover Street* who was a sort of rival to *Sexton Blake*. *Hotspur* had its famous school stories of *Red Circle*, and a schoolmaster in another series called *The Big Stiff*, whilst the *Skipper* eventually had a schoolmaster by the name of *Mustard Smith*.

Mustard Smith was a schoolmaster of the type that was so popular with readers. Big, friendly and with a broken nose that was received when he was fighting for the *Varsity Heavy-weight Championship*, he also of course played for *England* at *Soccer* and *cricket*, scoring many centuries and goals. He was dressed in a mortar board always at a rakish angle, and he carried a cricket stump in his hand, so there was hardly ever any trouble. He first arrived in *The Skipper* in No. 195 dated 26th May, 1934, (the paper actually commenced on the 6th September, 1930) when he arrived at the sleepy country town called *Binkerton*, to take up his post as a new assistant master at *Marbury College*. As in most schools of this type there was trouble between the college lads and those of the town, and one of his first jobs was to sort this out. Main boys in his class were *Jimmy Stokes* - the school centre-forward, and his friend *Lumpy Morgan*, whilst there was the usual snob clique - *Herbert Pottington* - a dandy who usually had a well oiled head of hair. Of course there was also the rather unpopular master (like *Hacker* of *Greyfriars*, and *Mr. Smugg* of *Red Circle*) this time being a *Mr. Peabody* - a podgy second master.

Personally I think that the *Mustard Smith* tales were written by the same author who penned *The Big Stiff* tales in the *Hotspur*, as they were similar in many respects. *Mustard* eventually after several series was promoted to a sort of *School Inspector* (like *The Big Stiff*) and whether the author had run out of local plots is probably likely, as in 1938 saw him in *New York* helping to fight crime - and fighting against a *Master Criminal* called *The Spider*.

Unfortunately The Skipper was killed off on the first of February 1941 owing to paper shortage, being presumed the weakest of the Famous Five, and never to return. Interesting figures of sales provided to me by W. O. G. Lofts shows that the Wizard sold almost more copies than all the others put together and there was not much difference between Adventure and Skipper sales. The latter did have a run of 543 issues, so could be considered quite successful in its way, and I shall always remember it with affection for the stories alone of Mustard Smith - and as the blurbs or slogans said about him 'He was very hot stuff'.

* * * * *

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The Sexton Blake Work of Anthony Parsons

... a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma
(Winston Churchill)

by GEOFFREY WILDE

"I think Tony Parsons is by far the best Blake man."

The words are those of the author John Hunter in a letter to Bill Lofts. Mr. Hunter, who was himself a 'Blake man' of no small distinction, displays a pleasant modesty in this comment, but we must applaud his judgment, which I think an entirely accurate one. It is the considered, and wholly deserved, tribute of one professional to another.

Anthony Parsons, who wrote his first SBL in 1937 and his last in 1956, with ninety-seven others between, was unquestionably the supreme Blake author of the period. I would go further. My own view is that in terms of sustained quality assessed by adult standards there is only one other figure of comparable stature in the entire history of Blake writing. The other, of course, is G. H. Teed. Teed's creation has been much written of; I find it odd that we should have waited so long for a comprehensive study of Parsons' work.

Quality each reader must ultimately experience for himself. What I can do is to describe the salient characteristics of Parsons' output, from which some impression of his quality may emerge; and first I think it useful to pursue the comparison with Teed a little further.

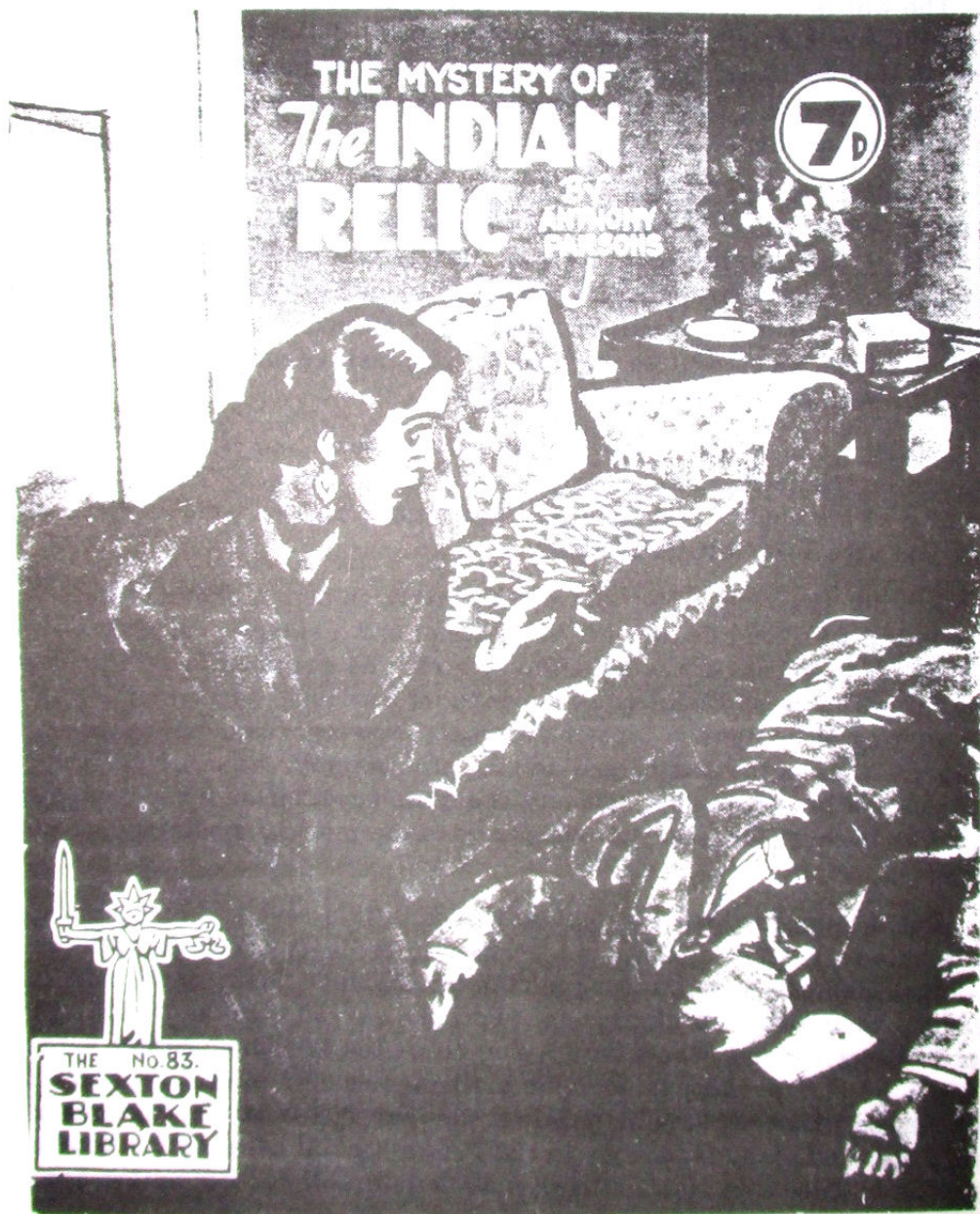
Strictly speaking, a detective story requires both a problem (traditionally, one connected with the commission of a crime) and a solver. By this classical definition, Teed did not write detective stories - he wrote stories of criminal adventure, with Sexton Blake as a freelance international agent; and he is at his best in writing of intrigue in foreign settings. Now Parsons, by contrast, very much specialises in the setting and solving of problems: he confronts the reader with puzzles of breath-taking ingenuity and quite bewildering beauty and intricacy, like studies in three-dimensional chess. It is the most immediately striking feature of his work.

But if he meets the classical definition in this respect, in others his approach is more akin to Teed's. Action and adventure, tellingly combined with the intellectual element, play a strong part in his stories. Many of the best of them, moreover, have foreign backgrounds. Parsons served with the R.F.C. in India, and later Egypt, during World War I, and he writes of both countries with great authority; he is especially famous for his Indian cases. And in the Parsons novels we see Sexton Blake working on behalf of the War Office or other branches of Government, and also, from time to time, in a special capacity for Scotland Yard - so that, as in Teed's yarns, he figures as an international consultant specialist, and one whose cases commonly have political overtones.

These points of resemblance between the two writers are not, I believe, due

to simple coincidence. The pure classical detective story is both a highly artificial and a highly demanding form, one of the least suitable, in fact, on which to base a weekly or monthly magazine. The outstanding Blake writers wisely avoid it. Teed side-stepped its demands; Parsons, remarkably, embraced many of them - but he moulded the form to his own requirements. In neither writer will you find any marquises murdered in the conservatory or criminals called The Shadow who obligingly drop a postcard to the police announcing their forthcoming exploits.

Parsons, in fact, never writes an orthodox Whodunit. The question he poses is rather: What is going on? and What lies behind it all? The astounding revelation



that crowns a vintage Anthony Parsons is the nature, and the ultimate objective, of the crime itself. Characteristically, this is something breathtaking and colossal, not simply in the physical sense but in the vaulting imagination of its conception. Only a tremor along the fringes of the web hints at its existence; we trace a thread here, another there; but always it is the pattern we are seeking to identify, the design which will lie revealed when, logically perfected, every strand is woven into place. And the author, rather than trying to outwit his readers, invites them to share in the absorption and the thrill of the process of elucidation.

I know of no other writer who makes the actual business of detection, of sifting through to an answer, such a central feature of his work - and who makes it of such engrossing interest. In that very special sense, he writes true detective stories. And what stories! We find ourselves in a gorgeous but bewildering maze. Probing, testing, calculating every turn, we thread its corridors towards what our reasoning tells us is the goal. At last, we reach a golden door; expectantly we open it - and lo! not the treasure-chamber, but the entrance to another maze. It is like peeling off the layers of an onion. To paraphrase Churchill, the secret at the heart of a Parsons case lies hidden within a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.

His plots, therefore, are extremely complex, to a degree with few parallels in detective fiction. While quite a compliment to the reader, this is also an eloquent testimony to his skill: the builder of such labyrinths must be genuinely clever and an absolute master of construction - as Parsons is. All the parts mesh smoothly together; he times unerringly each fresh convolution or moment of disclosure; his logic is faultless. And, furthermore, this masterful complexity makes possible much else to admire, not all of it immediately predictable - excitement, effective characterisation, and a high level of verisimilitude.

Excitement, because complexity springs from proliferation of ideas. There is no padding in a Parsons story; there isn't room for any. And so cram-full of substance are his pages, so irresistible is the torrent of ideas, that the reader feels a sense of tremendous pace and energy. Moreover, it is typical of him that events, generating their own momentum as we draw nearer a solution, move from the intellectual to the physical plane as his narrative proceeds: the unravelling of the knot becomes a form of pursuit. Action and adventure are thus wholly integral to the puzzle, woven in a natural and most satisfying way into the very process of decipherment.

Beautifully-achieved characterisation, firstly, of Blake and Tinker themselves: with a hundred telling touches, Parsons presents to us one of the most pleasing of all portraits of the Baker Street partners. What most of all impresses them on our memory, though, is simply watching them at work on these intricate and imaginative cases. Blake stands out as an investigator of unchallenged intellectual supremacy, while Tinker, too, seen as a young man, not a boy, emerges as a resourceful, fully-equipped professional detective. Happier in action than meditation (as is natural enough) he nonetheless has a good brain, and is invariably seen to use it, as he does (to give but one instance) in chapters 12-15 of SBL 3rd No. 79.

The most famous of Parsons' character-studies, though, is undoubtedly that of his own Scotland Yard ace, Superintendent Claude (or Claudius) Venner. Venner, vain as a peacock and as gorgeously-arrayed, unabashed stealer of the limelight and picker of men's brains, is a real creation. For all his faults, he is a capable detective and a fine administrator; his superb control of the Yard machine makes him an invaluable ally, and he is not without his moments of insight. Contrasted with the magnificent and volatile 'sooper' is his shabby but quietly shrewd assistant, Belford. The pair are admirable foils for the Baker Street duo, and Venner's verbal duels with Tinker and with Blake's formidable landlady provide an enjoyable touch of humour. As long ago as 1947, Rex Dolphin picked out Venner as "perhaps the most brilliantly characterised official of them all". The verdict remains valid to this day.

Parsons' portrayal of police-work at all levels is distinguished by its credibility, and in recognising that even the super-sleuth depends on the backing of an elaborate scientific machine manned by a corps of experts he displays a realism rare, and welcome, in the genre. And, mercifully, he never inflicts on us the cliché-figure of the blundering police blockhead. The cracking of the Parsons cases is shown as the work of a highly proficient team whose combined skills and efforts are united, and find their ultimate consummation, in the person of Sexton Blake. Some of them will never re-appear in his pages; but they are characterised, and they are given credit for their contribution. This commendably realistic picture of the pattern of crime-investigation is something again made possible by the depth and ingenuity of his plotting, and, significantly, it enhances rather than detracting from Blake's stature: we measure him by the ability of his associates.

This kind of credibility is but one indication of the wholly adult tone of Parsons' stories, a conspicuous feature of his work which made him, in a quiet way, something of a pioneer in his day. His plots reveal an understanding of politics, finance, law, commerce and banking, the procedure involved in documentation of all kinds. One of his characters may keep a mistress, or a prostitute may furnish vital evidence: he shows no false squeamishness in such matters, though he isn't ever self-indulgent about them either. And his knowledge of forensics and the detail of investigatory techniques is such as to make one wonder if he had first-hand experience under the British Raj. The finer points of his stories often call for an adult's grasp, and it is an adult level of appreciation that his stories inspire.

And the man can write. Apart from an entertaining tendency to misuse the word 'literally' ("Venner literally flayed him with his tongue" or "the man was literally walking on air"), his style is without blemish. 'Dynamic' and 'brilliant' are adjectives which come to mind - he has the verve and the bold brush-strokes to match the urgency of his ideas, the kind of technique which quickly draws in the reader. But none of this must be taken to imply a hasty or careless style. Reasoning as meticulous as his cannot be supported by slapdash writing, and he is too instinctive an artist to try rushing such crucial, if apparently uneventful, components of story-telling as atmosphere and scene-setting.

He is also a master of dialogue, which is extremely important to him: Blake and Tinker (often with the Yard men in attendance too) invariably 'talk through' the extraordinary riddles he confronts them with, debating, hypothesising, examining

the problem from every angle, until one of them receives the flash of insight that brings them a step nearer the answer. A characteristic example may be found in chapter 9 of SBL 3rd No. 83. For a sample of his descriptive and narrative quality you need look no further than chapters 11 and 12 of SBL 2nd No. 694 (though you'll certainly find yourself reading on); for sinister atmosphere and palpitating tension, chapter 8 of SBL 3rd No. 132.

What no mere sampling can convey to you is the wholly individual fascination, the sheer mystique, of Parsons' very finest work, which for the most part belongs to his early output. He moved, in fact, at one stride into the forefront of Blake authors, bringing off a stupendous double hat-trick with his first six novels. All the ingredients we have noted - the elaborately-woven plot, the dramatic cross-currents of action and intrigue, the Indian background, the meticulous detective-work, the shattering climactic discovery - are strikingly present in his first book, The Secret of the Ten Bales (SBL 2nd No. 596). It must be the most brilliantly accomplished first novel ever to appear in SBL. A copy can still be secured with a little luck, since a cheap hardback re-issue was brought out by Dean & Sons in 1968. Utterly contrasted but equally riveting, his second novel, The Riddle of Big Ben (2nd 617), introduces a famous Parsons opening gambit - a top hat impaled on one of the pinnacles of Big Ben. It is a long way from that seemingly harmless little teaser to the cliff-hanger of the final chapters, an adventure sequence that could have been scripted for a James Bond movie. (One used something very like it.) The chain that links these bemusing extremes is pure gold in every link. And how did the top hat get there? Ah, that would be telling.

The dazzling succession of stories which now followed, five novels in which Parsons featured the Hindu, Gunga Dass, could properly form a study in themselves. Regarding his take-over of an existing character, my own guess is that someone at Fleetway recognised that in the elusive criminal genius known to The Ten Bales simply as Mahomet Khan (whose potentialities were clearly wasted in one novel) Parsons, with his special knowledge of India, had unwittingly perfected the portrait of H. E. Hill's arch-villain. So the one in effect 'became' the other. What is beyond doubt is that these books constitute a unique highpoint in the career of Sexton Blake, and that Dass, in Parsons' hands, becomes the one truly authentic master-criminal. Others (Teed's especially) have charisma; Dass has intelligence. Having created a Blake of unprecedented intellectual authority, Parsons alone could create for him an opponent who is his match.

The next second Tinker hit the water and disappeared - but even then his wits did not desert him. Deep down near the bed of the creek he realised that he had but one chance - and that, not to go forward but to go back! They would be looking for him to come up farther out in the basin; but instead he would go back and come up close under the timber of the wharf itself!

He turned and swam back in that direction. He swam until his lungs were bursting and he was on the point of collapse, but just then his fingers touched the woodwork and he floated quietly to the surface.

Instantly he was seized. Before ever he had a chance to open his eyes and clear them of water, hands were on his throat and others were round

his arms ... Ignominiously he was hauled from the water and dumped on the floor of a boat and someone held a lamp over him.

"Didn't I tell you he would turn back?" said a suave, mocking voice.

Some individual mention must be made of the three stories that form the centre-piece of this group - for my money, the most sublime consecutive trio in Blake history. The Harem Mystery (2nd 671) is on many a connoisseur's short-list for the title of Greatest Blake Story of All Time. An unknown white girl found murdered inside an inaccessible and permanently-guarded harem - so is Blake faced with an amazing locked-room mystery which is but the prelude to further extraordinary riddles and dramatic adventures played out against the exotically-coloured backcloth of the East; and behind it all lies the most colossal and audaciously brilliant plot of Gunga Dass's career. One cannot really describe a novel of such kaleidoscopic richness and variety: steal a copy (so long as it isn't mine) or persuade Mr. Baker to reprint it, and read it for yourself. The Case of the Crook Rajah (2nd 681) and The Secret of the Golden Horse (2nd 694), the one set wholly in London, the other moving from England to India after the manner of the author's first book, are two further opulent mosaics of detection and adventure with all the fascinating intricacy of mystery-within-mystery which shows Parsons' inspiration still glowing at white-heat. With these two wonderful stories he achieved the near-impossible, following The Harem Mystery without anti-climax.

But the day of the let-down could not be indefinitely deferred, as the writer well knew. At the close of The Golden Horse part of an Indian temple is blown up, bringing down half a mountain with it. The Baker Street pair are lucky to escape with their lives. Dass is not so fortunate. Or so it appears ... One can see Parsons' reasons for now deciding to be rid of Dass. He must have looked back with awe as well as pride at the magical quality of the Dass novels to date, and have known it would be fatal arrogance to presume he could match them in future. To succumb to the temptation of providing just one more sequel (as many famous authors had done before him) would be to devalue his own legend. And wisely he resolved to put temptation behind him.

Not immediately, though! His next SBL sees Dass restored and very much alive, for it is his mercurial and malignant presence which lies behind The Secret of Oil Creek (2nd 710), another absorbing Indian adventure. If this fine story is the weakest of the Dass novels it is only marginally so, and then by the awesome criteria of judgment the others impose. Nevertheless, we can only applaud Parsons' decision to make this his last Dass story. At this distance of time we can rejoice that there was to be no falling-off, and look back on a fabulous quintet of detective-adventure tales as near perfection as one can expect in an imperfect world.

I think Parsons felt a certain nostalgia for the Hindu, though. Now and again in later cases we have a tantalising hint that his hand might be at work, but Blake always insists that Dass is dead. Tinker realises (good psychology, this) that his chief hates to admit even to himself that his arch-enemy might still be alive. Pleasing as these little references are to old readers, the curious point is that they all speak of Dass as having been killed in the temple explosion - as though the Oil Creek affair, in other words, had never happened. Parsons had come to feel,

clearly, that The Golden Horse marked the more perfect exit for his anti-hero - and re-reading its concluding chapters we may perhaps agree.

His next book, The Man from China (2nd 722 - the only title he used twice), suffers inevitably from the absence of Dass, though, of course, that is not fair criticism. There need be no reservations about its two successors, which compensate by introducing two new characters. Belton Brass of the British Secret Service and Mlle. Yvonne de Braselieu are a World War II equivalent of Pierre Quiroule's Granite Grant and Mlle. Julie, and we were to meet them again in some later stories. Curiously, on the very first page of The Case of the Missing Major (2nd 729) the lady is called Annette. I suspect this was Parsons' original name for her, that the editor tried to capitalise on memories of Teed's character, and that in this single instance the necessary proof amendment was overlooked. A small curiosity attaches also to The Mystery of the Free Frenchman (2nd 741). The cover and the inner title illustration both give the plural 'Frenchmen'; the spine and page-headings the singular. On balance, I feel the latter best fits the context. But these are trivial matters. The important thing is that both stories are virtuoso pieces, with the author in spell-binding form.

So ended Parsons' work for the 2nd series. It forms a sumptuous and enchanting tapestry unmatched by any other writer, and sets the standards by which all Blake writing must be judged. If he had never written another word, these ten novels, in their cornucopian wealth of idea, their complete technical command and compulsive readability, would remain as a landmark in Blake literature.

But we are drawing a line which is more apparent than real.

The New Series numbering began in June 1941. There can be little doubt that it signalled the decisive shifting of the SBL on to a war footing. The Library had kept up its standard fare surprisingly far on into the war, but in a blacked-out, blitzed, beleaguered Britain it was hopelessly anachronistic. The war, and the wholly changed way of life it had brought about, were facts the Blake writers could no longer ignore; they were going through a time of uneasy transition.

Parsons, however, who had already anticipated the change of emphasis in his last two novels, embraced the challenge with enormous zest, and without so much as pausing in his stride. He quickly appreciated, I think, that what the war had done was to give reality a substantial push in the direction of his kind of story-telling: that the lives of nations and of individuals were now in truth caught up in a web of secrecy and drama of the kind wherein his imagination delighted, and where his fertile brain perceived that fictional possibilities must abound. The amazing true stories of those epic years show how right he was. The secret Commando strike against the heavy-water plants in Norway, or the patient back-room trials that produced a bouncing bomb and culminated in the famous Dam-Busters' mission: such things are the very stuff of his pages - fact masquerading as an Anthony Parsons novel.

Despite their period background, therefore, the Parsons SBL's of the early 3rd series are in all major essentials - not least their superb standard - wholly of a piece with what he had written hitherto. And yet there is an important sense in

which these war-time stories stand somewhat apart. The historian acknowledges their importance in sustaining the SBL through difficult times. The connoisseur sees them as natural successors to the author's pre-war triumphs. For many readers, who remember how they lightened a weary hour on Service or on the Home Front, they are something more. And just as those first masterpieces are haloed with an aura all their own, so these wonderful and evocative exploits of the 40's stand out in our recollection of their twilit era like starshells bursting over some scarred Cimmerian landscape. In their ability to capture the ethos of an age, as well as to display the highest intrinsic quality, they are true classics, and they confer a special distinction upon what must otherwise have been a mediocre period in Blake fiction.

Within the author's characteristic framework these splendid tales encompass a considerable variety: espionage; undercover missions; orthodox domestic mystery complicated by the shifting circumstance of war; an Italian plot in Egypt; further enthralling riddles in India. I pick out two personal favourites.

No. 19 is an absorbing example of what for convenience I call the "chain" mystery - a Parsons speciality: the investigation starts at one end of a chain or sequence of events, but the key to the mystery may lie anywhere along its length. Here, a King's Messenger is attacked and two murders are committed to obtain possession of a dispatch-box containing merely routine memos from Cairo. Had one of the memos an unsuspected security significance? Had some secret enclosure been smuggled into the box - and if so, where, how, and by whom? Or, an intriguing thought, was the stolen box itself not the one that set out from Cairo? And if not, just how and where was the switch made? A teasing tangle for Sexton Blake to unravel, and (complete with colourful climax) quintessential Parsons.

No. 24 starts with a mysterious corpse and a problem of identification, but its ramifications are fascinating and far-reaching. The culminating discovery of a gigantic German plot aimed against Britain's shipping could again almost come out of a Bond movie, and indeed the whole book is a natural for filming.

After No. 44 - which is unusual for its classical surprise solution - I see the first signs of fatigue setting in. The time was early 1943; in four crisis-torn years Parsons had completed 18 SBL's unparalleled in their sustained excellence and inventive drive, the last 11 of them in only 22 months. He had every right to be tired. He never wrote a poor Blake story in his life, but from now on to the end of his career there were to be interludes when he was below his characteristic form, and I find the first such interlude in his next three novels. They are interesting and thoroughly competent products, well above the SBL average; but we had come to expect from their creator a magical extra dimension, and it is this which seems lacking.

With Nos. 62 and 67 he is in full flow again, the latter an especially taxing puzzle because it confronts Blake with the problem of proving a negative. There were more good stories over the next twelve months. Much of No. 83 is a particularly exciting action adventure, though prefaced by shrewd detective work by all four regular investigators; Nos. 76, 79, 87 and 98 are all first-rate. Though No. 90 is less memorable it does include an outstanding feat of ratiocination by

Tinker. This is a pleasant instance of the variety with which genius can afford to indulge us: the Farringdon Street scribes would have built the whole novel out of this incident - and they couldn't have 'wasted' it on anyone but Blake himself.

The year 1946 began with Nos. 111, 115 and 117, a very enjoyable trio involving an "impossible" crime in England, an ingenious variation on a theme from Macbeth, and some extremely tense adventures in India. And then after another more subdued interval we had two stories which in different ways broke new ground.

No. 132 is to an unusual degree a pure thriller, remarkable for the brooding and malevolent atmosphere which hangs over it - a powerful story wrapped in physical and spiritual darkness. No. 134 is not only a cleverly-constructed tale which leads the reader up the garden path - it marks the first appearance of Lady Emily Westomholme, a young and beautiful adventure-seeker, late of the WRNS and "Sexton Blake's newest recruit". I'm not sure if her patronymic has three syllables or is one of those Cholmondeley-names and pronounced Westum. Mostly she is just called Emily, and she is Parsons' last - and very charming - addition to the gallery of recurring characters. Resourceful as well as pretty, she is called in when the Blake investigation-team has particular need of a female operative. Emily not only lends variety to the stories, but also a pleasantly romantic touch, since she is manifestly (as Anthony himself would say) in love with Sexton Blake.

The two numbers which followed mark a curiously nostalgic watershed in Parsons' work. From their point of vantage we can look back over a gorgeous procession of spell-binding, utterly original tales - virtuoso displays of almost outrageous daring, where romantic grandeur vies with baroque elaboration to the fascinated astonishment and delight of the reader. And here, for the last time, as though reluctantly ready to close a creative period, he gives his labyrinthine fantasy full rein.

No. 138 is a model story of its kind. From the stunning shock of its opening we move through steady police-work to some truly inspired reasoning by the Blake team and, as the net closes in, to drama, tension and excitement, with a typical (and topical) Parsons secret finally disclosed. No. 141, with its intriguing opening gambit, is even more complex. He had reached, as we now know, almost precisely the half-way point in his output; he was to write nothing quite so intricate again.

No. 148 was the last of the solid 96-page SBL's - a format familiar to the bookstalls since 1932 - and the Library now reverted to the slimmer 64-page styling current before that date. The external change coincided with a subtle modification in the content of Parsons' stories. It was now the spring of 1947 - that spring which was to turn to long, dreaming, golden summer as we basked in unquenchable sunshine and Compton and Edrich batted for ever. How touchingly it spoke to us, that unforgettable summer which said that war was finally over and recalled the images of sweetly far-off days! Yet we knew that there could be no real turning back. We were moving into the post-war world. And so, inevitably, was Sexton Blake. The Missing Parachutist was the last of Parsons' tales whose substance was intimately tied in with the war. The iridescent colours which had so magically lit the Dass novels, the strangely poignant romanticism of the war itself - these were of an age now gone for ever. And with unfailing professionalism he turned his

attention to a more orthodox kind of mystery story in keeping with the times.

His first 'slim' SBL I find rather inferior, but he was soon providing a succession of novels which showed his familiar skill, his capacity for satisfying reasoning, and much of his old panache. He had trimmed the sails of his imagination a little, working as he was with rather less canvas, and was turning out a more compact kind of story - this was, after all, the period of 'austerity'. But there can be no doubting the accomplished way in which he was adapting to what I might call Standard English mystery - some of his titles at this time are indicative - and modifying that in turn to suit his own needs. And still he was revealing his old fertility of idea, and he was ever alert to the plot-possibilities of such events as the Independence of India.

An old admirer notices that his stories, though clever and compelling, were now moving in more of a straight line from problem to solution; yet once or twice in this 3rd series transitional phase, which lasted something over two years, he harked back to his earlier baroque manner. Nothing from this period more grippingly recalls past splendours than No. 189, a winner all the way, but No. 198 is another fine tale which runs it close. A light plane en route from England makes a forced landing in France. Before it bursts into flames an occupant is dragged clear; but he has been dead - of poisoning - for many hours. Where is the pilot? And why deliberately wreck the plane when the body could have been dumped without trace over the Channel? A typical Parsons gambit: and when Blake discovers the plane had grounded at a touch-down point formerly used by the Resistance the plot begins to ramify as of old. As always when the author is in vintage vein, the final answer is a long, long way, conceptually as well as spatially, from the intriguing starting-point.

From the summer of 1950 right through 1951 Parsons was in fine form. No. 221 is a particularly strong tale. Set in India once more, it confronts the reader with an "impossible" crime; yet in the outcome Sexton Blake produces not one but two solutions to the case, one for official purposes and, for our eyes only, the true one. The way in which he touches (I choose the word carefully) on one decisive clue is a beautiful example of what chess-players call a "quiet" move.

No. 235 offers a deceptively simple case - a fatal fall on a cliff path - but as Blake probes deeper it develops into an absorbing puzzle. When he puts his reasoning to the test in an undercover operation a chilling sense of menace envelopes the story, the more chilling for its quiet rural setting.

In No. 238 we have a remarkable example of the "chain" mystery - though perhaps a "train" of events is a more appropriate term here. A business-man travels by train from London to Rome and there disappears. Is it a voluntary disappearance, to hide his defalcations? Blake suspects not: that he was murdered on the train and then impersonated at Rome to confuse enquiry. But if such a switch was made, just where had it taken place? Working backwards, he retraces the journey step by step, until finally we discover the victim never left London, but lies buried beneath the blitzed tower of the title. Brilliant deductive work marks every stage of Blake's reconstruction, and the whole story must be reckoned a tour de force.

No. 245 has an English village setting throughout. Squire drowns (accidentally?) in local stream. Some weeks later a strange girl calls on one of the residents, then simply vanishes on a short stretch of road with no turnings. So unaccountable; so featureless. The very absence of data makes for an engrossing mystery, told in a leisurely, low-key manner which actually generates increasing drama. No. 251, by contrast, neatly dovetails financial chicanery with a most unusual variant of the "locked-room" murder that is wholly dependent upon its Cairo setting.

These are all thoroughly satisfying stories that give an idea of the impressive quality of Parsons' best work at this time. Indeed, once he had mastered his post-war idiom, so to speak, his slim 3rd series novels had maintained a formidable standard. Nos. 164, 193 and 271, for instance, are in their different ways scarcely below the level of the numbers I have highlighted.

Passing mention will not suffice for No. 277, a particularly memorable undercover thriller - with, needless to say, an interesting puzzle for good measure. The blend Parsons serves up in this fine issue, and the central idea upon which it rests, make of it a story which stands somewhat apart from the rest of his output and which forms Lady Emily's finest case.

His last 20 SBL's, unhappily, were to include few stories of this calibre. It is pleasant, though, to record a last purple patch in mid-1954 with the four novels starting at No. 307, another technical coup - a murder mystery with no documentary evidence to suggest that the victim had ever existed. No. 311 is pure classical detection, with enjoyable red-herrings, admirable police-work, and a triumphant re-enactment of the crime by Sexton Blake; as well-knit and comfortable as a Shetland-wool cardigan. No. 314 is in similar mould, though it adds an Indian dimension, while No. 319 is the last of the Middle-Eastern mysteries to carry the authentic and wholly inimitable Anthony Parsons hallmark.

The decline which now set in was signalled by a series of tattily unstylish cover illustrations - how they jarred after more than 25 years of work by the masterly Eric Parker! The point is not wholly a trivial one: changes were afoot in the Library, and Parsons must have sensed there would not much longer be a place for him. He can hardly have expected his powers of invention to burn undimmed for ever; but equally the impending change of regime (and no criticism of Howard Baker is here implied or intended) can hardly have been conducive to them.

Still, he was to put one last winner in the field.

The Case of the Frightened Man is a gripping thriller whose basic design follows that of Mason's Arms. This time the undercover agent, working on behalf of Scotland Yard, is Tinker - who to the great amusement of Messrs. Venner and Belford goes to jail! Tension, humour, puzzle and pursuit combine in this excellent tale, and happily for all old readers the sooper is in at the exciting kill. There is a heart-warming valedictory strain in this lovely story, as though the four friends and rivals know they are joking and striving together for the last time; the reader closes the book with a sigh of mingled satisfaction and regret.

With this sweetest of swan-songs for the Yard - Baker Street foursome Parsons could fittingly have written *finis*. And after one more (unremarkable) SBL with its patently New Look title he indeed bowed out. Over a period of eighteen years he had averaged five novels a year: 99 SBL's, with not a dud among them, and only a scattering of relative disappointments. Much more than that, a full two dozen of them stand among the finest Blake stories of all time, and as many again not far behind. He brought to Blake literature an unprecedented maturity, imagination and technical virtuosity, enlarging all its boundaries and placing it firmly on the roll of detective fiction. He virtually re-defined the word 'classic'.

What a pity that this treasure-house of endlessly fascinating reading should remain locked against all but a relative handful of specialist collectors. The time is surely due when the best of Parsons' work, like the best of Teed's, should be re-issued for a wider audience. But that, as they say, is - or with luck it will be - another story.

SEXTON BLAKE STORIES BY ANTHONY PARSONS

SBL 2nd Series

- 596 The Secret of the Ten Bales (a)
- 617 The Riddle of Big Ben (b)
- 638 The Allah's Eye Conspiracy (c)
- 671 The Harem Mystery (c)
- 681 The Case of the Crook Rajah (c)
- 694 The Secret of the Golden Horse (c)
- 710 The Secret of Oil Creek (c)
- 722 The Man from China
- 729 The Case of the Missing Major (d)
- 741 The Mystery of the Free Frenchman (d)

SBL 3rd Series

- 2 On the Stroke of Nine (d)
- 8 The Man from Occupied France (d)
- 12 The Clue of the Stolen Rupees
- 16 The House with Steel Shutters
- 19 The Mystery of the Stolen Despatches (d)
- 24 The Stowaway of the S. S. Wanderer
- 28 The Secret of the Burma Road
- 32 The Plot of the Yellow Emperor
- 36 The Riddle of the Captured Quisling
- 40 The Riddle of the Disguised Greek
- 44 The Case of the Missing D. F. C.
- 52 Calling Whitehall 1212
- 55 The Crime of the Cashiered Major
- 58 The Riddle of Cubicle 7
- 62 The Case of the Secret Road
- 67 The Mystery of the Cairo Express
- 72 The Case of the Renegade Naval Officer
- 76 The Case of the Indian Millionaire
- 79 The Mystery of the Bombed Monastery
- 83 The Mystery of the Indian Relic
- 87 The Loot of France
- 90 The Riddle of the Gambling Den
- 96 The Case of the Stolen Evidence
- 98 The Blackmailed Refugee
- 105 The Case of the Spanish Legatee
- 111 The Riddle of the Indian Alibi
- 115 The Case of the Prince's Prisoners
- 117 The Mystery of 250,000 Rupees

SBL 3rd Series (cont'd.)

- 121 The Case of the Missing G. I. Bride
- 124 The Man Who Had to Quit
- 127 The Case of the Swindler's Stogie
- 132 The Mystery of the Bankrupt Estate
- 134 The Yank Who Came Back (e)
- 138 The Riddle of the Escaped P. O. W.
- 141 The Affair of the Missing Parachutist (e)
- 145 The Man from Kenya
- 148 The Eustan Road Mystery
- 151 The Riddle of the Burmese Curse
- 158 The Mystery of the Whitehall Bomb
- 161 The Income-Tax Conspiracy
- 164 The Loot of Pakistan
- 167 The Mystery of the Red Cockatoo
- 171 The Man Who Backed Out (e)
- 175 The Mystery of the One-Day Alibi
- 177 The Riddle of the Russian Bride
- 180 The Mystery of Avenue Road
- 184 Terror at Tree Tops (e)
- 189 The Case of the Dangra Millions (e)
- 193 The Case of the Missing Surgeon
- 198 The Riddle of the Rajah's Curios
- 203 The Man from China
- 207 The Riddle of the Prince's Stogie
- 211 Those on the List
- 215 Living in Fear
- 217 The Great Dollar Fraud
- 221 The Mystery of the Crooked Gift
- 225 The Case of the Spiv's Secret
- 231 The Millionaire's Nest-Egg
- 235 Retired from the Yard (e)
- 238 The Mystery of the Blitzed Tower
- 241 The Case of the Indian Dancer
- 245 The Mystery of the Girl in Green
- 251 The Bad-Man of Cairo
- 257 The Case of the Missing Scientist
- 260 The Man Without a Passport (e)
- 262 The Case of the Blackmailed Prince
- 267 The Case of the Banned Film
- 271 The Case of the Japanese Contract

cont'd...

SBL 3rd Series (cont'd.)

277	The Mystery of Mason's Arms (e)
281	Crook's Deputy
285	The Case of the Prince's Diary
290	The Secret of the Indian Lawyer
295	The Case of the Unknown Heir
300	The Case of the Nameless Millionaire
305	The Secret of Sinister Farm
307	The Secret of the Castle Ruins
311	The Car-Park Mystery
314	The Case of the Second Crime
319	The Secret of the Moroccan Bazaar
322	The Case of the Wicked Three
326	The Man from Maybrick Road
329	The Case of the Indian Watcher

333	The Prisoner in the Hold (e)
337	The Secret of the Roman Temple
340	The Case of the Six O'Clock Scream
341	The Trail of the Missing Scientist
344	The Crooks of Tunis
348	The Case of the Frightened Man
357	Hotel Homicide

Sexton Blake Annual

No. 2	The One Who Knew (f)
No. 3	The Secret Amulet
No. 4	The Riddle of O.C. Balloon Barrage (f)

NOTES and REFERENCES

- (a) Introduces Captain (later Major) James Winfield of the Indian Police, who features in several of the later Indian novels.
- (b) Introduces Superintendent Claude Venner of Scotland Yard. Venner, with his associate, Detective-Sergeant (later Detective-Inspector) Belford, appears in almost all the subsequent stories. He is absent, naturally, from the novels set in India or Egypt, though he may still be mentioned, as when Blake cables the Yard for information. Only a handful of the English cases exclude him.
- (c) These five novels feature Gunga Dass.
- (d) Stories featuring Belton Brass and Mlle. Yvonne de Braselieu.
- (e) Stories featuring Lady Emily Westomholme.
- (f) The four Sexton Blake Annuals included both new stories and reprints (some acknowledged as such, some not) that featured such famous characters as R. S. V. Purvale, Captain Dack, Raffles, Zenith and Huxton Rymer. The provenance of these stories must have been obvious to all but the newest readers, yet *The Secret Amulet* is the only piece in the entire four volumes to be attributed to an author by name. How this single credit got by is one of those little mysteries, but no less puzzling is the reversion to a policy of anonymous authorship, long since abandoned by the other Blake publications.

This editorial eccentricity has almost certainly given rise to the belief (held by Messrs. Lofts and Adley among others) that Anthony Parsons wrote 99 SBL's and only one other Blake story. However, the 2nd Annual contains a postscript in which the editor, eccentric to the last, actually identifies many of the contributors; he specifically assigns *The One Who Knew* to Anthony Parsons, and I see no reason to disbelieve him. As for the story in the 4th Annual, it is an extremely modest short-short, obviously written to order. But it does introduce Venner, Parsons' own character, whom he would not have allowed any Fleetway House odd-jobber to take liberties with, I think. And the tale is quite neatly-turned. In fact, none of the internal evidence is positively against the idea of Parsons' having written it, and so we must, I feel, accept the story as his. He therefore wrote 102 Blake stories in all.

Biographical details, many supplied by Mr. Parsons' sister, can be found in Vic Colby's article in C.D. No. 212 (August 1964).

John Hunter's letter to Mr. Lofts is quoted in C.D. No. 225 (September 1965).

The Venner quotation is taken from Rex Dolphin's "Friends at the Yard" in the C.D. Annual for 1947.

My own article "In Defence of Superintendent Venner" can be found in C.D. No. 333 (September 1974).

* * * * *

WANTED: "Always a Knight", author unknown. Greetings to all.

MAURICE KING, 18 BARTON ROAD, SLOUGH

BERKS., SL3 8DF. Tel. 43950

Recollections and Reflections

by JACK OVERHILL

In 1911, when I was eight years old, I found a copy of Comic Cuts in our kitchen-workshop; it had been used as wrapping-paper; I smoothed it out and went and sat on the front doorstep in the Sunday afternoon sunshine to look at it. The Street, a cul-de-sac of twenty-six houses, broken flagstone-paths and a cobbled roadway, was deserted and had the sanctified air of the Sabbath.

Tom, the Ticket of Leave Man, is running up a railway-bridge, a bulging bag, labelled SWAG, slung over one shoulder, P.C. Fairyfoot in hot pursuit. In danger of being caught red-handed, Tom looks round, sees a train coming and as it roars up, he leans over the parapet and adroitly drops the swag into one of the funnels. Leaning carelessly against the wall of the bridge he waits with an air of innocence. The policeman draws level, looks puzzled as Tom is empty-handed, and goes on his way. Tom waits till he's in the distance, then he dashes across the bridge to catch the bag of swag the train belches up to him as it comes out under it.

The time element between the train travelling under the bridge and all that happened on top was lost on me and I gloried in Tom's ruse. So would any of the gang of which I was a member. We regarded policemen as natural enemies and badgered them into stalking us round a small block of houses. At each corner we'd halt, one of us would chant, 'What's your mother wash the linen in?' 'Copper!' we'd shout and bolt to the next corner. Again, the chant: 'What's a penny's nickname?' 'Copper!' we'd bawl and bolt, again. So it went on till the 'slop' gave up and resumed his beat. None of us was ever caught. We knew why. A policeman had no right to run more than six yards!

There was a large variety of comics. Comic Cuts, Chips, Merry & Bright and Butterfly were my favourites. I didn't like Lot o' Fun. Dreamy Daniel gave me the willies. It wasn't only his ugly mug and shuffling figure, he was dreaming all that was taking place. My own dreams were enough for me. I didn't read the stories. I'd heard they were blood and thunder, best left alone.

Boys' story papers were still a long way off.

I was ten when I came across a grubby page of a greenish paper called The Boys' Friend. I found it upstairs, came downstairs with it and read the end of a story, all there was of it, in the fading light of an October afternoon. A mystery had been solved and a woman and two boys were parting. I've wondered ever since what the story was about.

Another find was a few pages of a threepenny library, Boys' Friend, or Boys' Own. It was a story of Fayne, Pye, Bindley and Manners, the Fighting Four of Calthorpe School (Sidney Drew). They had made a hideout of a cave and were indulging in high jinks by chucking jam tarts at one another. That was the sort of story I wanted to read.

I've told in previous articles how I caught up with the Companion Papers and I'll not go over that ground again, but how vivid the memory of coming out of school on sunny days in 1915 to read the Magnet, Gem, Boys' Friend, Penny Popular and Dreadnought on the way home across Parker's Piece, where Jack Hobbs learned to play cricket. It had become a training-ground for men of Kitchener's New Army; they were now out of dark-blue uniforms and in khaki and instead of forming fours, marching and wheeling, were practising rifle-drill before going to France.

The Rookwood stories induced me to buy The Boys' Friend every week. There were other fine stories in it, notably A Son Of The Sea. Was it true, I wondered, when an old salt urged two lads, aged fifteen and seventeen, to drink sea water to keep sea sickness at bay?

I bought old-stock numbers of the Aldine Library. They had a captivating air of romance. I had a habit of reading while walking in the street and absorbed in Dick Turpin's daring in riding out of a house on Black Bess, I suddenly looked up - and there he was coming through the open french windows of the house I was passing, just as it said in the story. The house is still there and when I pass by he's still doing it.

On a cold, wet, Monday morning in January, 1916, I ran through a maze of little streets to the nearest newsagent for a copy of the special, blue-cover, 21st birthday edition of The Boys' Friend. Outside the shop, rain pelting down, I had a quick look at it - and at the free art plate called 'His Good Deed'. Always susceptible to the weather, that sparkling production fell flat with me.

About that time, I spread myself more in my reading. I took Comic Cuts, Chips, Funny Wonder and Chuckles for the stories in them. In spite of the atrocious spelling, I read first the office boys' 'columns' (Sebastian Ginger - Comic Cuts), (Philpot Bottles - Chips), (Horatio Pimple - Funny Wonder). They were funny. My main interest in Chuckles was the school stories of Teddy Baxter at Claremont. He had a drooping lower lip - in other words a 'scowl'. Apparently, I had one, so there was affinity between us.

A serial in Comic Cuts told how a young man alone in a room was startled, when a man's voice threatened him from a queer-shaped object fixed to the wall. It was uncanny, even in daylight and I was startled as well. Six years later, I heard one of the first B.B.C. broadcasts from London 2LO. The author was in advance of his times to have technical knowledge of that sort.

Criminals abounded and lost in a story about one in The Boys' Friend, I became aware that it said 'The End' only two short paragraphs ahead when the incidents in the story couldn't be rounded off so abruptly. I read on. The criminal walked out of a house and was knocked down and killed as he crossed the road. Even to me that was phoney. (Nearly fifty years later, Bill Gander sent me a copy of The Boys' Friend that he had in duplicate. That puzzling end to the story was in it.)

I had my shins hacked so many times while playing football that I'd lost heart in the game when I chanced upon The Red Rovers serial in Comic Cuts, but the close friendship of Jack Hinton, Paddy Flynn, and two pretty waitresses held my interest. Probably, the story was written for an older age group, but by skipping the

descriptions of the football matches I found it entertaining reading. Indeed, I was so emotionally stirred by an episode of lightly told love that not even the eerie hoot of an owl on a dark night when I was delivering goods as an errand-boy banished the thoughts the story evoked.

Outstanding that year (1916) was *The School Bell* (Jack Fordwich) - abridged as *Just Boys And Girls in Young Britain*. That had the rare setting of a working-class district and an elementary school. It was in a class of its own in juvenile fiction, public school tales being so popular because of the social circumstances of the time. Joe Peters, a boy with whom I could identify myself, had two loves, his mother and Edie, the sister of his friend Arthur Selby. She did not favour him, for in spite of his mother's gentle chiding, he dropped his aitches. But Joe had pluck and a heart of gold and he showed it in ways that more than made up for his grammatical shortcomings. Percy (Puddeny) Perks, a self-styled boy-detective and his imaginary bloodhound Blakey, figure prominently and it was he who craftily discovered that Joe's father was in prison. But it was a false charge, he was freed, and after many trials and tribulations, Mrs. Peters was able to hold her head up again. Joe's sterling worth manifesting itself, Edie came round and the story ended with the two families emigrating, Joe and Edie holding hands on the deck of the ship as it started on the voyage to Canada.

The story was too close to my own doorstep to be really enjoyable. I wanted to be lifted out of the poor neighbourhood I lived in, not dragged through it.

I was reading *The School Bell* when I learned that it wasn't true that policeman were not allowed to run more than six yards. One chased me for overstepping the mark, got close, and with a shout of 'You young sod', hurled his cape at me. It sent me flying, but the birch and reformatory close, ignoring hands and knees bleeding, I got up and ran madly to freedom. Satisfied with summary justice the policeman let me.

My father out one dark and dismal evening, I had another go at reading Billy Bunter's Bolt, a tale of the Owl running away from school and exhibiting himself as a gourmandizing savage in a circus ring. We'd moved out of the cul-de-sac into an old six-room house round the corner and as I read by the light of a small oil-lamp, the only light in the house, I began to feel lonely. The fire got low, but the coal cupboard was under the stairs, too close to the ghosts lurking on them for me to fetch a shovelful of coal to replenish it. The hour grew late, the street became strangely quiet and I was comforted by the occasional sound of footsteps passing the house. At last, I heard the familiar light tread of my father and what had become an ordeal was over. I'd been on my own many times without having the intense feeling of loneliness and dread that I had then and often, while reading, I'd let the fire go out without noticing it. Was I a bit run down? Did the dull doings of William George Bunter turn my thoughts inwards?

About that time there was a serial in the Magnet similar to Jules Verne's *Journey Into The Interior Of The Earth*. The subterranean explorers discovered a race of people unable to raise their arms above their heads. A daft idea, I thought. I changed my mind as I grew older. A physical disability of that sort would be a

great handicap to human endeavour; indeed, its implications are limitless. I wish I'd read the story to the end.

The Christmas double number of the Magnet was The House On The Heath. A German prisoner-of-war, Lieutenant Ludwig Wolf of the Prussian Guard, escapes from the internment camp at Wapshot. Pursued by soldiers, he is captured at Greyfriars. He escapes, again. The train on which Harry Wharton and his friends are travelling home for the holiday is snowbound and they are lost in the country. In their search for shelter they come to a big house. Denied sanctuary by Crawley, the man in charge of it, they enter by force. Mysterious goings-on in the house lead to the disappearance of Bunter, Courtenay, and the Caterpillar. Ludwig Wolf, in hiding there, and Crawley, his treacherous accomplice, are the cause of them. Bunter's ventriloquism tricks the German, Courtenay and the Caterpillar vanquish him in a rough-house fight, and he is a prisoner-of-war, again. The party arrive late at Wharton Lodge, but as Bob Cherry says: 'Better late than never.'

The genuine air of the period and the descriptive scenes of winter weather made the story ideal for Christmas reading.

Early in the new year there was a fall of snow and one afternoon when it lay deep on the ground, three public schoolboys snowballed me. A comedown for them. I was at the Cambridge Higher Grade School on a scholarship and had the Borough crest on my cap, but I was not in their class. And three to one was the roll of cads like those at Greyfriars and St. Jim's when meeting a lone village boy. We were on the high road and slowly retreating I snowballed back. Their laughter as the snowballs biffed on and around me was that of Skinner, Snoop and Stott. Still snowballing, I backed into a street of middle-class houses and by way of it into the street I lived in. They followed me; then, realizing they were in enemy territory, they sheered off. I compared them with Tom Merry and Bob Cherry - my favourites. They'd never do a thing like that. A week or two later, I met one of them. Fists up I went for him. He was bigger and doubtless much better fed than I was, but he ran away.

According to the agreement my father signed, I was bound to attend the Higher Grade School until the end of term after my 15th birthday, but it was wartime, the home fire had to be kept burning and the Borough Education Committee permitted me to leave in February 1917, when I was 14. My grandfather, father, brothers, uncles, had all been or were shoemakers, so I was put to the trade. A disappointment. I had hoped to work in an office.

Reading helped me to weather through, but boys' story-papers had begun to wear thin and though I bought the Magnet and Gem every week, I rarely did more than glance through them.

In January 1918, the cover picture of a Magnet called A Very Gallant Gentleman, impelled me to read it. In chapter 2, headed In The Springtime Of Their Youth, there is the sudden ting-a-ling of a bicycle bell and Skinner, Snoop and Stott, spying cads of the Remove at Greyfriars, cycle past Arthur Courtney and Vi Valence as they kiss under the leafless branches of an old oak in a little-frequented lane.

The economic, social and sexual climate of the country was very different then and John Nix Pentelow conformed to the standards of the time by dealing with the delicate theme of young love in a sentimental yet sensible way suitable to the story. A difficult task to an aspiring author as I found out in writing my first novel, *Romantic Youth*, a story of Cambridge University life seen through the eyes of a townsman, published in 1933. Many years later, I found out something else. In chapter 12, Jerry and Peggy, two 18 year olds, he an undergraduate at Peterhouse, she a children's governess, reveal their love for each other. The title of that chapter is *Springtime Of Youth*. My unconscious self must have been at work when I decided on that heading, so similar to chapter 2 in *A Very Gallant Gentleman*. (I have no doubt that the same medium was at work when I named them Jerry and Peggy, two major characters in *Peg O' My Heart*, a serial in Reynolds Sunday News, which I read every week while Tom, the Ticket of Leave Man was diddling P.C. Fairyfoot.)

Before leaving the subject: even now, over sixty years later, the sudden ting-a-ling of a bicycle bell makes me think of that touching little love scene in the little-frequented lane. What a lasting impressing that made on me.

While sitting beside a brook in the quiet of an afternoon that summer, I had a nostalgic spasm that took me back to 1915, the best year of my schooldays. How I'd revelled in stories of Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood. Never again would I know such happiness. Life seemed already over!

With the buoyancy of youth I rallied and the war over, I waited expectantly for what editorial fanfares said was in store for me by way of forthcoming publications. I tried them all. Some had been in cold storage because of the war, others saw daylight for the first time. I wasn't impressed by any of them.

I began to like the Union Jack and Sexton Blake Library. Count Carlac and Professor Kew were two of my favourite characters and at my suggestion, I and my friend Eric Goldsmith - still hale and hearty - used their names to hide our identities when out together in case high spirits led us astray.

Young Britain came out. It excelled with a serial on Spartacus (Richard Essex). A Thracian soldier, originally a shepherd, he was taken by the Romans and trained in the gladiators' school at Capus. In 73 B.C. he escaped with 70 others to the crater of Vesuvius. Defeating a blockading force, he gathered an army of runaway gladiators and other slaves estimated at 100,000 men and devastated Italy from end to end. He displayed remarkable skill, beat the armies of two Roman generals, and tried hard to restrain the excesses of his men. He was defeated and slain by Crassus in 71 B.C. Six thousand of the slaves suffered death by the Roman method of crucifixion. A cruel contrast to Spartacus as he had never harmed his Roman prisoners.

The story had a love interest that showed it was written for an older age group. It suited me.

The *Champion* appeared. I took it for a time. Going in a grocer's shop, I looked at the copy I'd just bought. The cover picture showed two men fighting on a rooftop. There were ominous words about a war with Germany in 1940. Chilling. But 1940 was a long way off. I banished unpleasant thoughts - to remember them

later and ever since.

I didn't stick to my last. Making the jump from workshop to office I studied earnestly and read widely. Then, I met a girl (Jess). She was eighteen, I was nineteen. After a 4½-month courtship we met secretly and on a lovely morning in May 1923, walked to a registry-office, where I had given three clear days' notice to marry at a cost of three pounds thirteen shillings and sixpence (nearly a fortnight's wages), declared we were both twenty-one years of age, and were married. Two men waiting on the stairs were brought in by the registrar to witness the marriage (I gave them five shillings each). It was Empire Day, flags and bunting were out - for us! I said. After a swim in the river while my wife watched, it was dinner and back to work at one o'clock.

We lived in rooms three-and-a-half years, then I managed a mortgage and bought the house, newly built, that we still live in. It was a dream come true. When I was a boy and sat reading in a ten feet square back yard surrounded by high walls, I had longed for a home on the edge of a cornfield. As I write, at the bottom of the garden, a miniature orchard one hundred yards long, corn ripe for reaping, stretches into the distance two miles away to the Gog and Magog Hills, a continuation of the chalk formation of the Chilterns.

First a girl (Jess), then a boy (Jack), with all the hopes and fears to do with them ...

So much happening, I could do no more than look at the little pile of boys' story papers that I had. How heart-warming when I did, especially in adversity - and there was plenty in those Dole and Means Test days. So near to me were Greyfriars and St. Jim's, I sometimes dreamt about them. A note in my Diary dated 9th December, 1934, reads: Dreams seem to have something to do with a repressed wish. In mine, I'm often looking for Magnets and Gems in all sorts of places, even in forests, accompanied by men-at-arms. I thrill with delight when I find and read a story of Harry Wharton and Tom Merry that eluded me in my boyhood.

Just over a year later, I dreamt of Nobody's Study, the Gem 1912 Christmas Double Number, which I'd read as a back number in 1915. I was so struck by the vividness of the dream that I wrote to the editor of the Gem about it. He wrote lengthily in reply and concluded: 'I have read scores of generous tributes to the stories in the Magnet and Gem - some from the other side of the world - but nobody yet has put the matter so pleasantly as you in your wind-up. It is not surprising, I think, that these stories, impressions of life when it was fresh and new, maintain their popularity, for it is quite within their scope to revive the old enthusiasms and the gracious memories, and thus do their bit in the business of keeping young.'

He sent me a copy of Nobody's Study. That led to Jack, eight-and-a-half years old, becoming an ardent reader of the Magnet and Gem, and Jess, nearly twelve, The Schoolgirl.

In my Diary (17th December, 1939), I express the hope of visiting Barry Ono, the Penny Dreadful King, to see his collection of old boys' story papers. That was

the time when the lights had gone out in Europe for the second time and all the horrors of war were upon us, again. Could there be greater proof of my feelings?

The years passed. Jess and Jack got scholarships from the village school to the County High School, went on to College, became school teachers - Jack school librarian as well. I graduated B.Sc. (Econs.) as an external student of London University and in my fifties and sixties I mixed business with lecturing and examining in Economics at the Cambridgeshire College of Arts and Technology, and teaching Pitman's shorthand and typewriting at Cambridgeshire Village Colleges - thereby, fulfilling modest youthful ambitions.

I was in my middle fifties when I read *The House On The Heath*, again. It was well worth reading. The descriptions of the wintry weather were so lifelike, I kept on drawing closer to the fire!

That reminds me: I learned to speak German in reading spy stories during the first world war. I can still speak it: Ja, Ja, Nein, Nein. Jawohl. Ach, Himmel. Mein Gott. Donner und blitzen. Gott im Himmel. Kamerad. Dumkopf. Schweinhund.

Old associations to do with boys' story papers of the past persisted and as I toppled into the world of them in 1914, so I did in 1962. After a radio broadcast of mine called *Magnets and Gems*, Tom Porter wrote to me. That led to my becoming acquainted with Eric Fayne, Bill Gander (I have a complete set of *Story Paper Collector* to browse in), Bill Lofts and other old boy - and girl! - bookites. I became a founder-member of the Cambridge Old Boys' Books Club, started by Danny Posner. That led to new friends - welcomed, as old ones were becoming scarce. I contacted Roger Jenkins, the able custodian of the Charles Hamilton Library, from which I can borrow *Magnets and Gems* I didn't read when I was young. Often, I've speculated about the themes of stories I haven't read. One was *The Hidden Horror* (Magnet No. 239). An illustration advertising it in a back number made me think the story was to do with a snake. Sixty years later, I found it was so, but not on the lines of Conan Doyle's *The Speckled Band*, as I'd thought.

My brother Fred was fifteen years old in 1913, when Morton Pike's *Guy Of The Greenwood* was serialized in *Pluck*. Errand-boy to a fishmonger in Cambridge at five shillings a week (8 a.m. to 8 p.m.), he made a circular five-mile bicycle ride in all weathers twice every morning around Trumpington and Grantchester, the first for orders, the second to deliver them. In fine weather, he used to sit on a five-barred gate in Grantchester and read the serial in *Pluck*. Showing me the gate one day - and where he hid his rods when he indulged in a spot o' fishing in the mill pond - he enthused so much about this story of Robin Hood that I longed to read it. I must have wafted the feeling to Eric Fayne, for a year or so ago, he kindly sent me gratis a rare copy of *Guy Of The Greenwood: Boys' Friend Threepenny Library No. 115*. It was a pleasure to read it. Pity such an entertaining story was spoiled by the end, which seemed to have been tampered with; probably through reasons of space.

I had read bits and pieces of *The School Under Canvas*, a tale of Rylcombe Grammar School, in serial form as it appeared over the years. The story seethed

with mystery. That was strangely lacking in The Boys' Friend Threepenny Library No. 235, which I borrowed from the Charles Hamilton Library. Maybe, it was me. Age marches on!

In December 1976, I had a telephone call from a man in Stockport. Had I any Nelson Lees to sell or swop? No. He seemed a genuine collector, so I sent him as a gift seven of the eight 1918 South Sea series (I had never solved the mystery of the missing number) and several old weeklies of various sorts. I had no acknowledgement. I hope he got them.

Two years ago, 380 comics, 1971/77 were for sale at £4 in the local paper. I telephoned and went to the vicarage in Grantchester. Invited into the lounge, I saw in neat piles on a large table, twenty-seven different kinds of comics, all in excellent condition. I gave the seller, the vicar's young teenage son, five pounds. He was delighted. So was I.

My wife watched me as I unloaded them on the kitchen table.

A little apprehensive about storage, she said: 'What do you want them for?'

'To look at in my old age,' I said.

What she has to put up with!

* * * * *

Wishing all Greyfriars Club Members a Happy Christmas with kind regards at Courtfield and all success to the Frank Richards' Museum and Library at Courtfield.

BRIAN & JUNE SIMMONDS

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THE MAGNET wanted; single copies in good condition, suitable for binding. Bound volumes also welcome. Will purchase or have various rare items for exchange. Also wanted, anything signed by Charles Hamilton (under any name) and any original artwork by Chapman or Macdonald. FOR SALE: Bound volumes of very early green Gems in mint condition; H. Baker monthly reprints - many volumes. Also, one set of "special" Book Club Editions in mint condition numbers 1 - 26.

DARRELL SWIFT, 22 WOODNOOK CLOSE, LEEDS, LS16 6PQ.

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HUGHES, 228 CHARTERS TOWERS ROAD, HERMIT PARK, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA, wants Collectors' Digest 19, 20, 21-23, 28. Story Paper Collector 2 - 9, 11, 13 - 35, 45. 'Bunny' series by Hamilton, Modern Boy circa 1930.

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Merry Christmas to our Editor, Eric Fayne and to Madam, to our respected Abbot W. Howard Baker, to Norman Shaw, Derek Adley and all Friars and Saints everywhere. To all, health and happiness through the New Year.

P. J. HARRIS, MONTREAL.

The Time Yesteryear Stood Still

by ALF HANSON

Most of us have vivid memories of far off boyhood days. I suppose with me it may have started when at the age of five I had the pictures from the early comics during the first world war read and explained to me by my Uncle. Surely an appetizer of things to follow! Then with my own spends, I bought and read my favourites later on. However, specially golden memories are of when I went to live in a most idyllic village called Utley where I lived from when I was nine to fourteen years of age. It was here that I met Tom Smith who became my chum, and it was he who introduced me first to the 1921 Greyfriars Holiday Annual; and then the Magnet! That was it! The school adventures of the Famous Five and the rest, including the grey old pile, and the leafy lane that led to Friardale village, when every week I read the Magnet, reminded me of my village - the railway at the bottom of our lane, the river beyond, which could have been the River Sark in my imagination.

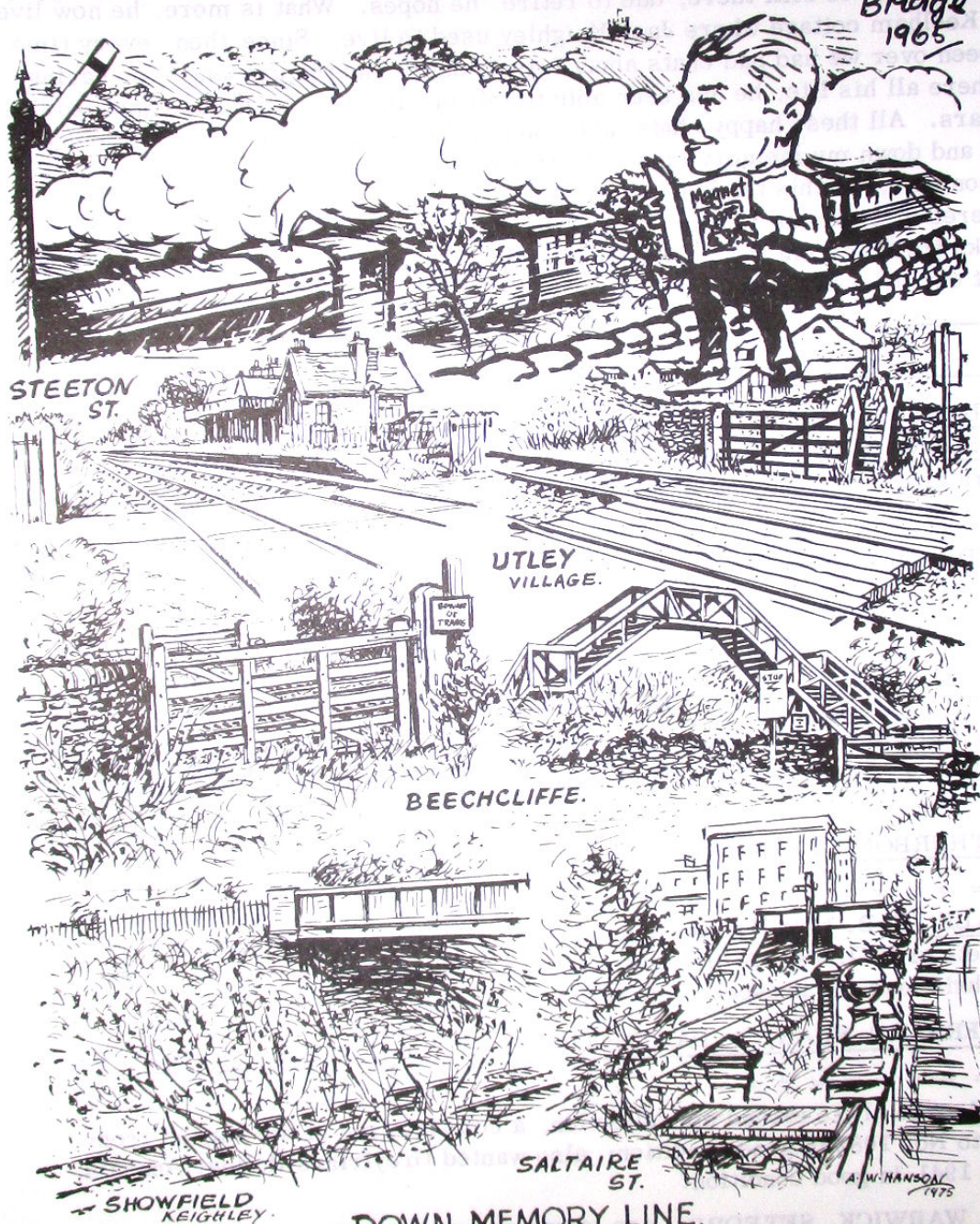
Perhaps because I only went to a Council School the thrill of a Public School was more attractive. I also palled up with another boy, Jack Keighley, whose surname was the same as the town I had left. He lived next door to Tom. Just think! We ('The Terrible Three', as we called ourselves) lived down the same lane within a stone's-throw of each other, and we were all deep-rooted in what are now known as the Old Boys' Books. Down our lane we would play out our fantasy games - cricket, football, athletics between the three favourite schools, Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Rookwood. I forget now who came top. St. Frank's was to come later when I was fourteen, through a Sunday School chum. This was when I was to go back to my own town, for I had won a scholarship to Keighley Art School for two years, but I still continued reading our old favourites, including the Nelson Lee Library. It was at this time I spotted my first Monster Library - and I finally acquired the whole nineteen.

Stangely enough, I still took the S.O.L's and Sexton Blake Libraries right up to the Second World War, and collected the Magnet right to the last one. How sad that it all ended, but what satisfaction I got out of my remaining collection, including four early Holiday Annuals, during the war years when I was making Lancaster Bombers, and reliving old times.

The tit-bit of memory now, though, came on a rare visit three years ago. I was staying with a relative and went to have a look at my boyhood village. I took my grandson Alex to see his grandad's old place. It was a beautiful summer's day, and believe me things have hardly changed since those days long ago; still the same cobbled lane; stone cottages but more ivy clinging to the walls. We went to see my old cottage which still has the name 'Fern Cottage' on the same wooden gate. What a thrill I had when the current owner, a Keighley woman who knew my parents, welcomed us in for a cup of tea. Oh, the attractive little rooms! And the old-world garden of my young days, though not quite as it was then, still had ferns, and in the sunshine I was soon far away, dreaming.

THE LAST GLIMPSE from a Photo I took from UTLEY Bridge

1965



DOWN MEMORY LINE.

THE YEAR 1976 DISUSED AND OVERGROWN, BUT THE BRIDGES AND GATES STILL THE SAME AS IT WAS 50 YEARS AGO WHEN I WAS A LAD AT UTLEY VILLAGE.

THE ENO

Finally, wending our way up lower Greenhead Lane, turning right from Keelham Lane brought us to Skipton Road, and there just across the way was my old Council School. I was grateful to be shown around. Hardly anything had changed, and the playground brought back memories. Just across was the village Post Office, where my old school chum Harry Denby used to deliver my Magnet and Gem for me. Harry is still there, due to retire, he hopes. What is more, he now lives at old Keelham cottage where Jack Keighley used to live. Since then, every time I have been over we had had chats about far-off days, and the present - for having been there all his life, he has been able to tell me all about what has happened over the years. All these happy chats take place in Keelham Cottage over a bite and a drink, and down my memory lane. After departing on the first occasion my grandson said, 'Is this the lane where you used to play?' but I don't know whether I answered him, for as I looked back down our lane, I fancied I saw a white plume of smoke trailing from the train passing under the bridge ... Wasn't it trains that brought our beloved papers to us?

* * * * *

JOHN BARTHOLOMEW, 77 EDINGTON STREET NORTH, ROCKHAMPTON,
QUEENSLAND 4701, AUSTRALIA, sends Christmas Greetings all Hobby friends
in Australia and England and Happy New Year 1980.

= = = = =

WANTED: Gem 258, BFL 237, 337.

MEARNS, 4 OGILVIE PLACE, BRIDGE-OF-ALLAN
STIRLINGSHIRE, SCOTLAND.

= = = = =

A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all my dear friends in the London O.B.B.C., and to our fine Editor, Eric Fayne, and to everyone who follows our hobby.

SAM THURBON, 29 STRAWBERRY HILL RD., TWICKENHAM, MIDDLESEX.

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FOR SALE: H.B. 1974 Holiday Annual, mint condition or exchange for similar book or Magnets or S.O.L's. All letters answered. Wishing all Collectors everywhere a Happy Christmas and prosperous New Year.

BERNARD EGAN, 1 DARTMOUTH TCE., RANELAGH, DUBLIN 6.

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WANTED urgently to extend my collection, a complete run of the Magnet from No. 956 to No. 1082 in good condition; also wanted Greyfriars Holiday Annuals, 1920 and 1941 in good condition.

WARWICK SETFORD, 155 BURTON RD., DERBY., DE3 6AB.

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Yuletide Greetings to all friends and correspondents. Happy days. BEN WHITER

Memories were made of These

by JAMES W. COOK

Together with my sustained interest in the weekly Nelson Lee Library there were the Correspondents Wanted Columns published therein to which I found many pen-pal friends and kept up a correspondence for many years long after the Nelson Lee Library ceased publication in 1933.

Now, in the twilight of my years, I often think of them and wonder. Are they still with us? Have the years clouded their memories of those days when we were young and the tales of St. Frank's were looked forward to with enthusiasm.

If I should ever get to know you again, my old correspondents, I wonder what we would talk about for times have changed and for the most part so have our thoughts.

You, Ida G. Locke, of Liss, Hants., you must recall that day I met you on Liverpool Station for the first time where you were on your way home and I accompanied you to London Bridge Station. You told me in that year of 1930 there would be no war with Germany; you argued they had no money. I disagreed that what was happening there was every indication that house painter fellow was going to cause trouble. But you had your way and I let it go at that.

Then there was that correspondent from Dublin whom I met at the London Docks. The boat he came over on seemed so frail, and when I saw him off on his return home that same craft did not appear any stronger. I never met up with him again.

Naturally, I did not meet all my pen-pals. Many lived in different parts of the world, but we kept writing and exchanging views, etc. I can remember Solomon Arkin of Cape Town who used to send me The Cape Argus newspaper and invariably it arrived loose at my London home bringing the wrath of the local post office.

I wonder where you are today, Mildred Green? You must think of the time I took you out of that sweet shop in Locking Road, Weston-Super-Mare, and we walked to Keystoke over the sands. You were surprised I had come all the way from London to see you. It was Sunday too and a busy day for you, but your lady boss let you off for the few hours.

I went one day with a correspondent to meet another. I knew the fellow from Cirencester for many years and he asked me to accompany him to Camden Town where his pen-pal lived. So we all met, all Nelson Lee lovers, but it was not till afterwards that my Cirencester friend told me his friend took a distinct dislike to me. Sadly, I shall never know why. But I often wondered.

But now I think I have the answer! Those of you who are familiar with the very old Nelson Lees and have No. 133, The Case of The Japanese Schoolboy will see the boy on the front cover as a picture of the Japanese boy of the story. I now dimly recall saying to my Camden Town friend that he looked very much like him.

Thus after all these years light has dawned on why I was disliked.

Another chap I wrote to for a very long time was one Ido Inglott of Valetta, Malta. I kept his photo for a long time and during the war when Malta was being bombed daily I often wondered about him.

There were two readers of the N.L.L. who wrote me from Apia and Singapore. My Apia correspondent sent me a brochure on the scenic beauties of Samoa with the expectancy of my calling on him; I never got round to it! And my writer from Singapore was another who kindly sent me the Straits' Times newspapers.

I remember as if it were yesterday sending a parcel of items a boy would like to a Gold Coast reader who promised in return ostrich feathers and monkey skins. And later on if I would send him socks he would dispatch to me African idols. My Accra pen pal let me down. He never sent me anything.

I had Canadian and American pen pals too. Bernard Thorne, where are you today? And your daughter Berenice who used to prefer the Magnet stories to your love of St. Frank's. My New York friend has completely vanished from my memory, but if ever he reads this he will remember those old times.

One day I received from Lima, Peru, an idol. It got broken in transit, but I managed to get it together again. It was about six inches high and was of two figures - one on top of the other. My pen pal in Peru probably sent it in the hope I would keep it; I never did: I changed it some years later for Nelson Lees!

Far away places like the Falkland Islands, Fiji and New Zealand had Nelson Lee readers who wrote to me. Of Australia I had one correspondent in Melbourne and another in Sydney. Nearer to home, there was a scout whose surname was Silver. I knew he was a scout because he sent me a photo of himself. He lived in Forfar. I can remember he looked exactly as a scout should look; very neat plus Scottish strength in his muscles.

I shall never forget my very first letter from a correspondent. It came from Manchester I believe and my mother brought the letter up to me as I lay in bed. From that moment I was hooked writing to pen pals in the Nelson Lee.

I oft times think of a certain Margarete Patzer who lived at Blackheath, London, who was German. Our correspondence blossomed into romance and we frequently met on the heath. She used to make me cakes after she found one of my weaknesses. If memory serves she came from Sprottau, Germany, and I sometimes speculate how my life would have been had I married and gone there to live! That was about 1933. It will always amaze me that where she lived in Blackheath the hotel was cut through with a bomb during the Blitz ... just that one hotel among several others. It was No. 9 The Paragon.

I must have been a great letter writer those days for I had pen friends from the Nelson Lee Library in all parts of the United Kingdom. Looking through my collection I often see them in print ... they are still wanting correspondents!

I had a very loyal and trustworthy reader friend during the period of the N.L.L. His father kept a shop and some evenings, when his parents were out, we used to play table tennis. We were so close that we had billheads and envelopes

printed as J. J. Hoser-Cook. Joe Hoser and I had many ideas for furthering the St. Frank's cause, but we moved and lost each other. Joe was Jewish, and if he perchance should see this I'd love to hear from him again.

An old friend who has since passed on used to stage plays with St. Frank's characters in his village hall. They were called The Jolly Juniors and were acclaimed by all who saw them. My friend, in true St. Frank's schoolboy fashion, deceived a local hotel by informing them a certain foreign prince and his entourage would be staying there. The Bull Hotel, at Fairford, Glos. made preparations for the royal visitor but we never got to know the rest of it.

One German reader who must have been brainwashed at the time he wrote to me declared that "war is a factor in God's plan of the earth". At the time he wrote Hitler was emerging as a figure to be reckoned with.

Naturally, I wrote very often to the editors of the Nelson Lee Library and also to Edwy Searles Brooks. Now I wish I had visited them more often when I had the chance.

Except for the fellow in Accra, W. Africa, I was never let down. I have listed just a few Nelson Lee correspondents with whom I made contact. The thought has just occurred to me of the various places in England where I purchased the N.L.L. I used to buy more than one copy and leave the rest in odd places in the hope new readers would join the 'club'.

Although letters were my main correspondence I sometimes received some of those amateur magazines that were put out by some readers who either were running a club or who were hoping to attract readers by publishing a magazine. One such correspondent came to mind who lived at Parsonage Barn Lane, Ringwood, Hants. I forget his name.

I was not to know then that a more expedient journal was to be published at a much later date for those of us who remained lovers of those books and papers of our youth.

With the advent of the St. Frank's League that was the brain child of Edwy Searles Brooks, I began to gather new correspondents who had joined the League. Members enrolled from the most surprising parts of the world. One of the objects of the League was to foster friendship among readers and this it did.

The great pity is that with the opening up of World War 2 everything connected with my correspondence changed. The bond was broken.

After the war the interest in our boys' books became apparent from advertisements and correspondence flourished again. Those of us who survived the holocaust began to start again writing, talking and forming clubs; we had come full circle.

It is surprising who does still cherish our books. They can be found in all walks of life. One day I had a letter from a film star. But Daniel O'Herlihy did not collect Nelson Lees; he was a Magnet collector. He told me he read Magnet and Gem since he was 8 years old. He had also read the Nelson Lee Library but was mainly interested in Hamiltonia. His notepaper was strange - it was the back of an

airmail envelope! He did apologise though. I still have it.

Today I still have a large list of correspondents. But the list is thinning as the years take their toll. Yet I am certain we shall all meet up again in that particular heaven reserved for old time readers of our hobby books.

* * * * *

A jolly Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year to the Editor, Staff and Readers of Collectors' Digest. I am still hoping to buy "William and The Masked Ranger", "William The Lawless", "William The Superman", "The Katzenjammer Kids", "L'il Abner", and these by Dornford Yates - "The Courts Of Idleness", "The Stolen March", "Valerie French", "Anthony Lyveden", "This Publican", "Blind Corner", "Blood Royal", "Perishable Goods", "Fire Below", "Maiden Stakes", "As Other Men Are", "Lower than Vermin", "And Five Were Foolish", "She Fell Among Thieves", "Safe Custody", "An Eye For A Tooth". Can anyone help? Please write first. All postage incurred will be refunded.

J. P. FITZGERALD, 324 BARLOW MOOR ROAD
MANCHESTER, M21 2AY.

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A Merry Christmas and good health to the Editor and all at Excelsior House.

NEIL LAMBERT

=====

Merry Xmas and a good New Year to all Hobby chums.

JOHN McMAHON, TANNOCHSIDE,

=====

Chums Annual wanted, 1932 - 33, School Boy's Own Libs for sale or exchange.

PERRY, 2 HEATH RD., LANGLEY, MAIDSTONE, KENT.

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WANTED REALLY WANTED: Two issues of the Magnet, Nos. 948 and 949. Any help will be greatly appreciated, believe me. Thank you.

H. W. VERNON, 5 GILLMAN ST., CHELTENHAM

VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA 3192

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A Merry Xmas to all in our hobby. Thanks for the memories.

LES FARROW, 13 FYDELL STREET, BOSTON, LINCOLNSHIRE.

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Greetings from ERIC WAFER of AUSTRALIA, staying in England until October.
Lovely to be with you.

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Girls Own Paper Centenary



by MARY CADOGAN

When the Religious Tract Society launched the Boy's Own Paper in 1879 it soon achieved a circulation of 160,000. Its success prompted them to follow up in January of 1880 with a 14-page penny weekly for girls - or rather for young ladies. This was of course called the Girl's Own Paper, and, though not so long-lasting as its masculine equivalent, it survived until 1956. Then, under the more modern title of Heiress, it finally folded.

Embodying a vivid and varied chunk of publishing history, this magazine is surprisingly neglected by collectors. It was naturally in its early days a rather staid affair, lacking the Henty-ish excitement of the B.O.P. The Religious Tract Society preferred to give its girl readers reassuring domestic fiction, rather drab school stories and gentle anecdotes about the childhood of Queen Victoria. However, although unadventurous by today's standards, it makes interesting browsing for twentieth-century readers, for whom it provides a fascinating reflection of the social attitudes of late Victorian and Edwardian England. The Girl's Own Paper has always been a memorable amalgam of fiction, fact, fashion and high-class illustrative material. Its early black-and-white line pictures include drawings by Kate Greenaway and many other distinguished artists.

The creators of the G.O.P. took some years to make up their minds whether they were writing for girls or for women. There were stories for young girls, but the emphasis was on articles like 'How I Keep House on £350 a Year', or features describing the advantages for women in domestic service of emigration to remote parts of the Empire: 'Ten shillings a week is what an ignorant, untaught girl commands' (in New Zealand).

Charles Peters, the paper's first Editor, included some articles that were mentally stimulating, in keeping with the growing demand for better educational and career opportunities for girls. Flora Klickmann, who succeeded Peters in 1908, made the G.O.P. a visually attractive magazine; it became her metaphorical

'Flowerpatch'. (This was the name that she gave to her home in the hills of the Wye Valley.) She placed a great deal of emphasis on pictures, and during her time the covers and plates were in particularly glowing colours. Flora Klickmann gave the fashion features new dimensions, both imaginatively and at practical levels, with excellent hints on crochet, embroidery and all aspects of dress-making.

The Girl's Own Paper, however, did not achieve its hey-day until the 1930's, when it was decided that this paper really would cater for girls and not for women readers (who were diverted to Lutterworth's 'Woman's Magazine'). The publishers were probably inspired by the success of the Amalgamated Press's schoolgirl papers, and also by that of the hardback girls' writers, like Angela Brazil, Dorita Fairlie Bruce and Elsie J. Oxenham. All these authors, as well as many others who were equally celebrated (Baroness Orczy, L. M. Montgomery, etc.), contributed to the Girl's Own Paper during the 1930's. The paper was by then a 6d. monthly; fat, glossy and appealing. In addition to lively fiction it contained splendid photographs and illustrations, and regular features on sports, Guiding, current affairs, film stars, etc. The covers, whether the work of artists or photographers, were extremely attractive and in full colour. Radiantly healthy and quintessentially English teenage girls peered laughingly through the strings of their tennis raquets, walked their dogs or dashed across school hockey pitches.

After the declaration of the Second World War, the golden G.O.P. cover-girls started to appear in the uniforms of the various services - and so popular were these W.A.A.F's, A.T's, V.A.D's, etc., that the paper sold colour plates for framing of these wartime lovelies. (I have a treasured collection of these.) The G.O.P. is in fact unique as a record of what life was like for British girls growing up during Hitler's war; it covers almost every aspect of their lives, interests and aspirations. Famous young girls - from the Little Princesses (in Girl Guide and Brownie uniforms) to Deanna Durbin (relaxing at home with her dogs) and Shirley Temple (in Camp Fire Girl garb) - are well represented. The war gave new zest to the stories - and the G.O.P. introduced one teenage heroine whose name is still very much remembered. Captain W. E. Johns's 'Worrals of the W.A.A.F.' - like the same author's 'Biggles' in the wartime B.O.P. - went on and on, symbolizing not only the vitality of the magazine but of Britain's backs-to-the-wall resilience and determination.

Like 'Worrals', the G.O.P. survived the war. However in 1948 it changed in concept and format, and became Heiress. As in the paper's early days it then tried to cater for the mixed readership of women and schoolgirls. Heiress became a watered-down romance and glamour magazine - and when it ended in 1956 it bore little resemblance to the vital G.O.P. of the 1930's and 40's that many of us remember with affection. (Readers may like to know that Lutterworth Press are marking the Centenary by publishing (in March 1980) a gorgeous book called Great Grandmama's Weekly, by Wendy Forrester.)



An episode at Slade

WEDNESDAY, 3.45 p.m.

Tammadge of the Lower Fourth at Slade entered Masters' Corridor. He had an exercise-book under his arm. He did not look tidy or prepossessing. Tammadge never looked tidy or prepossessing. Slovenly in appearance, he was also a slovenly worker, as a number of Slade masters had found to their cost.

Yet Tammadge was a bright boy. The youngest pupil in the Lower Fourth, he had acquired that distinction despite his slovenliness.

It was nearing four o'clock on an afternoon in the summer term. The school was silent, due to the fact that Wednesday afternoon was a half-holiday. Cricket was in progress on the playing fields of Slade, where a goodly crowd had gathered to watch the games. Those who were not playing cricket, or watching it, had made up

small parties to ramble in the Devonshire countryside, many of them planning to end an afternoon in the sunshine with a pleasant tea in some tea-shop in the little town of Everslade.

But Tammadge was making his slovenly way along Masters' Corridor.

A door opened, and Mr. Drayne came out of his study. His eyes fell on Tammadge, who had had a brief spell as a pupil in Mr. Drayne's form, the Third, before his slovenly brightness had earned him his promotion into the Lower Fourth. Mr. Drayne was not enamoured of Tammadge. Few people were.

Mr. Drayne spoke fussily.

"What are you doing in Masters' Corridor, Tammadge? You have no business to be here."

Tammadge stood still. With both hands he held his exercise-book

over his plump stomach.

"You had better tell Mr. Buddle that, sir," said Tammadge meekly.

Mr. Drayne did not appreciate the meekness. The colour rose in his cheeks.

"You are impertinent, Tammadge."

"Am I, sir?" queried Tammadge. He added, still meek: "I hope not, sir."

"Do you want me to box your ears, Tammadge?"

Tammadge took a step in retreat. He stared at the floor.

"No, sir. If you box my ears, Mr. Buddle won't like it, I'm sure. He told me to come here with my exercise."

Mr. Drayne breathed deeply.

"You mean that Mr. Buddle told you to bring an exercise to his study this afternoon? Why didn't you say so at first?"

Tammadge did not answer. He raised his head and looked at Mr. Drayne. There was a glimmer in the boy's eyes.

Mr. Drayne compressed his lips.

He said: "If Mr. Buddle told you to come, it is all right, of course. You will see his name on his door."

"I know, sir," murmured Tammadge.

With a sniff, Mr. Drayne hurried down the corridor and disappeared round the corner. Tammadge watched him go. Slowly, Tammadge put out his tongue in the direction Mr. Drayne had taken. It

was not a gesture worthy of a Slade boy, but Tammadge was not really, so far, a credit to Slade. The boy moved on down the corridor.

He tapped on a door. There was no sound from within the room. Tammadge tapped again. Silence still.

Tammadge opened the door and looked in. Mr. Buddle's study was unoccupied.

"Sir!" called out Tammadge from the doorway.

No reply.

Tammadge entered the study. He looked around him with some interest. It was a fairly large room, comfortably furnished, with a good carpet on the floor.

The door to Mr. Buddle's adjoining bedroom stood partially open. Tammadge wondered whether his form-master might be having an afternoon nap.

"Sir!" he called out again, loudly.

Still no reply. Without any doubt whatever, Mr. Buddle was not at home.

Shrugging his shoulders, Tammadge crossed to Mr. Buddle's desk. He opened the exercise-book he had been carrying, and placed it on the desk. He looked down at the open exercise-book. His appalling scrawl, decorated with numerous smears and crossings-out, covered the two exposed pages. The work was headed: Essay. "Supernatural Elements as used by Shakespeare". Tammadge was well-satisfied with that essay. Whether Mr. Buddle would be equally well-satisfied with it was a moot point.

Having left his essay on his form-master's desk, a really nice boy would have taken his departure as quietly as he had come. Tammadge was not a really nice boy. He was an inquisitive youth.

Setting the study door slightly ajar, so that he would hear anyone approaching down the corridor, Tammadge proceeded to look around the study. He examined Mr. Buddle's bookcase, but found the glass doors locked and no key present. He scanned a photograph showing a dozen young men in mortar-boards and gowns. It was hanging on the wall. Tammadge found someone in the group who was obviously Mr. Buddle. Had Mr. Buddle ever been as young as that?

"Must have been taken ninety years ago," said Tammadge, discontentedly.

He picked up a small piece of stamp-edging which had inadvertently been left lying on the desk. Tammadge licked it and stuck it on the forehead of Shakespeare, whose bust adorned Mr. Buddle's mantelpiece.

Tammadge moved across to the window and looked out. In the distance, beyond the quadrangle and the lane which passed the gates of Slade, cricket was in progress on the playing-fields. He could see white-clad figures running. Tammadge had no interest in cricket.

He turned back to the desk and leafed over some letters which lay thereon. A pile of exercise books was awaiting Mr. Buddle's attention. Tammadge looked over them. Each book was carefully opened at the start of some English exercise which one of Mr. Buddle's classes had worked for him. Tammadge spent a few moments

reversing every alternate exercise-book in the heap, so that the marker would find alternate exercise-books upside down. Tammadge gave a chuckle.

He sat down in Mr. Buddle's chair against the desk. The large green cushion looked inviting. It proved not a very comfortable seat. Tammadge stood up again, and lifted the cushion. A large book, bound in dark-blue buckram, was revealed. He wondered why Mr. Buddle had placed a large book under his cushion.

Tammadge took up the book and eyed the gold-lettering on the spine. He read: The Gem Library, 1908.

Tammadge sat down again on the cushion, this time with the book on the desk. It looked attractive. Tammadge came to the conclusion that it comprised copies of a periodical which had been published weekly in the year 1908. Some time or other, Tammadge felt sure, he had heard of the Gem.

He leafed through the volume again. It fell open at one certain spot, due to a folded sheet of paper having, apparently, been inserted as a book-mark.

Tammadge turned back to the start of that particular issue of the Gem. On the blue cover, an excellent artist had depicted one schoolboy whispering in the ear of another boy. Even Tammadge, with no artistic appreciation whatever, was impressed by the picture. The title of the story was "The Tell-Tale" and the author of it was one, Martin Clifford. Tammadge felt a stirring of interest in his heart beneath the rather grubby mauve and white Slade blazer which he was

wearing. He would like to read that story. He wondered whether he could pluck up courage to ask Mr. Buddle to lend the book to him. With a continuation of thought, it suddenly occurred to him to wonder what a staid schoolmaster was doing with a volume of periodicals which had obviously been published for the juvenile market of its particular period. Possibly Mr. Buddle had confiscated it from some boy.

Tammadge's attention was taken by the bookmark which had been inserted somewhere in the pages of "The Tell-Tale". Part of the folded sheet of paper was sticking out beyond the pages. Tammadge jerked it out, and unfolded it.

There was writing on one side of the paper only, and it seemed to be part of a letter in Mr. Buddle's crabbed writing. Tammadge recognised his form-master's handwriting at once. He had seen it often enough in comments written in red ink at the end of the English exercises he did for Mr. Buddle.

Had Tammadge been a really nice boy he would not have dreamed of reading anything of the sort. It would have gone against the grain with most Slade boys to read something which was obviously private, whether it was a letter or not. Tammadge had no such scruples.

He read with much interest, and his eyes widened with astonishment as he read. It ran as follows:

"I would inform the Headmaster that I shall be taking a new teaching post in another school next term. I would express my gratitude for the great courtesy and consideration always shown to me by the Headmaster during my time on the staff here. I would add that I shall be

getting married during the next vacation, and, in consequence, I feel it necessary to take a post where my wife will be able to reside with me. In conclusion I would point out that I have been offered a Housemastership at Shrewsbury College and I propose to accept it as from the start of next term."

Tammadge turned the paper over. There was nothing on the back. He held up the volume by the covers and shook it to ascertain whether there might be a further sheet. There was not.

Tammadge read through the solitary sheet of writing once more, and then sat back. His currant eyes were almost popping out of his head.

"Well, I'll be blessed!" he said aloud.

He found "The Tell-Tale" story again in the volume, slipped in the sheet roughly where he had found it, closed the book, and rose to his feet.

On the corner of Mr. Buddle's desk there was a silver oblong box. It looked like a cigarette-box. Tammadge wondered whether his form-master might be a secret smoker. It was always assumed that Mr. Buddle was a non-smoker, but one never knew. Even schoolmasters had their hidden vices.

Tammadge opened the box and looked in. Immediately the tinkling strains of "Coming Through the Rye" filled the air. It was a musical box, and it contained a fountain-pen, a few pencils, and a number of postage stamps.

Tammadge slammed the box shut, and the music was cut off at once.

There was the sound of footsteps in the corridor, and Tammadge moved

promptly away from the desk.

The door was fully opened, and Mr. Buddle entered. He stared hard at the rather untidy specimen of his own Form.

"What are you doing in my study, Tammadge?"

Tammadge had his hands at his sides. He looked surprised.

"You told me to bring you my detention exercise as soon as I had finished it, sir."

"You should not have entered my study, Tammadge, when you found I was not present. You should have gone away and returned with it later."

"I'm sorry, sir."

Mr. Buddle frowned.

"Did I hear my musical-box playing as I came down the passage? You must have opened it. You seem to be an inquisitive boy."

"Oh, no, sir. My exercise-book caught the edge of the box as I put it down. It frightened me very much, sir."

Mr. Buddle's lips twitched. He crossed to his desk.

"You may show me your work, Tammadge."

Tammadge picked up the exercise-book and handed it over. Mr. Buddle glanced through the essay.

"I will check it later, Tammadge. It seems a little tidier than usual."

Tammadge looked modest.

"I hope so, sir. I try to please you."

Mr. Buddle fidgeted. In spite of Tammadge's slovenly performances, he was an intelligent youth, and his work was often exceptionally good for a lad of his age. Mr. Buddle wished that he could like Tammadge more.

"Very well, Tammadge. You may go."

Tammadge lingered. He said:

"That book you confiscated from someone, sir --"

"Book I confiscated? Which book?" Mr. Buddle's eyebrows rose a little.

"The one with the blue cover, sir. The volume of Gems, sir, over there --"

Mr. Buddle transferred his gaze to the bound volume, now lying on the edge of his desk.

"It was on the floor, sir, against your chair. I picked it up, sir, in case it should get damaged. I couldn't help seeing one of the stories in it, sir. It's called 'The Tell-Tale'. It looks very interesting, sir. I'd like to read it, sir. I wondered whether I might borrow it, sir. I'd take great care of it, sir."

Mr. Buddle stared hard at his hopeful pupil.

"You may not borrow that book, Tammadge. It is a valuable volume, lent to me by a friend for sociological study. You should not have entered my room, or touched my musical-box, or had any contact with that volume. Now you may go."

Mr. Buddle hung his hat up behind the door, and then opened the door wide for Tammadge to make his exit. Tammadge moved to the door--

way, and paused. He looked earnestly at his form-master.

"I'm sorry if I did wrong, sir."

"Very well, Tammadge. Go and get your tea."

Tammadge took another step. Then he spoke again, his currant eyes on Mr. Buddle's face.

"Thank you, sir. You are very kind to us all, sir. I should be terribly upset if you went away."

"Indeed, Tammadge?" Mr. Buddle smiled faintly. "It is nice of you to say so. We all have to go some time, don't we, Tammadge? It was Wesley who observed that 'Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all its sons away.' And now it had better bear you away."

Tammadge smirked and was gone, and Mr. Buddle pushed the door closed behind him.

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WEDNESDAY, 4.15 p.m.

Tammadge had a couple of buns and a cup of tea at the tuck-shop. Then he made his way to the cricket ground. The matches were still going strong. The First Eleven was playing a visiting team from Holsworthy on Big Side, and the Third Eleven, which comprised a goodly number of Tammadge's own form, was similarly engaged with a cricket side from Ivy-bridge on Little Side. The Second Eleven was playing away.

Tammadge liked to be in the limelight, though he lacked the qualities which would enable him to occupy a position of importance in the junior school. Fate occasionally gave

Tammadge a passport to brief fame, and he fancied that he had such a passport now. He did not intend to waste it.

He sat down beside Shovel, under an oak tree beyond the boundary line. Normally Shovel played for the Third Eleven, but a boil on the neck had temporarily incapacitated him, so he was reduced to watching the game from a distance.

"Isn't it sad?" commented Tammadge.

Shovel glanced at him.

"Yes," he admitted, "and it's painful, too."

Tammadge sniffed.

"I was talking about the Gump."

"What about the Gump? Has he got a boil, too?"

Tammadge shook his head sorrowfully.

"No. Worse than that! He's leaving Slade."

Shovel gave all his attention to Tammadge for the moment.

"Leaving Slade? The Gump leaving? Where's he going?"

Tammadge blinked at him. His currant eyes were alive with self-importance.

"He's been offered a house-mastership at Shrewsbury, and he's taking it."

Shovel looked incredulous.

"How do you know about it?"

"I was told in confidence. Don't tell anyone that I mentioned it to you."

"If you were told in confidence, why are you telling me?" demanded Shovel.

"Well --" Tammadge smiled. "You're a friend of mine, in a way, so I felt I had to tell you."

WEDNESDAY, 5.45 p.m.

The games were over. The First Eleven had won easily; the juniors had collapsed rather ignominiously. When the team from Ivybridge had been seen off in their motor-coach, Meredith of the Lower Fourth sought out Tammadge.

"What's this you've been telling Shovel about the Gump leaving Slade?" he asked angrily.

"It's true, Meredith," said Tammadge. He spoke earnestly with his head on one side. "I happened to see a letter that he wrote to old Pink tendering his resignation. The Gump said he didn't want to lose us but he felt he ought to go."

"You mean you read a private letter that the Gump had written to the Head," said Meredith indignantly. "You're a nasty little beast, aren't you?"

"I hope not," protested Tammadge. "I couldn't help seeing it. The Gump sent me to his study, and the letter lay there facing me on his desk. I had read it through before I knew it was a private letter."

Meredith stared hard at him.

"You mean it was a letter from the Gump to the Head, in which Mr. Buddle resigned his post at Slade? I don't believe it."

"You'll see!" replied Tammadge.

"Wesley said that we all have to go

when our time comes - and the Gump's time has come."

"Piffle!" said Meredith. But there was a worried frown on his fair brow.

WEDNESDAY, 7.30 p.m.

Hunwick of the Lower Fourth presented himself at the study of Tomms in the Sixth Form corridor. Tomms was a prefect, and Hunwick had an imposition to tender.

"My imposition, Tomms," said Hunwick.

The prefect, who was alone in his study and working at his table, looked up.

"All right," he said. "Leave it there, and don't rush about the staircase like a lunatic in future. You nearly knocked me flying."

"I'm sorry, Tomms," said Hunwick. He looked back before making his exit. "I saw that giant six you hit this afternoon. It was terrific."

Tomms smiled modestly. Hunwick went on:

"Isn't it a shame about Mr. Buddle leaving?"

Tomms stared at him.

"Mr. Buddle leaving? Leaving where?"

"Leaving Slade, Tomms. It seems he's getting married, and he's going somewhere where his wife can live with him."

"Mr. Buddle getting married? I don't believe it." Tomms looked sceptical. "Where did you get that yarn from?"

"It's true, Tomms," said

Hunwick sadly. "I suppose he told Meredith. He's been offered a post where he can be housemaster. He's accepted it. A good many of the fellows know about it."

Hunwick departed. Tomms sat in thought for a few moments. Then he carefully re-opened a letter to his mother which he had already signed and sealed. Taking up his pen, he added a postscript to it, as follows:

"P. S. You remember Mr. Buddle, our English master. You and he knew one another when you were both young. He is getting married, and is leaving Slade to take a post at some college where his wife can live at the school. Like Mr. Fromo at Slade. Pity Fromo doesn't decide to retire, and leave the housemaster's post vacant here. I'd rather have Buddle than Fromo any day. But isn't it astounding? Who would have thought that a man of Buddle's age would be so frivolous?"

Tomms re-sealed the letter, and put it on one side to be posted later in the school box to catch the following morning's collection.

WEDNESDAY, 8 p.m.

Scarlet of the Sixth Form was in his bed-sitter, having a wash at his ablution-bowl. He was getting ready to go to have supper with his parents. Michael Scarlet was the son of the Headmaster of Slade. The Headmaster had been known as "Pinky" or "Old Pink" to generations of Slade boys, and it was a natural sequence of events that the Headmaster's son should be nicknamed "Pinky-Mi".

Since he had become a prefect, Pinky-Mi was occasionally allowed to visit his parents in their quarters adjoining the School House and take supper with them. This evening was one of those occasions.

While Pinky-Mi was towelling himself, Tomms came into the study, closed the door, and sat down in the armchair. Tomms chatted away with Pinky-Mi while the latter spruced himself up in readiness for his supper date, taking out his best blazer and changing into immaculate grey slacks.

Just as he was about to take his leave, Tomms happened on the subject of Mr. Buddle.

"By the way, I hear that the Gump is leaving Slade. Did you know?"

Pinky-Mi looked surprised.

"I hadn't heard anything about it. I shall be very sorry. Mr. Buddle is something of an institution at Slade. Why on earth is he going?"

Tomms chuckled.

"An even bigger surprise. It seems he's getting married, and I suppose that having a wife will make it possible for him to take a housemaster-ship somewhere."

Pinky-Mi shook his head, completely baffled.

"Well, wonders will never cease. Did the Gump tell you this himself?"

"No. One of the youngsters in the Lower Fourth was telling me half an hour ago." He looked curiously at the Headmaster's son. "I suppose he will have given in his notice to your father."

Pinky-Mi shrugged his shoulders.

"Must have done, but I haven't heard anything. I'm sorry, if it's true. Mr. Buddle is a fine master, and he's always been good to me."

After Tomms had gone, Pinky-

Mi stood in thought. He looked at his watch. He still had fifteen minutes before he was due in his parents' quarters for supper.

Pinky-Mi made his way to the Lower Fourth passage, and looked into the study of Meredith of that form. Meredith, Pilgrim and Garmansway, who shared the study, were all present. Pilgrim and Garmansway were just completing their evening preparation, but Meredith had already finished, and was sitting in the window seat, gazing out into the summer twilight. All three looked in polite enquiry at the prefect as he put his head round their study door.

He came to the point at once.

"What's this I hear about Mr. Buddle leaving Slade?"

Meredith slid off the window seat, and moved across the study.

"You've heard about it then, Scarlet? It's grim isn't it? Slade won't be the same without the Gump."

"No, it won't!" Pinky-Mi nodded pleasantly. "He knows his own business best. I was told he's getting married."

"Married!" Meredith looked startled. "I hadn't heard that bit before. Somebody said he was going to Shrewsbury as a housemaster. I suppose most housemasters are married men."

"Oh, well, don't gossip about it, there's good lads," said Pinky-Mi.

He went on his way leaving the three Lower Fourth heroes staring at one another.

WEDNESDAY, 8.20 p.m.

Mr. Buddle was writing a letter to an old friend. The old friend was Mr. Lionel Meredith, the father of Meredith of Mr. Buddle's own form. Mr. Buddle wrote:

"I am greatly enjoying the latest volume of 'The Gem' which you lent me. I feel guilty at having kept your book for so long, but I don't get so much time for reading during the summer term. I will return it to you the next time we meet.

"For my taste, the best story in the book is 'The Tell-Tale'. Very well written, with much knowledge of human frailty and peccadilloes. I am not happy, though, with the title of that story. A tell-tale is a tale-bearer - what the boys call, in their own peculiar parlance, a sneak. The boy, Mellish, in the story, is not, so far as the narrative is concerned, bearing tales or sneaking. He is deliberately trying to create misunderstandings. Would you not think, dear friend, that 'The Mischief-Maker' would be a much more appropriate title than 'The Tell-Tale'?"

WEDNESDAY, 9.20 p.m.

Pinky-Mi enjoyed his supper with his parents. There was succulent cold ham, an exciting salad which was one of Mrs. Scarlet's specialities, and fruit and cream rounded off the meal.

While Mrs. Scarlet was preparing coffee, the Headmaster and his son sat on the settee near the open window. Darkness was falling, and shaded wall-lights had been switched on.

Pinky-Mi did not enjoy these evenings very much, apart from the meal. Mr. Scarlet was not a man able to discard his headmastership in his own family circle, and it did not make things too easy for his son. Mr. Scarlet tried, not very successfully,

to keep the conversation flowing, but he concentrated mainly on school matters.

However, it did give Pinky-Mi the chance to ask the question at the back of his mind.

He ventured: "I hear that Mr. Buddle is leaving Slade. Is it definite, sir?"

Mr. Scarlet gazed at his son. He did not answer at once. Gradually his jaw set in a firm line.

Pinky-Mi sat in silence. Clearly something was wrong, and he wished with all his heart that he had not broached the subject.

Mr. Scarlet spoke at last. He said:

"It is extraordinary how boys gossip. May I ask where you heard that Mr. Buddle is leaving Slade?"

Pinky-Mi shifted uncomfortably.

"It seems to be spoken of in the Lower School. I had a few words with young Meredith of the Fourth --"

"Meredith!" exclaimed Mr. Scarlet. There was a wealth of disapproval in the tone. "So Mr. Buddle has seen fit to tell Meredith, a junior schoolboy --"

"Then it's true, sir. I'm sorry," mumbled Pinky-Mi.

Mr. Scarlet held up one of his large hands. He was a large man, quite over-powering when he got on his high horse.

"Say no more, Michael. I am amazed, and I am displeased, and I am astounded. Say no more."

Michael said no more. He wished heartily that he hadn't said

anything in the first place.

WEDNESDAY, 10 p.m.

When Mr. and Mrs. Scarlet were alone, the Headmaster poured out his indignation to his wife.

"It appears, my dear, that Mr. Buddle is leaving Slade."

Mrs. Scarlet looked up from the book she was reading.

"Is he, really? Oh, dear, I am sorry. Such a nice man, and an exceptional teacher, I am sure. What a loss for Slade!"

Mr. Scarlet said, in measured tones: "The loss, in the long run, will be for Mr. Buddle, not for Slade. No doubt Mr. Buddle, in due course, will condescend to inform me that he is leaving and why he is doing so. As it is, I hear it first from my own son, and he, in his turn, obtained the information from Meredith, a junior in this school."

Mrs. Scarlet shook her head in bewilderment.

"Dear me, how very wrong of Mr. Buddle. So unlike him!"

Mr. Scarlet's face was dark with annoyance.

"Buddle is friendly with the Meredith family. I have pointed out to him, more than once, that it is undesirable for a schoolmaster to be on visiting terms with the parents of a Slade boy. Now we see how right I am. Mr. Buddle has confided in the Merediths that he is leaving Slade, before he has even given me any notification of his intentions, and the boy, Meredith, has spread that infor-

mation through the entire school."

Mrs. Scarlet made a sound of perplexity with her tongue, and returned to her book.

THURSDAY, noon

The next morning Mr. Buddle took the Sixth Form for English Literature. After the class ended, and everybody else had left the form-room, Pinky-Mi lingered. He approached Mr. Buddle who was gathering together a number of papers on his desk. The English master looked up at the senior.

"Well, Scarlet?" asked Mr. Buddle, with a pleasant smile.

Pinky-Mi looked uncomfortable.

"I just wanted to say, sir, that we should all be very sorry if you left Slade."

Mr. Buddle's eyebrows rose in acute surprise.

"Indeed, Scarlet? Well, I'm glad to know that, but what gave you the impression that I should be leaving Slade?"

"I had supper with my parents last night, sir. The matter came up then. It has worried me --"

Pinky-Mi broke off. The pleasant smile had gone from Mr. Buddle's countenance. The senior could not miss the grimness which had replaced the smile. Suddenly he felt confused, and wished himself anywhere but in front of Mr. Buddle's desk.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said miserably. "I shouldn't have spoken."

"I find it extraordinary that you

should have spoken," said Mr. Buddle coldly. "Good morning, Scarlet."

Pinky-Mi hurried from the form-room.

Mr. Buddle stood rubbing his chin. He scratched his head. He looked worried. It almost seemed as though the Head of Slade had decided to get rid of his English master, and as though he had discussed the matter before his young son, one of Mr. Buddle's pupils.

"Surely it cannot be," said Mr. Buddle to the empty form-room. "It would be quite monstrous."

Collecting his papers, he hurried away.

THURSDAY, 7.30 p.m.

Meredith of the Lower Fourth was writing to his father:

Dear Dad,

A simply awful thing is happening here at Slade. The Head and Mr. Buddle seem to have had a row. Pilgrim was in the Mulberry Walk this afternoon, and saw what happened. Mr. Buddle was sitting under the Mulberry Tree. The Head came along, and Mr. Buddle got up and went to speak to him, but the Head swept past, cutting Mr. Buddle dead. Mr. Buddle called out something, and the Head turned and said "I have nothing to say to you", and Mr. Buddle said "You're no gentleman".

Isn't it awful! There has been a rumour going round that Mr. Buddle is leaving Slade, and from what Pilgrim saw in the Mulberry Walk, it is evidently true. Some are saying that Mr. Buddle is getting married and taking a post at Shrewsbury. I don't know what to think. Did the Gump say anything to you about it, the last time you saw him? I'm sure he didn't.

I feel so upset. The old school is going to the dogs. Isn't it awful? I suppose there's nothing you can do about it?

Your loving son,
Ceddie.

Meredith signed his letter with a flourish, addressed and stamped an envelope for it, and then took it down to the school mail-box in the hall for collection the next morning.

SATURDAY, 2.30 p.m.

Another half-holiday. More cricket being played across the road on the Slade playing fields. Mr. Buddle sat at his desk in his study staring straight ahead. He was lost in thought, and his thoughts were not pleasant. Mr. Buddle just could not understand how it had all happened, yet it seemed that his career at Slade was drawing to its close. Mr. Buddle was depressed. He loved Slade, and would be grieved to leave.

There was a tap on the door. Mr. Buddle sat in silence. He did not wish to see anybody just then.

The tap was repeated, slightly louder.

"Come in!" called out Mr. Buddle irritably.

He looked up. The expression of depression left his face to be replaced with one of surprise and pleasure.

The door had opened. A lady came in. She was middle-aged, plumpish, pretty in a charming faded way, and she looked kind. She also looked very, very anxious.

Mr. Buddle started to his feet. The lady closed the door, and faced him.

"Maggie!" ejaculated Mr. Buddle. "A lovely surprise --"

Her opening words startled him.

She said: "Joe, who is this woman?"

Mr. Buddle faltered: "I beg your pardon, Maggie."

He knew the lady of course. She was Mrs. Tomms, the mother of Tomms of the Sixth Form to whom Mr. Buddle taught English Language and Literature. Mr. Buddle had, in fact, known her for many years, though, until comparatively recently, they had lost touch with one another. She was an old friend of Mr. Buddle's, and, to be quite accurate, she was an old flame of the schoolmaster's, though that was a long time ago.

Mrs. Tomms repeated: "Who is this woman, Joe?"

Mr. Buddle moistened his lips with his tongue. He cast an involuntary glance over his shoulder.

"What woman? Which woman?" he asked.

"Don't prevaricate, Joe!" Mrs. Tomms spoke sternly. "You know quite well which woman I mean." Her voice softened. "Joe, how could you be so utterly stupid. This is some scheming woman who has wormed her way into your affection. You have let her turn your head."

At a loss for words, Mr. Buddle stood staring at his visitor.

Mrs. Tomms said, quietly: "Tell me, Joe - tell me truthfully - do you really want to marry this scheming woman?"

Mr. Buddle controlled his wits at last. He gazed at Mrs. Tomms in bewilderment.

"Maggie, my dear, you are not well. Please sit down."

"I am perfectly well." Mrs. Tomms sank into Mr. Buddle's arm-

chair and pressed a flimsy handkerchief against her cheek. She whispered: "Oh, Joe, we had an understanding - you and I - and now this woman --"

"What woman?" demanded Mr. Buddle, raising his voice.

"The women you are going to marry," said Mrs. Tomms.

Mr. Buddle pressed his palm against his forehead.

"Maggie, it must be the heat. There is no woman. Where on earth have you got the idea --" As Mrs. Tomms started to speak again, he interrupted her wildly: "I tell you, Maggie, there is no woman. I have no intention of getting married. Who has told you this absurd thing?"

Mrs. Tomms rose to her feet. She brushed a tear from her pink cheek.

"There is no other woman?"

"Certainly not!"

"And you are not getting married?"

"Certainly not!"

They stared at one another. Mr. Buddle said gently:

"Maggie. My dear, dear Maggie - who has told you this tale?"

"Lance told me in a letter. He said that you were getting married and leaving Slade --"

Mr. Buddle's eyes glinted with anger.

"You mean that your son wrote to you with such wicked lies?"

Mrs. Tomms shook her head.

"Lance didn't make it up, Joe. He believed what he wrote to me.

Somehow the tale has got around --- Oh, Joe, I am so embarrassed."

There was another tap on the door.

Mr. Buddle grimaced. "Come in," he called out for the second time that afternoon.

The door opened. The gentleman who looked in was middle-aged, tall, neatly dressed, and well-known to Mr. Buddle. It was yet another parent of yet another of Mr. Buddle's pupils.

"Mr. Meredith!" exclaimed Mr. Buddle. He coughed with a touch of self-consciousness.

"Forgive me for butting in," begged Mr. Meredith. "I didn't know you were engaged. I'll call back presently."

"No, no," said Mrs. Tomms breathlessly. "I'm just going. Mr. Buddle and I have finished our chat - about my son's future." The last phrase seemed unnecessary, and Maggie Tomms blushed. "My car is outside. My son is playing cricket away from the school today, I know. I will telephone you some time, Mr. Buddle."

Politely, Mr. Meredith opened the door. Mr. Buddle said nothing. The door closed behind Mrs. Tomms.

Mr. Buddle sat down at his desk, and motioned to Mr. Meredith to occupy the armchair near the window.

"Twenty-five years ago I asked that lady to marry me," confessed Mr. Buddle almost casually. He smiled very faintly. "She was wise. She turned me down. Now, all these years later, she is the mother of one of my senior boys. If she had not rejected me so long ago --"

He shrugged his shoulders. "It is nice to see you, Mr. Meredith. You have a purpose in coming to see me unexpectedly, no doubt. What is it?"

"I came because I had a letter from Cedric. He told me that you are leaving Slade. Is that true, Mr. Buddle?"

"Another boy and another letter," remarked Mr. Buddle. He sounded bitter. "That lady who has just gone out had a letter from her son to say that I was getting married. She came -- to congratulate me --"

"And are you getting married, Mr. Buddle?"

"I am not getting married. On the other hand, I may be leaving Slade."

"Yet you wrote to me, only a day or two ago, and you never mentioned it in your letter to me."

"I didn't mention it a day or two ago because I did not know a day or two ago," said Mr. Buddle emphatically.

"It is, if I am not being impertinent, a matter of a misunderstanding between you and Mr. Scarlet," suggested Mr. Meredith.

"It is not difficult for misunderstandings to occur when one is dealing with a man as self-opinionated as Mr. Scarlet. Far be it from me to criticise my chief!" added Mr. Buddle, cheerfully ignoring the fact that that was exactly what he was doing.

Mr. Meredith gave an involuntary chuckle. He was serious again immediately.

"Old friend, I want to tell you a little story," said Mr. Meredith. "Several times in the past you have linked some event in real life with one

of the old stories in the Gem. Am I not right?"

Mr. Buddle regarded him curiously.

"Yes, you are right. I do not see --"

"The little story I am about to tell you comes from the Magnet, with which you have only a nodding acquaintance. Mr. Quelch, a master at Greyfriars, has, for many years, been engaged in writing a History of Greyfriars. In one section of this work, he gave his own opinion of a past Headmaster, a tyrant who had reduced the school to turmoil. In short, Mr. Quelch wrote scathingly of a long-gone Headmaster of the school.

"An ill-natured boy named Skinner is sent to Mr. Quelch's study, and there he sees the rough draft of this section of the History of Greyfriars. Being a rough draft, it is in Mr. Quelch's hand-writing, and is not typed. Skinner sees the possibility of making trouble. He takes the rough draft, referring to the long-departed Headmaster, away from Mr. Quelch's study. Skinner hands this sheet to the present Headmaster, Dr. Locke. 'I found this in the corridor, and wondered whether it might be important.' The Head takes it, and, quite naturally, reads it. He recognises Mr. Quelch's handwriting, and jumps to the conclusion that Mr. Quelch is being bitterly critical of the present Headmaster --"

"Quite naturally!" said Mr. Buddle drily.

"Exactly! A coolness results between the Head and Mr. Quelch. It leads to the sacking of Quelch, and a rebellion on the part of the boys who are led by a wealthy comrade and open their own school. An outstanding series

came about in the Magnet."

"A lot of coincidence," observed Mr. Buddle, still speaking drily. "The draft happens to be in Mr. Quelch's handwriting, otherwise the Magnet would have lost an excellent series."

"Quite!" murmured Mr. Meredith.

"And so misunderstandings occur which would never occur in real life between intelligent people," said Mr. Buddle, sourly.

"My dear Mr. Buddle, real life is made up of coincidence. Misunderstandings in real life can be tedious and unnecessary, but they do occur. They are not peculiar to fiction."

Mr. Buddle said thoughtfully: "It reminds me of the story 'The Tell-Tale' in the volume of Gems you so kindly lent me, and which I should have returned to you long ago."

"Keep it as long as you like," said Mr. Meredith cordially. "In your letter to me you suggested that 'The Mischief-Maker' would be a better title for that story than 'The Tell-Tale'. I agree with you. When they re-published it in a paper called 'The Penny Popular', they entitled it 'Rough Justice', which I used to think quite good." He paused, and then went on, picking his words carefully: "Do you not think that you yourself may have been the victim of such a mischief-maker?"

Mr. Buddle sighed.

"It is impossible to say. You may be right."

Mr. Meredith said, in very quiet tones: "You and Mr. Scarlet

seem to be on less than cordial terms, if what my son tells me is true. You may be leaving Slade - though you have always professed to love your post here very dearly - and you are going to take a post at Shrewsbury. It is rumoured that you are getting married."

"What!" yapped Mr. Buddle.

"I think a mischief-maker is indicated," said Mr. Meredith firmly. "If so, it should be easy to trace the source of the story."

"It might not be so easy. Boys at school live by a strange code. It is curious that you mention Shrewsbury. I have a friend who recently became a housemaster there." Mr. Buddle sat in silence, and Mr. Meredith watched him with interest. Suddenly a strange expression became fixed on Mr. Buddle's countenance.

He rose to his feet, went to his bookcase, and extracted a blue-bound volume which Mr. Meredith recognised. It was that gentleman's collection of Gems from the year 1908.

Mr. Buddle sat down at his desk with the volume before him. He turned to the blue-covered copy of 'The Tell-Tale', with the striking picture of one lad whispering in the ear of another.

Mr. Meredith rose and stood by his side, gazing down at the slightly faded pages of the old paper.

"'The Tell-Tale'," murmured Mr. Buddle, reminiscently. "Or, more appropriately, 'The Mischief-Maker'."

He leaned back in his chair, and folded his arms. With Mr. Buddle's fingers removed from the surface, a page or two turned over, and a book-mark of some description came into view.

Mr. Buddle took up the sheet of paper, and unfolded it. He read:

"I would inform the Headmaster that I shall be taking a new teaching post in another school next term ..."

Mr. Meredith said something, but Mr. Buddle did not answer. He was reading: "... I shall be getting married during the next vacation. ... I have been offered a Housemastership at Shrewsbury ..."

Mr. Buddle spoke at last.

"It must be the key to the mystery." His eyes were gleaming. He held out the sheet of paper. "Read that, Mr. Meredith."

Mr. Meredith took the sheet. As he read, he rested himself against the edge of the desk. After a few moments, Mr. Meredith stared in bewilderment at the schoolmaster.

Mr. Meredith said: "So you are taking a post at Shrewsbury? No, that's nonsense!"

"I am not taking a post at Shrewsbury," rapped out Mr. Buddle. "I am not getting married. I am not doing anything, except, perhaps, losing my temper."

"That letter is in your handwriting --"

"It is in my handwriting, but it is not a letter. It is a rough draft of something I included in a letter. It was written nearly a year ago. A blind man could see that the ink is faded and that the sheet has been folded for a long time."

A ghost of a smile crossed Mr. Meredith's kindly face. He glanced down at the sheet again, and nodded.

Mr. Buddle went on: "A

schoolmaster friend of mine named Verity -- Mr. Scarlet knows him, actually, for the man did relief work at Slade on one occasion years ago --. At the time of which I speak, Verity had a post in a college at Torquay. A housemastership became vacant at Shrewsbury, and Verity applied for it, and was offered it. His Principal at Torquay had been exceptionally good to him, and Verity did not like to let him down. All the same, he felt he had to take the opportunity at Shrewsbury, especially as it was for a married man, and Verity was shortly to be married. He wrote to me, asking my advice, and I jotted down, in a rough draft, what I would say to his present Principal if I were so placed. I then wrote fully to Verity, and included the substance of the rough draft in my letter to him."

"You obviously kept the rough draft."

"There was no reason why I should, but, apparently, I folded it and used it as a bookmark. I transferred it from one book to another, and it finished up marking some spot in your volume of Gems."

"Extraordinary!" murmured Mr. Meredith. "So now you know who 'The Tell-Tale' - or, more appropriately, 'The Mischief-Maker' - is."

Mr. Buddle shook his head.

"I do not know. I have no idea whom it could be. I remember using that sheet as a bookmark in your volume of Gems some months ago, but that is all. I shall question your son and Tomms --"

Mr. Meredith said doubtfully: "You have not loaned that book to anyone?"

"Certainly not!" Mr. Buddle

spoke indignantly. "Under no circumstances would I lend your book to anyone. I would not allow the book to go from this room. You must know me well enough for that."

"Then I cannot understand it. That sheet of paper, on which you wrote a good time ago, must be the key to the mystery, yet the sheet has been in the book, and the book has not been out of this room. It is a puzzle worthy of Ferrers Locke."

Mr. Meredith rose to his feet, and, as he did so, his sleeve caught the edge of the musical-box on the desk, and flipped the lid open. Immediately the strains of "Comin' Through the Rye" tinkled sweetly on the air.

Mr. Meredith turned in surprise, and closed the musical-box. The lovely old tune ended abruptly.

"Sorry!" exclaimed Mr. Meredith. He stared at Mr. Buddle. "What's the matter, old friend?"

Mr. Buddle was sitting bolt upright, a greenish glint in his eye, an alert expression on his face.

Back to him with a rush had come the memory of the recent occasion when he had heard, unexpectedly, the strains from that musical-box. Back into his head came the memory of a slovenly youth, speaking in an obsequious tone, saying something like "I wish I could read that story 'The Tell-Tale', sir. Might I borrow that book?" Peremptorily Mr. Buddle had refused the request. He recalled now that the boy had also said something like "I should be sorry if you went away, sir." And Mr. Buddle remembered how, without taking much note of the oddness of the

boy's remark, he, Mr. Buddle, had said something akin to "We all have to go some time."

"Of course!" ejaculated Mr. Buddle. "Tammadge! Who else? The mischief-making young rascal! Tammadge, of course. What a fool I have been!"

Mr. Meredith said, with some excitement: "You have remembered something?"

Mr. Buddle stood up. He leaned forward towards his friend.

"Yes, Mr. Meredith, I have remembered something. A few days ago I was approaching my study from the corridor outside. I was surprised to hear my musical-box playing. I entered this room and found a boy here - a junior of my own form, named Tammadge --"

"Please tell me the whole story," said Mr. Meredith.

Mr. Buddle did so. Finally he waved in the air the sheet of paper which had been the root of the trouble.

"Without any doubt, Tammadge opened your volume, and saw this piece of paper, bearing my writing. He assumed it was part of a letter which I was sending to my own Headmaster, Mr. Scarlet. Tammadge left my study, and spread his own version of it, and that version passed through the school. Eventually Mr. Scarlet heard the quite untrue tale that I was leaving Slade. I think he heard it from his own son, Scarlet of the Sixth. Mr. Scarlet jumped to the conclusion that others in the school knew that I planned to leave Slade, while I had given no notice of my intentions to the Headmaster himself. He felt hurt. Later, his son, Scarlet of the Sixth, spoke to me, and I assumed

that the Headmaster was making changes in his staff without notifying me, and I was angry --"

"This is the House that Jack built," Mr. Meredith thought to himself, but he did not say it aloud. He said: "And so misunderstandings occurred which do not happen in real life among intelligent people."

A flush spread over Mr. Buddle's face.

He said grimly: "If you will excuse me, Mr. Meredith, I shall now send for Tammadge."

Mr. Meredith smiled.

"I should do so without delay, Mr. Buddle. In the meantime, with your permission, I will drop in on the Headmaster if he is at home. I may borrow this sheet of paper? Thank you. Verity, I think you said the name was." He gave a happy little chuckle. "You know, sir, I am playing the part of Colonel Wharton in that old tale about Skinner and Mr. Quelch. I have a feeling that I shall be equally successful."

Twenty minutes later, Tammadge - a sadder and wiser Tammadge - left Mr. Buddle's study.

And twenty minutes after that, there was a tap on Mr. Buddle's

study door.

The Headmaster of Slade entered. He crossed the study, holding out his large hand.

"My dear Mr. Buddle!" he said with quiet dignity.

Mr. Buddle grasped Mr. Scarlet's hand and shook it warmly.

"My dear Headmaster!" purred Mr. Buddle.

"My wife sends a very special invitation to you, Mr. Buddle. You will take supper with us this evening? We dine at nine."

Mr. Buddle smiled happily, and nodded.

"I shall be there, my dear Headmaster."

And it was so.

Mr. Meredith, walking across the Slade quadrangle towards the playing fields, hoping that he might find his hopeful young son, was also smiling happily. He was whistling a little tune. He rather fancied himself in the role of the peace-making Colonel Wharton.

* * * * *

EDITORIAL COMMENT

"The Tell-Tale", the story which fascinated Mr. Buddle, appeared in the Gem very early in the penny New Series - No. 8, in the Spring of 1908. Evidently someone in the editorial office had the same idea of the title as Mr. Buddle, for it was reprinted in the Spring of 1932 as "Mellish, the Mischief-Maker", in Gem No. 1263.

The Mystery of the Yuletide Mystery

by R. HIBBERT

Sandwiched between the 'Barring Out at St. Frank's' and 'The Spendthrift of St. Frank's' is a short series to which Bob Blythe has given the overall title of 'Christmas with Lord Dorrimore'.

There are three Nelson Lee issues in this series; No. 237 (20.12.1919) 'Dorrie's Christmas Party', No. 238 (27.12.1919) 'A Yuletide of Mystery' and No. 239 (3.1.1920) 'The New Year Heroes'. The third story has little to do with the others and I'm not going to consider it here. And, for this article, I'm going to treat Nos. 237 and 238 as one story and call it 'The Yuletide Mystery'.

It's an appropriate title because in this story we have mysteries within mysteries. The reader has to be his own detective and supply his own explanations. Unlike most detective-cum-ghost stories written for boys' magazines Christmas Numbers the hows and whys and the wherefores are not carefully detailed in the last chapter. That Christmas Edwy Searles Brooks gave us not so much a Who-dun-it? as a How-dun-it? and the reader was left to work it out for himself.

No. 238, 'A Yuletide of Mystery', although dated 27th December, 1919, was on sale on or before Wednesday, the 24th. Perhaps E.S.B. imagined his reader sitting in the parlour on Christmas Day; the first real Christmas since 1913. Everyone stuffed with Christmas dinner. Uncle Tom and Dad going on about Christmas in the trenches. Grandma asleep. Mum and Auntie Jessie talking about Sally's twin girls. A long gaslit winter evening ahead. Now is the time to talk to cousin Jack about the latest Nelson Lee series and find out his views on how the face appeared at the window of Cliff Castle, and exactly how Lord Dorrimore managed to be three people at once, and why, on page 4 of 'Dorrie's Christmas Party', his lordship says his castle's in Cornwall, and, on page 5, says it's in Kent. Mr. Brooks has deliberately left a lot to the reader. He's presented him with a Christmas Conundrum. Something to puzzle over during the holidays. Over the candied fruits and the chocolate creams the two boys sort it all out.

'Dorrie's Christmas Party' tells of Lord Dorrimore visiting St. Frank's. He asks Nipper to pick out a dozen of his fellow Removites for a Christmas Party at Cliff Castle. Dorrie's rented the place. It's "on the coast of Cornwall, about thirty miles from St. Frank's."

"Thirty miles, sir!" says Watson.

"Might be thirty-one," says Dorrie.

Nipper - in those days the most omniscient lad in fiction - says, "You must have got a funny idea of distances. Cornwall is a lot further than thirty miles, Dorrie. Why, it's right down the other side of England - through Hants and Dorset and Devon -"

"My dear kid, who's talkin' about Cornwall?"

"I am," says Nipper.

"By why should you, when this castle of mine is in Kent, an' practically on the Sussex border?" asks Dorrie.

"You said, not five minutes ago, that it was in Cornwall."

"Did I?" grins his lordship. "That's nothin' - a mere slip, my son. Perhaps I was thinkin' of a pal of mine who's gone to Cornwall for Christmas. The place I've rented is on the Kent coast, an' not more than thirty miles away, to the best of my belief."

Now, what was all that about?

Obviously a piece of characterisation. Edwy was making his stay-at-home readers realise that Dorrie the globetrotter is so used to having several thousand square miles of desert, jungle or lost world to swan about in that he just can't take in the piffling little distances in which we measure this tight little isle. As there's no more mention of Cornwall that's how I explain that minor mystery.

Soon after their arrival at Cliff Castle, Watson, Tregellis-West and Nipper, having a quiet hundred up in the billiard room, see a face pressed against the window. Watson, who sees it twice, describes it as "an awful looking face, with whiskers round it." Nipper, the trained observer, notices that the "two eyes were flashing queerly".

"The eyes were gleaming, but the face seemed to be dead! If I believed in ghosts, I should say that thing was an apparition."

Enter Dorrie, whistling.

"Hallo, what's the matter here? Been quarrelin' or something? You all look pretty black."

But when they tell Dorrie, he says he doesn't believe in ghosts and, what's more, as that "window is twelve feet from the ground, an' the wall is sheer," he doesn't believe in twelve foot giants either. (Remember, this is December 1919.) Six months later Dorrie won't be denying the possible existence of twelve foot giants. In July 1920 he will meet up with the Arzacs, the White Giants (nine feet plus) of the Upper Amazon.

Nipper and Co. verify the fact that the window is four yards above the ground by going outside. 'The snow ... beneath the window was one white, unbroken sheet! Above the window the bare, blank walls of the castle stretched high!'

"No human being could possibly have come to the window," chuckles Dorrie. Then suddenly he becomes serious.

"Somebody who lived in this place years ago said that they could see a face sometimes behind the window of the billiard room. I thought it was all bunkum."

When Nipper tells Nelson Lee he says, in that brisk way great detectives have, "If you saw a face, human agency was certainly responsible".

All the same at the end of 'Dorrie's Christmas Party' Nipper is troubled. "I hope that nothing else happens," he says, "because it makes a chap feel rather uncomfortable."

Vain hopes, Nip. In Nelson Lee 238 - 'A Yuletide of Mystery' - a figure lurks upon the terrace and, when challenged, makes off into the darkness uttering wild laughs. Dorrie disappears, and so do Lady Mornington's diamonds. "My jewels are worth £20,000," says she with a shake of her pretty tiara'd head.

But the face at the window never appears again. It's mentioned in passing - "Fancy, sheer fancy," said Dorrie' - but never explained. Reader participation is called for.

Mind you, with Dorrie gone - kidnapped if Nelson Lee reads the clues aright - we've other things to ponder.

Tracks in the snow - of two men half dragging, half carrying something large - start under Dorrie's bedroom window and lead into a lane. Here there are the tracks of the two men and the something large and a horse and trap.

Nelson deduces that Dorrie has been taken off in the trap by one of the men and that the other has gone off, on foot, across the fields. Nipper and Montie Tregellis-West follow the trap tracks, Nelson Lee and Tommy Watson those of the man on foot.

Nipper and Tregellis-West are led to a dilapidated boathouse on the beach. Inside is 'a fine looking horse and a neat trap'. No Dorrie. But at the high water mark a trail of footprints and marks, which look at though they've been made by a 'dragged sack', lead to a cave. Dorrie's clothes have been buried there! 'The evidence was appallingly grave'. Nipper turns to Montie and says, "Dorrie was brought here because his captors had evil designs upon him ... In short, I can't help thinking Dorrie has been murdered and that his body has been thrown into the sea."

Montie has barely time to turn pale when there's 'a low chuckle - and the next moment a rumbling noise followed ... A boulder had been rolled against the cave entrance'.

Meanwhile, in another part of the rugged coastline, Nelson Lee and Watson are following the trail of the man on foot. It leads them to a cliff top overlooking the beach. The man must have gone over!

'Nelson Lee gazed down upon the rocks below. The distance was considerable, and the cliff was almost sheer.'

A fearful Tommy Watson looks round for a mangled body, but Nelson draws his attention to a deep groove cut in the cliff top, a handy tree stump and other signs. The Nelson Lees, Sexton Blakes, Sherlock Holmes and Baden-Powells of this world read those sort of signs the way you and I read newspaper headlines. The man 'tied a rope to the stump, threw the loose end over the cliff and swarmed down'. So Nelson Lee and Watson make their way down to the beach too; just in time to see a man 'curiously attired in a long coat and hat which almost came over his eyes' heaving a boulder across the entrance to a cave.

When the man - 'tall, shabbily dressed, his dark beard unkempt and ragged' - is seized, he pretends to be an Italian. Nelson Lee, laughing heartily, recognises him as Dorrie himself!

It seems that his lordship's one of those upper class practical jokers who were such a damned nuisance to more serious minded citizens in the first half of this century. He has the nerve to say to Nelson, "You see, it was such a bally pity to have you at the castle doin' nothin'. I figured it all out to myself, an' provided you with a brand-new, ready made mystery, an' left you to chew at it."

Nelson Lee is honest enough to say, "You succeeded remarkably well. I must confess that I had no suspicion of the truth until a few minutes ago. I over-looked that you are an incorrigible practical joker."

Dorrie was the mysterious, wildly laughing figure who'd lurked on the terrace the evening before. He'd borrowed his sister's (Lady Mornington) jewels and, in the middle of the night, had faked four trails across the snow.

"You took a terrific lot of trouble over it," said Nipper.

'Dorrie sighed.

"'Trouble! I haven't worked so hard for years. I've been working like fury ever since yesterday evening'. I haven't had any sleep or rest. It'll be to my credit in future that I succeeded in spoofin' the great Nelson Lee."

"'How did you fake up all the tracks? You must have walked miles."

"'Miles!' said his lordship. 'I've walked leagues! I've been trampin' about, along the cliffs, and along the beach, until I am weak. I've been drivin' a horse an' trap, an' I've been frightfully worried all the time in case I should give the game away too early.'"

And that's the only account we have of Dorrie's movements that snowy Christmas night. If you're one of those people who are only too glad to get to the end of a detective story his brief explanation will do. You know, in a vague sort of a way, what Dorrie's been up to.

If you are worried as to exactly how he did it you have to supply your own theories. The ones which follow are mine. You might have different ones; better ones.

There are four sets of tracks to worry about.

- (1) The prints of two men's feet and the marks of a body. These lead from the castle to the lane.
- (2) The tracks of the horse and trap from the lane to the beach.
- (3) The footprints of one man, from the lane, across the fields and as far as the cliff edge.
- (4) The tracks of one man dragging a body along the beach.

How did Lord Dorrimore make the tracks of two men and one 'half dragged, half carried' body? Well, for this trick, Dorrie requires a pair of alpenstocks, a

spare pair of boots and an old sack. I assume sporting millionaires always have alpenstocks handy; in the umbrella stand, or the billiard room, or the gun room or the après-ski room, or whatever. He fastens the boots on the business end of the alpenstocks, trails the sack (which contains one of his suits) from the handles and sets off through the snow. He leans well forward with his arms fully extended so that he leaves the maximum gap between the tracks of the alpenstocks and those of his own feet. The booted alpenstocks leave the marks of the man in front, the dragged sack leaves the trail you'd expect from the body and Dorrie's own boots leave the tracks of the man behind. Simple.

Now he's arrived at the lane - all three of him - so he has to produce the tracks of a horse and trap going thattaway and one man's feet going in the opposite direction. We know he used a real horse and trap. Pity. He could have used a rickshaw he'd picked up on his travels and he could have attached horse shoes to his alpenstocks and his boots. But he didn't.

The trap tracks and the single man's footprints might have been made at different times; trap tracks first and foot prints an hour or so later. This is Theory A.

The trap tracks and the single man's footprints might have been made simultaneously. This is Theory B.

Theory A first.

A

- (2) The trap's tracks to the beach ... and
- (3) The footprints across the fields ... and
- (4) The tracks (along the beach) of one man and a body.

The horse and trap is waiting in the lane. Your carriage horse was used to hanging about waiting for someone to flick the reins and say Giddyap. It probably wasn't standing there for more than half an hour; Dorrie having parked it in the lane - and tethered it to a fence - before he pretended to go to bed. So he throws his impedimentia into the trap, mounts and takes the lane down to the beach. He stables the horse and trap in the old boat house and walks to the cave trailing his sack (one man dragging a body). He then climbs up the cliff - having previously left the rope dangling - and walks backwards for a mile over the fields to where he got into the trap. Then what does he do? Walks back the way he's just come - he's going forwards this time - setting his feet into the prints he's already made. Down the rope he goes, into the cave, buries the suit of clothes he had in the sack (he could of course, have done this earlier, before his I'm walking backwards for Christmas stunt) and hangs about until the sleuths turn up at breakfast time.

Perfectly feasible.

Theory B is trickier, but prettier.

Tracks (1) and (4) are made in the same way as in Theory A

- (2) The trap's tracks to the beach

but in

B

and

A

are made simultaneously!

- (3) The footprints across the fields

For this theory you need a particularly sagacious horse. The present generation who only see horses at pony clubs and gymkhanas might think there's no such animal, but we oldsters know differently. In our childhood we all knew milkmen's horses who knew every stop on the round and we all knew someone who knew a man whose horse had brought him home safe and sound when he - the man - was dead drunk; or was he just dead? Anyway, his horse got him home. And those were your common or garden horses possessed of only common or garden horse sense. At the pictures we saw the intelligentsia of the equine world. Tom Mix's Tony for one and Gene Autry's Champion for another.

Those horses could unfasten gates, make slip knots, find water in deserts where Moses would have been hard put to it to find water, cock and fire revolvers and rescue maidens from upstairs rooms in burning buildings. All in return for a piece of sugar and a kind word.

I reckon that's the sort of horse Dorrie would have.

So - Theory B.

The sagacious beast is standing patiently in the lane. A low whinny of pleasure as Dorrie, bent double over his alpenstocks, crunches up through the crisp and even.

A friendly pat from Dorrie, a lump of Tate and Lyle, a whispered, "Hi-o, Silver, away", and man's best friend is off down the lane and making his own way to the beach. Dorrie, alpenstocks and sack over shoulder, is going over the fields and down the rope to the beach.

He goes to the water's edge and wades - no tracks - to where his horse is waiting outside the boathouse. Dorrie then stables the horse, gives it a rub down and a feed of oats, and then sits in the comparative warmth of the boat house until such time as he judges that Nelson Lee and Co. will be searching for him.

There's a variation of Theory B. For this you need a horse of considerable sagacity and manipulative ability.

Dorrie comes down his rope and goes straight to the cave. He does no paddling. He makes some tracks of a man and a body, but doesn't take them all the way to the boat house. He doesn't go there to meet his horse. That intelligent beast comes jingling along the beach, noses open the boat house door, enters, trap and all, unfastens buckles and straps, walks out of the shafts and finds his own oats. Tom Mix's Tony could have done it. Tony would have brushed his teeth and said his prayers as well. I've watched him do more impossible things than that many a Saturday afternoon.

So there we are, all the mysteries within The Yuletide Mystery solved.

What about the face at the window?

Dorrie dangling a balloon on a string from the battlements. Face painted on the balloon or Guy Fawkes' mask fastened to it. Luminous paint about the eyes. Perfectly straightforward.

So, for Christmas 1919, Edwy Searles Brooks didn't just amuse and entertain us, he gave us a puzzle to solve. Thank you, E.S.B.

After you with the Brazil nuts, cousin Jack.

* * * * *

THE O.B.B. ALPHABET

by G. W. Mason

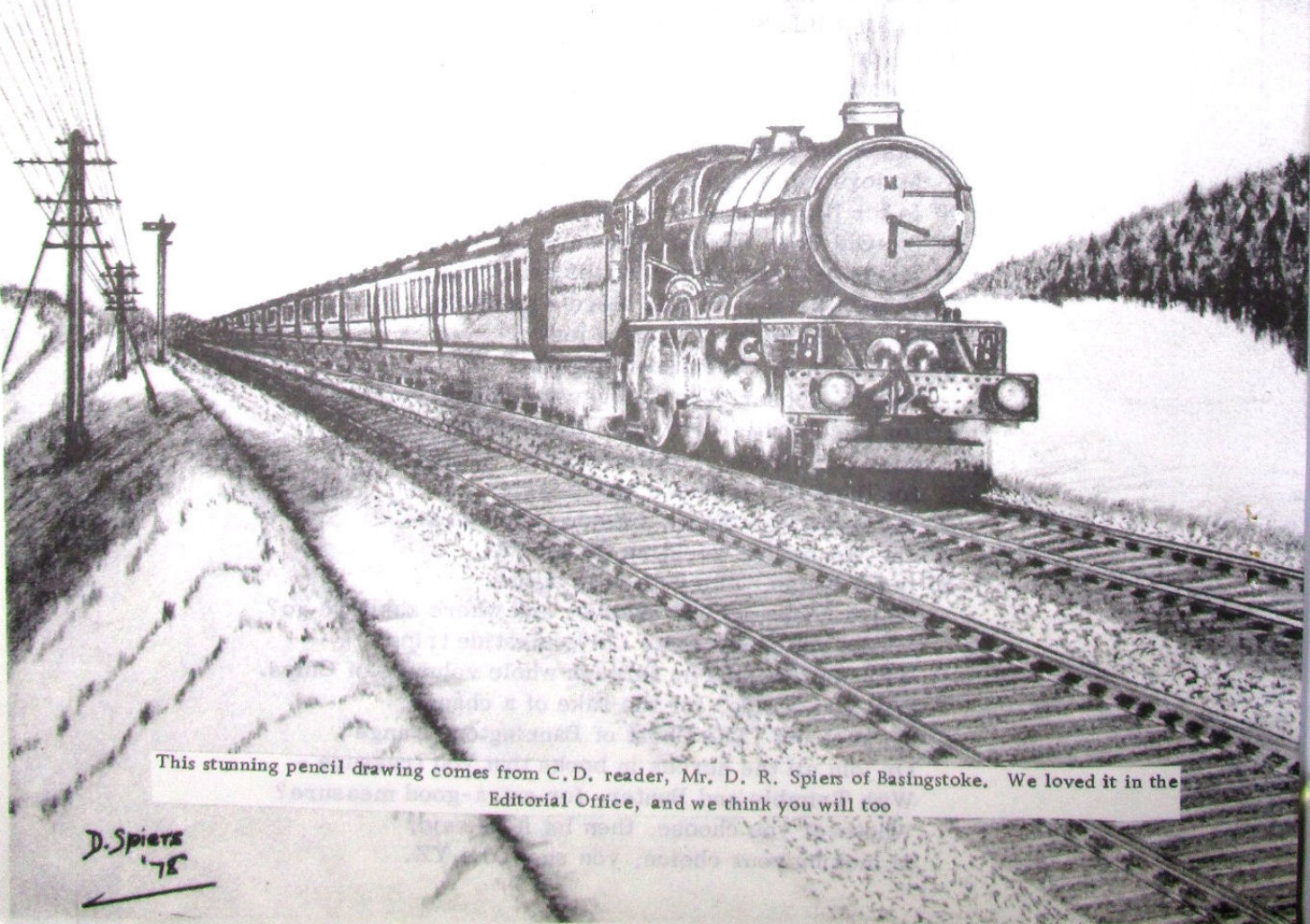
'A' is for Authors and Artists of skill,
 'B' stands for Bunter and Buffalo Bill.
 'C' for the Comics like Chuckles and Chips,
 'D' goes for D'Arcy, so lavish with tips.
 'E' is for Eric, our talented Ed;
 'F' for St. Frank's of which much has been read.
 'G' stands for Greyfriars, our dear Alma Mater,
 'H' for Charles Hamilton, famous creator.
 'I' for old Inky, who sends 'em down fast,
 'J' for St. Jim's which is game to the last.
 'K' is for Kildare, for Kerr, and for Kipps,
 'L' is for Lowther, so quick with his quips -
 Lathom and Loder, Lovell, Lascelles,
 Lot-O-Fun, Larks - there's a lot of the L's.
 'M' stand for Magnet, and Merry & Bright,
 Majors and Minors, Marauders at night.
 'N' is for Nipper (the great Nelson Lee)
 'O' for Old Boys' Books, I'm sure you'll agree.
 'P' starts off Penfold and Potter and Prout,
 'Q' is for Quelchy, of that there's no doubt.
 'R' for the Rainbow of many a jest;
 'S' for the S.P. Collectors' Digest
 And its Subscribers all over the earth;
 'T' for the Thirty-Third year since its birth.
 Also for Tinker, familiar name,
 'U' for the U.J. of Sexton Blake fame.
 'V' is for Vernon-Smith, bounder and sport;
 'W' the Wonderful Weeklies we bought.
 'X' is for Xmas, with yule-logs aglow,
 Which books are our choice, and where shall we go?
 Maybe you fancy some Christmastide trips
 With Willie and Tim through whole volumes of Chips.
 Will you decide, for the sake of a change,
 To seek out "The Ghost of Bannington Grange",
 Or join all the heroes in books that you treasure -
 With Trimble and Bunter, for extra-good measure?
 Whatever you choose, then let it be said,
 In making your choice, you showed a YZ.

British Steam Locomotives, I

G.W.R. King class 4,6,0, (4 cyl.),

No. 6012 'King Edward VI', hauling
a west-bound Paddington to Plymouth
express, near Newton Abbot, Devon,
in the late 1930's.

Livery, Brunswick green.



This stunning pencil drawing comes from C.D. reader, Mr. D. R. Spiers of Basingstoke. We loved it in the Editorial Office, and we think you will too

D. Spiers
'78

Christmas 1939

by E. G. HAMMOND

Christmas forty years ago! Probably because it was the first Christmas of the Second World War, I can recall it better than some that came after. I was only eleven at the time, and Christmas was THE holiday of the year in my family.

Many armchair strategists had predicted that the war would be over by Christmas. How wrong they were! Another five were to come and go before that happy day, not that the people in 1939 were particularly down-hearted. The black-out was proving a great nuisance, but recently the government had relented, and cinemas were being allowed to open again. So far, there were no real shortages, apart from butter.

The war appeared to be going quite well for us. There had been nothing approaching the carnage of the First World War, and everyone was relieved. True Russia had invaded Finland, but the plucky Finns were giving the Russian bully a very tough time. Little did we guess that our sympathies would make an 'about turn' within two years.

We had just had a victory at sea, that more than made up for the successful German U-Boat attack on the battleship 'Royal Oak' at Scapa Flow. Two of our light cruisers and a cruiser had taken on the pride of the German Navy, the pocket battleship 'Graf Spee', and made her run to the port of Montevideo in South America to lick her wounds. Rather than face the inevitable, she had scuttled herself on the 17th December. This magnificent victory was still being discussed at Christmas.

As the air raids predicted, had not materialised, many evacuees were coming home for Christmas. With this in mind, it was decided that at least one pantomime should be staged in London. This was to be 'Cinderella' at the London Coliseum, with Patricia Burke as Principal Boy. There were other shows now running. Max Miller, Bebe Daniels and Ben Lyon starred in "HawHaw" at the Holborn Empire. Jack Hulbert and Cicely Courtneidge were in "Under your Hat" at the Palace, with seats from 2/6 (12½p) to 10/6 (52½p). Tom Walls starred in "His Majesty's Guest" at the Shaftesbury, and at the Strand, Roberston Hare and Alfred Drayton were opening on Boxing Day, in a Ben Travers farce called "Spotted Dick". Dear Ben Travers is still going strong.

At the cinema we had Deanna Durbin singing 'One Fine Day' in "First Love". Henry Fonda was the star of two films, "Young Mr. Lincoln" and "Let us Live". Richard Dix played Sam Houston in "Man of Conquest". "The Lion Has Wings" was a popular propaganda film of the time.

The two most popular songs were "There'll Always be an England" and "We're going to hang out our washing on the Siegfried Line". It took us another five years to do the latter. The equivalent of today's hit parade, was then based upon the sale of sheet music, instead of records. On the wireless, Paul Temple was on after the

six o'clock news. During the thirties, the Radio Times had always commissioned a well-known artist to do a pictorial Christmas cover. Christmas 1939 was to get just a small sprig of holly on the front page. The BBC was determined to remind us of the gravity of the times.

The shops were still well stocked, and prices had not yet inflated. People with a sweet tooth could buy a pound of 'Black Magic' Chocolated for 2/11 (15p). Fancy boxes of 'Quality Street' sweets were priced from 6d. (2½p) to 10/- (50p). A bottle of good sherry would cost you 6/- (30p), and twenty top quality cigarettes 1/2 (6p). Anyone wanting an extravagant present for his spouse, could buy a full-length beaver lamb coat for 15 gns. (£15.75). Christmas trees were available at 5/11 (30p) for a 4 feet tree.

Living in Frank Richards county of Kent had its attractions, then as now. The following advertisement appeared in The Daily Telegraph a week before Christmas: "Bungalow for sale in Kent, 20 miles from London, safe area, 4 large rooms, plus kitchenette and bathroom, brick garage, and ½ acre garden. Freehold £630."

I think a year later, the buyer would have questioned the 'safe area' statement. Kent had more than its fair share of the ravages of the Battle of Britain.

Another item of news in the papers just before Christmas, that has a familiar ring. Two members of the IRA were sentenced to death for causing explosions that killed five people in Coventry in August. In reprisal for these death sentences the IRA was currently bombing cinemas in Birmingham. Some things and some people never seem to change!

At this time I was at the change over stage between comics and story papers. I had both! The comics were The Jester, at that time starring Gary Cooper in "The Sioux Trail", The Sparkler and the fairly new Radio Fun. The story papers were the Boys' Cinema and the Magnet. Christmas 1939 saw the start of the "Slim Jim" series in the Magnet. As this was my first, and last as it happened, with the Magnet I have a particularly soft spot for that series. I know it is criticised for being laboured and over long, it did at least introduce a new reader to all the main characters of Greyfriars. It also probably explains my liking for Vernon-Smith. Although a very late starter with the Magnet, I managed to beg, buy and borrow many back numbers during those early war years. I think my first Christmas with the Magnet is another reason why I remember 1939 so well. I also remember a holiday extra comic called 'Monster' with 32 packed pages for 2d. (1p). The Christmas annuals were always a favourite of mine, even if only a few could be bought. The war had not affected their look or content yet, they being planned before its declaration. Only the cover of Modern Boy Annual heralded the near future, showing two Auro Anson's of Coastal Command. The Greyfriars Holiday Annual showed a toboggan with four youngsters aboard, careering down a snowy country lane, Innocence and escapism were still acceptable, reality was yet to come.

Christmas Day itself I can remember vividly. The festive board and the gathering of ones family. We managed quite well, to enjoy ourselves without television! A difficult feat for the present generation. I can even remember some

of the presents I received. I had two Dinky Toys, that had been issued earlier in 1939. A van, advertising Hartley's Jam on the side, and an M.G. Magnette racing car sporting a Union Jack on each side. They cost 6d. (2½p) and 1/- (5p) respectively. Three annuals I can remember, Radio Fun, Boys' Cinema and Modern Boys Book of Firefighters. The latter I remember very well. Other items I am sure I had, but can no longer recall. Down the years, the memory has a fusion effect. It is difficult to separate them and place them correctly. Perhaps because it was the last Christmas of a different world, that it was so memorable.

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Early D. C. Thomson Girls' Papers

by W. O. G. LOFTS

The firm began at Dundee in March 1905, when William Thomson, a rich ship-yard owner with his two sons, Frederick and David Couper, founded the company of D. C. Thomson & Co. Ltd. Unlike the Harmsworth Brothers, who built up their Empire mainly with comics and boys' papers, the first Thomson ventures were regional Scottish newspapers. Curiously, and for some unexplained reason it has always been presumed that their first effort in the semi-juvenile field was "The Dixon Hawke Library" in 1919, but this was not so. Actually I had discovered (and completely forgotten!) that in 1912 they entered the girls market with "Girls Weekly". After three small size registration issues it appeared as number one again in large "Boys' Friend" size with identical green colouring. Dated 5th October, 1912, its opening story was a school serial entitled "Buntie Brown, or She Couldn't Keep Out of Mischief", being the adventures of a tomboy at Garthland School, other girls having such strange nicknames as "Fatty", "Shy Little Eva", and "Sneaky Fanny". One illustration of the Headmistress - a Miss Clyde complete with pince-nez - showed her to be the most grim-looking principal imaginable! Another illustration in a later issue looks remarkably like Hutton Mitchell's work, the first artist on "The Magnet". All the stories, as the fashion in Thomson papers, were anonymous, and included that famous classic melodrama "Maria Marten, or the Mystery of the Red Barn", and "She Hadn't a Friend, Strange Experiences of the Prettiest Girl in the Village". Features also included a column on "Her Most Interesting Clients" by Madame Stella, Palmist, and a weekly song sheet with titles such as "I Love to see them working in the Mills" which strongly suggests that the paper was for the teenager mill girl market.

Free gifts were given galore in the opening numbers mainly in the form of booklets dealing with such subjects as Fortune Telling, Dreams and Handy Candy, the latter containing recipes on how to make home-made sweets. The paper continued until No. 492 dated 4th March, 1922, when by this time it had dwindled to "Peg's Paper" size, and its contents had developed into the "Red Letter" and "Secrets" category, and it was incorporated into "My Weekly".

In the same year Thomson's brought out "Bluebird", No. 1 dated 28th

November, 1922, a paper built on the lines of "Adventure" and "Rover" and for the younger girl. This was simply a case of boys' adventure stories (slightly more romantic) with girls' names. The late E. L. McKeag editor of "The School Friend" told me some years ago the interesting story of how the A.P. promptly brought out "Ruby" a girls' paper to combat this. Once known how little impact "Bluebird" had on the Fleetway House publications, they promptly dropped "Ruby" after only 20 issues. "Bluebird", however, struggled on for exactly 100 issues, and then the publishers, realising that they could not beat the A.P.'s superiority in this field, made no more attempts until well into post-war years.

It is also interesting to note that by the same principle Thomson's did not enter the comic market until 1937 with "Dandy", quickly followed by "Beano" (1938). The A.P. had such world famous titles, and such a hold on the market that it would have been foolish to compete against them. The steady decline of all their comics in the late thirties, many due to the fact that they were getting outdated, had them at last competing in this field.

Three years after D. C. Thomson's death in 1954 at the ripe old age of 93, saw the Dundee firm enter the girls' market again when the trend had switched to mainly picture strips, "Romeo" (1957) whilst their second venture was "Bunty" (1958). I wonder if the editor who coined the title knew that it was the name of their very first character in girls' fiction way back in 1912.

* * * * *

This little bit of rhyme was sent to the Union Jack editor in 1912. I wonder who Winnie Griffin was. She may still be living, a very elderly lady, with happy Blakian memories. If she has passed on, there are sure to be some of her descendants knocking around. What an adventure if this edition of the Annual happened to drop into the hands of one of them. Winnie got five bob for her bit of verse! Worth five quid in these days! Or soon will be!

WHO?

Who sprang to sudden power and fame
While all men questioned whence he came?
Who earned a great, undying name? Sexton Blake!

Who always managed crime to floor?
Who always kept an open door?
Who used his wealth to help the poor? Sexton Blake!

Who was the bloodhound, trusted, tried,
Whose scent was keen, whose jaws were wide;
His master's pet, his master's pride? Pedro!

Who was the lad who had the knack
Of comic force, and sly attack,
Who followed in his guv'nor's track? Tinker!

Good tales are wholesome, all agree;
Then take a sporting tip from me,
Make Blake your favourite now, like me.

And read "The Union Jack"

WINNIE GRIFFIN