

Collectors' ²¹ Digest

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Tom Redwing

BOB
WHITER

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My Readers' Page

THE EDITOR CHATS WITH HIS READERS

THE TOLL OF THE ARCTIC

We apologise to our readers for the fact that our January issue was a good many days late in publication. As most will have guessed, it was due to circumstances beyond our control - the long abnormal spell of Arctic weather following the Christmas holiday. Unavoidable delays occurred at various stages, and we can only hope that you found the January Digest worth waiting for.

AND NOW A NELSON LEE CATALOGUE

The fourth of the catalogues issued by the London Club - the Nelson Lee Library Catalogue - is now available to all our readers. Compiled and produced by Robert Blythe, with the advice of several hobby experts, this is a splendid book and a great credit to all concerned. Comprising nearly 60 pages of reading matter, it is much more than a catalogue. As indicated on the cover, which is extremely attractive with its large badge of St. Franks, the book is a complete guide and biography of the writings of Edwy Searles Brooks. As well as a complete list of titles in the Nelson Lee Library, we are presented with details of Mr. Brooks' writings in the Gem, Schoolboys' Own Library, the Monster Library, the Popular, Holiday Annual, Boy's Realm, Nugget Library, Boy's Friend Library, Pluck, Union Jack, Sexton Blake Library and others. In addition there are comprehensive surveys of

Mr. Brooks' work in stiff cover books in the post war years, and particulars of the films made from his stories. Finally there are many pages of description of St. Frank's, and details of the characters in chronological order. On the cover, the St. Frank's badge announces CONSIDIO ET ANIMIS which all St. Frank's old boys will know means "By Wisdom and Courage." We take the liberty of adding BY DEDICATION AND SHEER HARD WORK. In fact, Mr. Blythe has put nearly a year of work into the book.

We have browsed for hours over this fine publication and have learned plenty of things - not only about the Lee - which we did not know before. It is an essential addition to the treasures of every reader of Collectors' Digest, and we heartily recommend it.

The modest price of the book is 3/6 plus 1/- for postage and packet. While stocks last it can be obtained from Robert Blythe, 40 Ellesmere Road, Dollis Hill, London, N.W.10.

THE EDITOR.

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WANTED: All Collectors' Digest Annuals up till and including 1960.
S. A. PACHON, 520 E. 5th St., Bethlehem, PA., U.S.A.

WANTED: Most numbers UNION JACK, SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY 1st and 2nd series. Nos. 1, 2, 8, 12, 13, 18, 24, 26, 73, 83, 85, 422. 3rd series. DETECTIVE WEEKLY from No. 25. CHAMPION featuring Colwyn Dane stories. TEXAS RANGERS featuring Jim Hatfield stories. MR. D. NEWMAN, 13 LONGCROFT LANE, WELWYN GARDEN CITY, HERTS.

WANTED: Greyfriars Heralds (1915) 1 - 18 (£10); Magnets 1461 to 1468 (28); Populars 161 - 174 (10/- each). 38 ST. THOMAS ROAD, PRESTON.

FOR SALE: 2nd hand copies of various Bunter books 3/6 and 4/6; Tom Merry and Rockwood books 4/-; First Biggles Omnibus (pub. 1953) 5/-; William and Brains Trust 3/6; Talford's Last Term, St. Winifred's 3/-. (postage extra). S.A.E. first please. ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE ROAD, SURBITON, SURREY.

WANTED: Nelson Lees, Union Jacks, Thrillers, Detective Weeklies, Boys Friends, E.S. Brooks' S.O.L.'s; Novels by R. Service, Connie Morgan, J. B. Hendryx, E.R. Burroughs, Chums Annuals. All correspondence answered. A. G. DAVIDSON, 193 RAE STREET, NORTH FITZROY, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA.

FOR SALE OR EXCHANGE: Magnets, Gems, Nelson Lees, B.F.L., S.O.L., S.B.L., Union Jacks, etc. Send your wants lists. THIS MONTH'S SPECIAL: "Boy Without a Name" and "School and Sport." VERNON LAY, 52 OAKLEIGH GARDENS, WHETSTONE, LONDON, N.20.

WANTED: S.O.L. 42; Nelson Lee No. 130 (old series). Your price paid or S.O.L.'s, Nelson Lees, Gems and Magnets for exchange only. Would like to correspond with a reader who is interested in Xmas numbers of S.O.L., N.L. Gem and Magnet, BRIAN HOLT, BRITISH EMBASSY, REYKJAVIK, ICELAND.

WANTED: S.O.L.'s Nos. 60 and 68. Magnets Nos. 829, 862-865, 867, 868, 874, 869, 879, 881, 886, 897, 900. DR. R. WILSON, 100 BROOKFIELD ROAD, GLASGOW, N.I.

DEAR OLD PALS (Third Spasm)By Tom Hopperton

The impersonator is probably as old as the missing heir and might even have originated when he took his place, but there is no point in starting with Jacob and Esau and tracing his history. This is one family where lineage and legitimacy do not go hand in hand. What counts is the credibility of the story.

One type of music hall turn that seemed to vanish entirely after Edgar Benyon went back to Australia was the chap who had a tray of hats, wigs, beards and greaspaint and used to do lightning changes. Every time I read a Kestrel tale I find myself remembering them and comparing their meagre results with those of the Master Mummer. But perhaps he wasn't so rushed for time. Anyway, let us give Lewis Jackson full marks for the way he built old Leon into a first-rate character. Kestrel, of course, was an experienced actor turned criminal; he had an amorphous sort of face, and his lack of teeth helped him to ring the changes with a wide assortment of dentures. I can swallow him with ease; it is when I have to strain my gullet for some of his schoolboy counterparts that I find it rough on the epiglottis.

It would be difficult to compute the number of stories turning on disguise and impersonation that Frank Richards has written. Like Bunter's sins, their name is legion. Yet no matter how frequently they occur, he enters into them with such whole-hearted gusto that he quite carries himself away. What I am not so sure of is how far he carries the reader in the process.

As soon as the ventriloquist is spotted you know what you are in for and can forecast the level and form of the story. There is a much wider range in the impersonation stories, which call for more individual assessment than sweeping generalisations.

"The Gem" seemed to be favoured as the trial ground. When Kerr appears as a young girl in pursuit of Gussy, no-one is going to carp. The Charley's-Aunt rig-out makes it conceivable that he could scrape through as a suffragette or some other "old sketch" as Bunter with old-world courtesy used to describe Aunt Judy and her like. They are acceptable and enjoyable as light-hearted schoolboy fooleries. Monty Lowther was the first of the many who had to leave school for some reason or other and returned in disguise. All right! They could get past the Headmaster and fool their bosom pals, while Frank Richards is still willing to use a variation of this in "Bunter Keeps it Dark" in 1960, so we won't crib.

Unfortunately, he was not content to leave it at that, and from

these little acorns grew some thumping big oaks indeed, which while still in the sapling stage were bent to dramatic ends. In one Rookwood story we find Peele, feuding against a gardener's boy, turning up at a match disguised as a policeman and arresting the kid amid general consternation. Owen Conquest remarked: "The policeman seemed a little on the short side," which could easily have been the understatement of the year. Still, virtue triumphed in the end. Tommy Dodd had wind of the plot and he turned up in turn, disguised as a detective inspector, and arrested Peele amid general rejoicing. This seems to require no comment and was only the forerunner of many more situations where, to paraphrase Churchill, the author was intoxicated by the exuberance of his own imagination.

In this connection, I believe the prize for originality must go to a sub who had Vernon-Smith cavorting about and even playing football in a rubber mask, thereby revealing for the first time that the Bounder's face was generally accepted as being a most peculiar texture - or alternatively, that pronounced myopia was rife at Greyfriars.

All these isolated ploys are, of course, insignificant compared with the exploits of William Wibley. True, we had Putty Grace impersonating Mr. Bootles, but Putty was just an incorrigible practical joker who threw in impersonations as a sideline. Wibley was a late arrival in "The Magnet" (No. 323) and was committed in cold blood, with no lack of effort and detail, in an attempt to create a Master Mummer in the Remove.

The foundation was laid with care. Wib's father was an actor and the son's sole ambition (except when the plot demanded that he try to get into the Remove XI) was in turn to don the buskin, as it used to be called. Every passing reference to Wibley found him messing about with wigs and greasepaint. The Wharton Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society passed into his hands and he functioned as manager, producer, director, make-up man, stage manager, leading actor and occasional author, besides whipping in the reluctant members of the cast who served as the setting for his splendence. This was the springboard from which he was catapulted into some amazing situations, with his impersonations of Mossoo as the star attraction.

The manner in which Frank Richards managed to get away with this is not the least striking illustration of his prowess in his craft and it was all so convincing that the reader who never reflected on what he had read would put the tale down with complete satisfaction. One visit to a school play would dissipate that! Impersonators, like poets and fools, may be born, not made, but they take longer to develop than the

other pair, and I am not going to labour the point that no fifteen-year old boy has the physical and particularly the vocal attributes to carry off the impersonation of an adult. It was most clever, it was fascinating to watch it being done, but it was still a fraud occupying space that could have been better filled.

So there we have them, the ventrilquist, the missing heir and the impersonator, dear old pals whose absence would not make my heart grow fonder. With that imported pest, the cowboy, they formed the Four Horsemen of the boys' weeklies, responsible for more bad writing and trashy stories than every other character combined. A harassed Shakespeare said: "Tired of all these, for restful death I cry." Not being in so parlous a plight as he, let me amend it to: "Tired of all these, for Pete's sake let them die!" But they won't die! Boys and authors being what they are, the Four Horsemen will still be gaily galloping in another hundred years.

* * * * *

YE OLDE CYNIQUE INN

Overheard in the Lounge -

"Is it true that many famous people come here incognito?"

"Well, just a wee bit, perhaps."

Miss Clossington, the receptionist says: Some of today's books should be pitied rather than censored.

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The following letter has been addressed, erroneously, to the Editor of Collectors' Digest:

Hoax House,
Fishy View,
Liverpool.

Dear Editor,

With regard to the gentleman resident of Ye Olde Cynique Inn, who desires to contact, with a view to matrimony, a lady possessing a large number of "Magnets."

As I have a big collection, my brother Fisher suggests I should obtain further details, conditional, that is, on the gentleman possessing an equally large collection of Gems.

Yours faithfully, FRED A. FISH.

DANNY'S DIARY



After his rather long bilious turn due to Christmas (at least, I suspect that was the cause of some feeble stories) Martin Clifford is back on form in the Gem, and I have liked three out of the four this month. "Figgin & Co's Feud" was good, and carried on the Kildare-Monteith quarrel. Monteith thrashed Figgins, so Figgins attacked Monteith one night in the woodshed. Monteith thought his attacker was Kildare, who had to resign his captaincy till Figgins owned up.

This was followed by "The Masked Entertainers" which was a scream. Cutts engaged a conjuror, who was appearing at Wayland Empire, to give a show at St. Jim's. But the Terrible Three went in the ruins to plan to keep the conjuror out of the way and to turn up disguised to spoil Cutts' show. But Fatty Wynn was eating a pie in the ruins and overheard the plot. So it was Figgins & Co who turned up as the Masked Entertainers and made Cutts and Tom Merry & Co lock asses.

"At Grips with the Grammarians" was a school rivalry story, and good fun. But the last story of the month, "Fatty Wynn, Professional" was very long, taking up no less than 27 pages, and there was more quantity than quality about it.

In the second week of the month, Doug took me to the Science Museum at South Kensington where they have just got the first collection relating entirely to aviation. There are any amount of models of aeroplanes and airships. I particularly liked Cody's man-lifting kite, and some of the earliest inventions of Wilbur Wright and other pioneers.

One evening Dad brought me home two comics, and I liked the pictures which were very good and funny. But the stories were amazing, and for adults. A comic called "Merry and Bright" had a very heavy serial called "Life" and Mum read the instalment and was interested. The other comic "The Jester" had a serial called "The Iron Conqueror" about Napoleon and his sweet, sad Josephine. I don't think any boy could ever enjoy that story.

A new serial has just started in the "Penny Popular" called "The Making of Harry Wharton" and it seems it is the first story of Greyfriars which ever appeared in the Magnet.

On February 14th the King went to St. Paul's Cathedral for a memorial service to Captain Scott who died on the way back from the South Pole.

Doug had an interesting Boy's Friend 3d Library this month. It was "Beyond the Eternal Ice" by Sidney Drew, which once was in the Magnet as a serial. I don't like Mr. Drew's stories, but Doug kind of gurgles over them.

Dad took Mum to the St. James's Theatre to see a revival of "The Importance of Being Earnest" by Oscar Wilde. The stars were Gerald Ames and A. E. Matthews, but Mum said it was rather old-fashioned.

Mr. G. A. Hutchinson, editor of the Boy's Own Paper ever since it started, has died. I suppose he must have been an old gentleman, for the B.O.P. is an old paper. Doug says the B.O.P. will pack up now, for it couldn't continue without Mr. Hutchinson. But Dad said "Don't you believe it boy, Nobody is indispensable."

The Magnet has been really good this month, and just a wee bit better than the Gem again, I think. "Harry Wharton & Co's Rescue" was a scouting story in which Hazeldene was led astray for a time by Smitty.

"Scorned by Greyfriars" was good. Mr. Quelch announced that a workhouse boy named Tom Lynn was coming to Greyfriars. However, Tom Lynn and Lord Lovell changed places, and of course, Lord Lovell did not mind a bit when all the cads were snobbish.

Then came "A Split in the Sixth" which reminded me very much of "Figgin & Co's Feud" for Wingate and Courtney had a row with Loder, and in the end Wingate had to resign the captaincy. The last story of the month was "Captain Coker" in which Coker filled Wingate's shoes for a little while. It was very funny, and in the end Wingate was cleared of the charge against him, and he became Captain once more.

In the last Magnet the editor gave away a "moving picture wheel", and when you spun it you saw men boxing.

Southwark Bridge, which has been in use for nearly 100 years, has been closed for alterations, and it will be three years before it is opened again. It won't bother me. I never go to that part of London.

WANTED: Union Jacks - year 1917. Nos. 691, 693, 695, 792-4, 711, 717, 721, 725, 727, 732, 733, 736, 740. Year 1919 - 800, 820. Year 1920 - 851-856, 858, 861-863, 865, 870, 872, 874, 877, 885. MRS. J. PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E.22.

BLAKIANA

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

SEXTON BLAKE AUTHOR HENRY ST. JOHN COOPER

By Victor Colby

That Henry St. John Cooper did write Sexton Blake stories in the early Union Jack days has been confirmed by his son, and accepted by the experts, the only real problem being to identify the individual stories. This, I doubt not, will be done one of these days.

Meanwhile, what sort of man was this, who gave of his time and talents to promote the Sexton Blake saga, and has, in consequence, joined that immortal band of Sexton Blake chroniclers?

Just recently through the courtesy of Frank Vernon Lay, I received a copy of "Sunny Gucrow" a hard cover romance of Henry St. John Cooper, published by Sampson Low, and to my delight found a short biographical article at the back of the book entitled "Henry St. John Cooper - an appreciation" by Helen Ford.

Here are some of the more interesting aspects of the life and activities of Henry St. John Cooper, gleaned from the above article.

.....

A man of many gifts, an adept at anything, he undertakes, of a lovable personality, Henry St. John Cooper stands conspicuous in the world of authors. His friends call him affectionately "Jack of all Trades" - but they do not add "Master of None", for in all he does, whether it is wood-carving, hammered brass and copper, reproductions of old furniture, photography, printing, making gramophones or the model ships for which he is famous, he must aim at the best and, as with all genuine artists, his best satisfies him only for the moment, if then.

Among Mr. Cooper's many activities breeding bull-dogs was a great hobby of his for some years and he has written no less than four books on the subject, which are generally accepted text-books on bull-dogs and their management.

He bred and owned several champion bull-dogs. His services as a judge of bull-dogs were in great demand at all principal dog shows in England, America and Germany.

Mr. Cooper started out in life with the idea of being an artist. Educated partly in England and partly in France, at the age of 15 he had a studio and in his spare time painted many charming little sketches of Richmond.

But the literary germ was in his blood, and when he was about 17 he obtained an engagement as sub-editor on a new boys' paper called Pleasure. This paper shortly departed life for the all-sufficient reason that it did not pay its way, and the proprietor's capital had run out. The boy used to get the paper out himself (the editor not being enthusiastic). He had no cash available for paying contributors, so would buy the illustrations from an agency that supplied drawings or blocks that had already seen service, selecting the pictures almost at random, then write articles, short stories, and

serials, into which such incidents were introduced as the pictures could fit. In addition he conducted prize competitions, wrote editorial notes, and a few advertisements also answers to correspondents. He wrote, in fact, the paper from cover to cover.

After this experience he did no more such editing, but went on writing serials, and one of these, a boy's adventure romance, was published by Messrs. Garrold in book form under the title of "The Voyage of the Avenger."

"Sunny Ducros" the book that has made him famous on both sides of the Atlantic, ran for many weeks as a serial. He himself made no attempt to re-publish it in book form, but a friend sent it to Sampton Low who promptly accepted it. Messrs. Putmans have sold many thousands of copies in America.

Mr. Cooper's works deserve to sell. His are the clean, sweet, fresh and wholesome books we all like and respect.

Mr. Cooper is no realist of the sordid and unhappy school. He has seen more than one side of life, and knows that the Summer is as real as the Winter. Many of us still are old-fashioned enough to love our heroes to be manly and clean, our heroines sweet and simple, and we are grateful to Mr. Cooper that he gives us such books, and helps us to realise that there is still romance and truth and purity for all who love them.

In many of his writings there is a suggestion of the occult, a subject in which he is deeply interested. In "The Garden of Memories" particularly - a story of reincarnation he deals with the subject convincingly to minds attuned.

In "The Gallant Lover" he goes back to the days of "good Queen Anne."

"Carniss & Co." is a romance in which old furniture, Mr. Cooper's pet hobby, plays an important part.

Other books by him are "James Bevanwood Bart," "The Imaginary Marriage", "Sally Luck," and "The Golconda Necklace."

Mr. Cooper in his long career of writing stories, must have turned out thousands. Perhaps the best loved story among schoolgirls was "Polly Green" written under the name of "Mabel St. John". This weekly story ran to over two million words - surely the longest serial to the credit of any author.

Henry St. John Cooper - a noble figure with a fine head, and thick, waving hair going grey, a kindly smile, and a humorous twinkle in his eye, a heart as big and generous as his body. No one has ever been turned away empty from his door, and his ears have never been deaf to the cry of the sorrowful and needy.

.....

A worthy member is he not, of that select band which has kindled and nurtured the flame of Sexton Blake's existence, and preserved him for the enjoyment of posterity.

SEXTON BLAKE - "OLD BOY"

By S. Perry

Why so little support these days for Blakiana?

Is it because there are no Sexton Blake stories for boys? Most of the contributors and the readers of "Collectors' Digest" write and read about old boys books, and all the pleasures they had reading them when they were boys.

The Magnet, Gem, Popular, Nelson Lee, and the others are no longer with us, and there is no lack of material for their various section in C.D. Can it be because the Sexton Blake Library still exists - one can

not say "going strong" because apparently it is having a bit of a struggle these days - the reading matter is not for boys, and most adult readers cannot find it on the bookstalls - perhaps it will be much better in its new format, although I have not yet seen it advertised anywhere. Let's hope adults gradually find it and remember the pleasure they used to have when boys, and so become regular readers!

I am sure "The Big Smear" would not appeal to boys - they would not be able to see why Sexton Blake should lose his business or his past reputation, because he was caught having an "affair" or looking - or suspected of looking at "rude pictures" - come to think of it I don't think adults would either - James Bond seemed to get away with quite a lot of things!!

The early stories of "Sexton Blake at Bay" (Detective Weekly Nos. 1 and 2) were far more satisfying and to me far more probable - but then perhaps I was still a boy (ahem!)

If only there were picture stories for boys - I am sure all the old papers could still find a sale if the stories were in pictures. Imagine a book like "Lion" with a story of Sexton Blake in pictures - not just a couple of pages, but from "Cover to Cover" - the Magnet would, I am sure, prosper with the young generation in that form. They don't read these days, but they do look at pictures - come to think of it so did we. I can still remember the "Bruin Boys" in the Rainbow and "Tiger Tim's Weekly" and I think it would be much better to teach the young generation "to play the game" through picture stories than nothing at all!

Another reason why we do not get lots of contributions to Blakiana could be that so many different authors write of Sexton Blake. After all the school stories were all written by Charles Hamilton and there is not a great deal of support for "substitute writers" although they wrote about our favourite characters!

I may be "sticking my neck out" regarding Nelson Lee, but I think most of the support and memories are of the author, Edwy Searles Brooks and the others do not count for a lot - with the possible exception of Maxwell Scott.

With "Sexton Blake" he always had a lot of different authors. My own favourites were Gwyn Evans, Anthony Skene and Edwy Searles Brooks. But there again it was the stories we loved not the characters (sticking my neck out again) and perhaps a Detective with any other name would have been just as good. In fact I can remember years ago getting a book in the Children's Library by Gwyn Evans all about "The King Crook". It was exactly the same story as had appeared in the "Union Jack" but the detectives name had been altered. I hope some other readers have read

the same story because I cannot remember the name of the Detective.

There must be a great number of members in the Sexton Blake Circle who all read about Sexton Blake and must of course still be interested in him. Please write an article for Blakiana about your favourite authors who wrote about him. Support Mrs. Packman who has been giving us great pleasure for over nine years! Make a new year's resolution to write about Sexton Blake for say nine minutes every two months.

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL ABOUT SEXTON BLAKE

Have you NOT noticed the Sexton Blake Library? Or rather, have you noticed that the S.B.L. is NOT on display in the shops or on the bookstalls? And hasn't been for a very long time!

What good is a first-class story if you don't get the chance to read it? What good is a most attractive cover if it is not put on display for prospective readers to see? How can a circulation ever build up under such circumstances? You tell us!

Any amount of readers have written us that they can't find the S.B.L. in the shops. The newsagent tells them "only available to order." Which often means a lost order. More than one reader has actually been told by his newsagent that the S.B.L. ceased publication long ago. Are our Sexton Blake fans panting with fury?

If WOU have had similar experiences - if you can't find the S.B.L. in the shops - don't write to us. Write to the Editor of the Sexton Blake Library at once. If you feel very heated about it all it may be safer to write your letter on asbestos. But write!

KEITH CHAPMAN (who is on the staff of the S.B.L.) writes us as follows:

In an article entitled "Let's Be Controversial About Sexton Blake" (January C.D.) an anonymous writer draws attention to what he terms a "slip-up" in the New Order S.B.L. changes of the later fifties.

"Tinker" he writes, "was far too popular to be turned into a stooge to be used for the purpose of light relief."

What an unjust accusation to level against New Order editorial policy! In the stories of the New Look writers, Tinker became, as E. S. Turner among others has quoted, "no longer the boy assistant, but a sturdy, hardy key man in the Blake menage."

More than ever before, Tinker has played important, leading parts in S.B.L. stories. SEASON OF THE SKYLARK, STAND-IN FOR MURDER, MISSION TO MEXICO, BULLETS ARE TRUMPS, KEEP IT SECRET!, TORMENT WAS A REDHEAD

Surely it was the old-style authors who were portraying Tinker as a cloth-headed Watson and a "stooge for light relief"? (S.B.L. No. 344 THE CROOKS OF TUNIS, pages 63-4.)

That Tinker has become to an irritating degree "a young man who goes goofy in the presence of a leggy female with titian hair" is in my opinion, a false claim. As more than one of our contributors - and strangely enough, amongst them, the New Order author who seems most popular with the older readers - could assure you, current editorial policy deplores the attributing to Tinker of adolescent emotional attitudes. It is a fact that sequences have been, and are, quite frequently deleted and re-written solely because of this fault.

Glad to see Collectors' Digest in such good health, and wishing it continued success.

MARTIN THOMAS writes:

Although there hasn't been a complete change to the standard pocket-book format the new-style covers do achieve one excellent result. They make a complete break from the "comic book" presentation with which the S.B.L. has hitherto been easily confused. The new covers are unmistakably adult and appropriate to the crime novel field.

Let's hope public response will greatly improve the S.B.L.'s prospects, which, as you know, are now uncertain.

EDITORIAL COMMENT:

Letters to Collectors' Digest in recent years from Sexton Blake enthusiasts seem to suggest that Tinker has lost some of his former great popularity. There must be some reason for this. Mr. Chapman tells us that "sequences have been, and are, quite frequently deleted and re-written solely because of this fault." In that case, surely it seems that Blake writers "quite frequently" have the tendency as suggested by our Controversial contributor last month.

Mr. Martin Thomas's latest thriller "DEATH IN SMALL DOSES" is now on sale in the shops (or available to order). Don't miss it.

OFFERS of S.O.L's and Pre-war FILM FUNS, please.
J. MARSTON, 168 NEWTON ROAD, BURTON-ON-TRENT.

MEMORIAL EDITION OF "THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF FRANK RICHARDS" - 25/-. Packed with interesting reading and many fascinating pictures, with a long supplement on Charles Hamilton's work by Eric Payne. Obtainable from any bookshop or direct from Collectors' Digest Office. The Editor of C.D. will mail the autobiography to any address in the world.

WANTED: Good loose copies or bound volumes containing any of the following - **MAGNETS** 45, 52, 131 to 149 inclusive, 195, 205, 237, 238, 239, 277, 318, 319, 353, 400, 417, 422, 921, 924, 925, 938, 940, 942, 943, 946, 949, 951, 965, 967, 988, 996. Most issues between 821 and 890, 900. **GENS** - many issues between 400 and 500. Many issues between 800 and 879. Also numbers 935, 953, 954, 956, 976, 980, 985, 989, 990, 992, 993, 998, 1129, 1150, 984. **POPULARS** - 183, 190, 370, 385, 396, 452, 455, 466, 474. Advertiser has complete sets of Gem, Magnet and Popular but needs many good replacement copies before having final binding work done.

ERIC PAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE ROAD, SURBITON, SURREY.

N O W A V A I L A B L E

The **NELSON LEE CATALOGUE**. A complete guide and biography of the writings of **EDWY SEARLES BROOKS**. Price 3/6 plus 1/- post and packet.

Write:

Robert Blythe,
 40 Ellesmere Road,
 Dollis Hill,
 London, N.W.10

NELSON LEE COLUMN

CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD

"LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S"

By Jim Cook

St. Frank's College,
Bellton, Susses.

I was very surprised to learn that Nipper arrived at St. Frank's on a Tuesday. When he explained it to me I could work it out for myself, quite easily. It's all there in the records published in No. 112, the first St. Frank's story, or the re-print published in 1933. It's not very often you can pinpoint the day of arrival of a St. Frank's junior. Incidentally, Nipper told me that when he first came to the school he had to disguise himself to look like a boy of fifteen. Which proves that Nipper is older than the chronicler led us to believe. I should think he is the only junior schoolboy to hold a licence to fly an aircraft.

I bumped into Nelson Lee as I was leaving the Ancient House and after exchanging greetings he asked whether I would like to accompany him to the village. Nelson Lee is one of those remarkable people who seem to emanate an aura. You feel that a kind of magnetism surrounds him and you are drawn to it. It is a very pleasant attraction that rather subsues you yet fortifies that apparent weakness we experience when in the presence of strength. The schoolmaster-detective, looking very fit and well, waited on the steps of the Ancient House while I hurried inside for my raincoat. A hint of rain was in the breeze that came in from the Channel over by Shingle Head.

We had reached the stile in Bellton Lane when Lee suddenly took me back to those hazardous days at St. Frank's at the time of the William K. Smith earthquake. Well, it very nearly resembled an earthquake after the German-American tycoon altered the shape of the old school.* He told me about one of Smith's workmen who had stayed on when the millionaire left and who had appeared in Bannington Court on a charge of larceny. Inspector Jameson, of the Bannington Police, had alerted Lee of the charge for while Lee was not involved the inspector had considered the case of special interest to Lee as it echoes back to the days when St.

Frank's was under siege. Actually, the charge was a very weak one and Lee was able to get the man off with a caution. So, out of that unruly mob that William K. Smith brought over from America to alter the outline of this part of Sussex, at least there was one decent chap who broke away and remained behind in Bellton.

Appropos courts of law, Nelson Lee said it would probably be much better if accused persons were "faceless" when they appeared in the dock. He explained that juries could very well be influenced by pity for weak characters and harmless looking wrongdoers. I saw his point of view and wondered whether the position has ever been clarified. Do the jury really have to see the faces of persons brought before them that they may declare the truth on evidence before them? Even Lee wasn't sure about this.

Later on, when I had returned to the old school, I met Reggie Pitt, captain of the West House. But he was too busy to talk to me. Affairs of State, he explained, prevented him from granting me an interview! I like old Reggie. At one time, his popularity in the Lower School almost eclipsed that of Nipper's; but I have yet to see the chap who will oust Nipper from his lofty perch of leadership. Some have performed that distinction but not for long. Nipper has been knocked off his perch once or twice but only temporarily.

After I left Pitt I saw Bob Christine. I could never understand Bob losing the captaincy of the Modern House to John Busterfield Boots. The strange thing is that Bob seemed to succumb to the great J.B.B.'s volubility with no apparent reaction from Bob or his two faithful chums, Yorke and Talmadge. Bob Christine was quite a likeable chap in the old days when he ruled over the destinies of the College House.

*Old series 445 - 463 (1924). - - - - -

CONCERNING THE EARLY LEE

J. A. WARK of Dunoon writes us as follows: Browsing through an old school note-book I came across an entry, written in 1925 or thereabouts: "Read a grand Boy's Friend Library all about Nelson Lee, detective. It was a football mystery in which Lee, in the guise of a football club trainer, took on the name of Leeson and solved the mystery." So keen was I on football that I had copied the opening paragraph of the yarn:

"Pass! Pass! Tackle him, Patsy. Oh, well played, sirl Goodwin's got it again. Shoot! Shoot! Goal! Goal!"

After reading that boyhood effort I would like to lay my hands on the yarn, but I do not appear to have recorded the title, and an advertisement in the Digest for an unknown story about Nelson Lee would be pointless. However, I did read somewhere that your Lee columnist would welcome data on any stuff featuring the detective, so this query of mine may be his cup of tea. From memory, I would say that Nipper did not feature in the yarn which was written long before St. Frank's saw the light of day. The author's name escapes me also.

DO YOU REMEMBER

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 4 - The Oliver Lynn Series - Gems 787-791

In one sense, the Gem never properly recovered from the first World War. Like the Magnet, it was reduced in size when the paper shortage came, but, whereas the Greyfriars stories resumed their full length when circumstances permitted, the St. Jim's stories seemed to remain confined to a limit of about nine Chapters throughout the 'twenties. The Gem became cluttered up with at least two serials every week, with other odd features thrown in for good measure. In the glorious past, the Gem had had a longer story than the Magnet. Now the wheel was come full circle, and the Magnet engaged most of Charles Hamilton's time and attention.

Of course, mere length is in itself no criterion of merit, and the basis for the series in Gems 787-791 seemed most promising: St. Leger, the dandy of the Fifth, had a young cousin who had been a professional boxer, by name of Oliver Lynn. Colonel St. Leger befriended his uncouth nephew, and sent him to St. Jim's. From this time, Lynn suffered a series of setbacks; his cousin seemed not to want to know him at school, and his studymates in No. 6 could not bear his manners. There were some good situations, when Cardew took up the outcast merely out of whimsical curiosity only to drop him after he tired of him, and when Lynn quarrelled with his studymates and threw them all out of the study - a situation in which Charles Hamilton contrived to represent both sides as being in the wrong. And Lynn's sacrifice for his unworthy cousin provided a moving climax to the whole series.

Even so, there were drawbacks; the quarrel with Blake & Co. was resolved by what critics scornfully call a *deus ex machina* - four footpads who decided to hold up Cousin Ethel so that Lynn could conveniently rescue her, which hardly altered his studymates' reasons for disliking his manners. Lynn's strength, too, was exaggerated; even the most skillful young boxer would scarcely be able to cope with four men at once. And the shortness of each weekly episode ruthlessly eliminated any chance of having a sub-plot with which to embellish the main story a little. Everything was very direct and to the point. One might perhaps deduce from this that the Schoolboys' Own reprint in No. 160 would be a very satisfactory presentation of this short series, but in point of fact it is the most unsatisfactory of all Hamilton Schoolboys' Owns, since it ends in the middle of the series with Gem 789. Why the series was not reprinted in full, using two numbers of the monthly library, is one of the many mysteries that surround most of the Fleetway House publications.

This Gem series inevitably challenges comparison with a very similar series about Richard Dury in Magnets 985-990, which was, incidentally, reprinted quite satisfactorily in Schoolboys' Owns 167 and 169. There can be no doubt that the Greyfriars version was vastly superior, partly because it was longer and artistically developed, and partly because it was written four years later, in 1927, when Charles Hamilton was approaching the peak of his performance. Whereas Lynn was presented briefly and rather coldly to the reader, Dury was shown to be a sympathetic character and the Greyfriars Juniors objected not so much to his table manners (as did Blake & Co) as to his bad sportsmanship in crowing over defeated opponents. Dury's worship of Hilton of the fifth was shown to be quite reasonable and credible, whereas Lynn's regard for St. Leger was explained briefly by a reference to something that was never related in the Gem itself. Masterly, too, was the description of how Dury came to realize that his idol had feet of clay, whereas Lynn admired St. Leger right to the end.

But perhaps the most endearing part of the Dury series was the beginning: Christmas at Wharton Lodge, snow abounding, Dr. Locke an honoured guest, and Bunter forcing his way in without an invitation.

With such an irresistible opening to a series, how could it fail to win the reader's heart?

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 64. ET TU, BRUTE!

In Collectors' Digest Annual for 1962 we presented "Late Summer Folly", a story of St. Jim's. It can be truthfully stated that there seems to be plenty of our readers who liked this story, but I received letters from three readers who gave views which I regard as worthy of deep consideration.

ROGER JENKINS wrote: "I think I should have liked more Hamiltoniana - who wouldn't? - and I particularly wish you had written an article on the subject. The St. Jim's story reminded me of a post-war Mandeville book - quite authentic but having modern touches that were disturbing reminders of the passing of time. My vote would go for Mr. Buddle every time. He, like Danny, is safely anchored in the pre-war past."

NORMAN GREGORY wrote: "A surfeit of good things as usual, but oh, Mr. Editor - five or six stories by substitute authors!! After all the derogatory remarks that have been said by you Hamiltonians about these poor individuals, we now find you at it yourselves. Is this another case of imitation being the sincerest form of flattery?"

(Norman added: "Only my fun. More power to your elbow.")

MAURICE KUTNER wrote: "A fine character study of Cardew in 'Late Summer Folly'. These stories of our old favourites seem to be on the increase. Whether this is a good thing for our hobby is debatable. They are not in the same category as 'substitute writings' because the same nostalgia and tenderness cannot be attached to them. The extracts from Greyfriars Herald and St. Jim's News, etc. were all part and parcel of our childhood periodicals, and can be re-read with some degree of fondness, despite their literary failings. Our present-day sub writings, however well written, haven't the advantage of that long vista of years."

Now, each of the gentlemen quoted above has given us food for thought. I think there is a good deal of truth in what each one says. Why, then, did I write "Late Summer Folly" for the Annual? I might have found a factual article a good deal easier to do, providing the subject matter for same was not too elusive.

"Late Summer Folly" was a substitute story, but not in the same sense as the pre-war substitute stories. They were substitutes for stories by the genuine writer. "Late Summer Folly" was a substitute for an article.

Hamiltoniana is a deep well - but it is not a bottomless well. There is no doubt that we shall find plenty of new slants on Charles Hamilton and his work for many years to come. There are still untapped

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sources of supply. Grimslade, for instance, though Grimslade is not a generally popular school, and I, at least, know nothing about it.

So the main object of a story like "Late Summer Folly" is to help out the problem of new material. And if a story can be made "authentic" as Roger terms this particular story, it is better than nothing.

The same problem of material supply is with our Nelson Lee Column to an even greater extent, for the subject is much more limited than Hamiltoniana. It is outside the scope of Let's Be Controversial, but it can be said that, without the imaginative writings of some contributors, it would not be possible to keep the Lee Column running regularly every month.

Mr. Kutner speaks of Digest "substitute" stories being on the increase, but I don't think it is really a valid objection. In the year 1962 we published only one - "Odd Man Out" last April. I am ignoring the Slade stories which come into a different category. So far as the Annual is concerned, types of substitute stories have appeared down the years without criticism resulting. But this is the first year that I have written a story of one of the famous schools for the Annual - and it is "Late Summer Folly" which is a pill which some find difficult to swallow.

Mr. Jenkins refers to the modern touches which he finds disturbing. I was puzzled at first by this criticism, but I think he means Lowther's wolf whistle, and Cardew's reference to Gussy's "bloomers" and to a board being disfigured by seagulls. Charles Hamilton would certainly never have made one of his boys make such comments. But the difference is this. Charles Hamilton was writing entirely for youngsters. I am writing entirely for adults.

"Odd Man Out" was a mild psychological study. Many readers wrote that they liked it, but two criticised it on the grounds that Lowther would never have shown jealousy of Talbot. They were wrong. Jealousy is not the prerogative of nasty people. It is a human failing which can attack the best of us. The lack of resentment on the part of Manners or Lowther was the weakness of the Tom Merry - Talbot set-up in the old days, had we been intelligent enough then to see it. That is not to say, however, that "Odd Man Out" should ever have been written.

Mr. Kutner is right when he says in effect that nostalgia and tenderness could never make a story like "Late Summer Folly" live on. It was never intended that it should live on. It was merely written for the needs of the moment - to provide a bit of variety in the Annual and to be a substitute for the factual article when new topics are more and more difficult to find.

Mr. Gregory cannot be faulted. What he says is absolutely true.

Often and often I have condemned substitute stories in the Gem and Magnet and now I have descended to writing them myself.

Collecting enthusiasts really fall into two types. Those who have a great nostalgic affection for the old papers and the pre-war writings of Charles Hamilton. Some perhaps would not even want a modern Bunter book in their collection. And those who just love the old schools and old characters, and enjoy anything about them. The ones, perhaps, who say they could never detect a sub tale from a genuine one.

Candidly, I am on the side of Messrs. Jenkins, Kutner and Gregory. Under different circumstances it is quite likely that I should have disliked "Late Summer Folly" intensely. I put every bit of blame on my editor.

And how do you feel about it? For the majority of the customers are always right. Would you prefer Late Summer to be our last piece of folly?

* * * * *

FRANK LETTERS
By Geoffrey Cook

I have had the great pleasure of being one of Frank Richards' correspondents, and I have created this article with the help of some of those letters which are in my possession.

The war had been over some six years, but Frank Richards told me in a letter of March 1951 that the publishing of books was still being frustrated because of a shortage not only of paper, but of the almost non-existence of boards for binding the books!

Apparently when grumbling to a publisher that he had had only five books published in 1950, the publisher replied that the average author was lucky if he had ONE book printed in a year!

Publishers, said Frank, required copy eight months in advance; quite a change from the old days when an author needed to be only six weeks ahead of the printer!

In one letter Mr. Richards grumbled about the terrible delays in publishing his books, saying that this was enough to turn an author's hair gray - and here Frank in his own inimitable way introduced a line; an action for which he is famous in his stories -

'...that is supposing, like Gilbert's sentry, that he's got any!'

Frank did not confine his little sayings to his stories!

Once or twice I suggested to Frank that a slightly-reformed Bunter - who was less conceited and dishonest - might make a more attractive Bunter. In a reply he recalled that Billy Bunter was "reformed" once in a Christmas series in the MAGNET; Bunter after reading Dickens's "Christmas Carol" was temporarily a 'Better Bunter'. Frank wondered whether the idea would work out in a book, and said he would certainly think it over, but remarked -

'I fear that Bunter never could stay reformed. The average reader expects him to go on being the same old Bunter - and to tell the truth, I should rather miss him myself, if he became a different sort of fellow.'

I shall be please to hear from any reader who can remember a story about a reformed



— JOHNNY BULL —

Bunter during the last ten years.

Frank's literary agent informed him in 1951 that he thought of trying out "Jack" - Frank's new character - on television. I wonder, now that Frank Richards has passed on, whether this will ever come about? I cannot think of a better character than Jack for a Children's T.V. series. I had always thought that Frank's softest spot was for Billy Bunter; but perhaps this is true until he 'invented' Jack ... on one occasion Frank confided that he was 'very fond of Jack' and on another occasion that Jack was his favourite character!

I really think that Frank Richards was very dissatisfied with our modern times, as he repeatedly refers in his letters to me, to "these deplorable days."

In spite of such remarks however, it is obvious that he always looked on the bright side, for he once concluded a letter as follows -

'... writing my books taking you into another world free from the worries and cares of the present day. So long as they produce that effect I shall be satisfied that my writing is worthwhile. George Orwell, in his article in HORIZON a few years ago, was pleased to describe this as "escapist" - echoed since by other writers who have no ideas of their own and take them second-hand from George. But surely there are worries and troubles enough in life without an author adding to them in his books! I confess that I like cheerful books, and cheerful faces, and a cheery outlook generally; and I hope that I shall always look on the bright side of things if I live to be a hundred - as I cheerfully hope I do!!

It is a sad thing that Frank's optimism was short-lived by some thirteen years. In 1952 Frank told me that his health was as usual, and that he had not had an illness since influenza in 1899! I wonder how many people can boast of such good health?

I am unable to understand why at the present time a new Bunter series is not being arranged for television. The Sunday Chronicle once took a poll of its readers, and 96% voted in favour of a continuation of the series. I repeat - 96%.

In 1951 Frank mentioned to me that a new series of Tom Merry books in paper backs to sell at 1/6d or 2/- was being planned. I wonder if any reader knows whether these transpired, as I have no more details of them either from Frank or from any other source. If they were published, I wonder under what name?

On a recent radio programme quite a few remarks were made by a psychologist trying to explain the character of Charles Hamilton and how Frank Richards' character fitted in with him. I asked Frank whether he wished to be addressed as Charles Hamilton or Frank Richards, and his reply was, that he liked to be addressed as Frank Richards - "but it doesn't really matter very much."

On another occasion after discussing the weather in a letter to Frank he replied with a misquotation -

"...but it was an unspeakable Spring - the worst since my memory started business in the 1870's. However, it is over now, and as Shakespeare very nearly remarked - 'Now is the winter of our discontent, made glorious summer by the sun in Kent!'"

Well, we all know that our famous author was a humorist.

In conclusion let me say that the bundle of letters which I have of Franks, are among my most treasured possessions. Particularly I hold dear the first Jack book - "Jack of All Trades" - which Frank so kindly sent to me in November 1950 - "from the author to an old reader." I believe two 'Jack' books exist in manuscript. How I would love to see these published.

Old Boys' Book Club

MIDLAND

Christmas Meeting, December 18th, 1962.

Only one thing detracted from the enjoyment of the twelve members who attended this happy last meeting of the old year and that was the absence of Tom Porter, confined to his house with a bad attack of 'flu. There were others we missed, but it seems a strange meeting to all of us without Tom. Nevertheless there was a good programme and we did ample justice to the good fare provided by the Arden Hotel "Tuck Shop". The quiz which Jack Bellfield improvised on the spur of the moment was more to the liking of the members than the few we have had of late. Also easy, proved by the fact that the writer of these notes won first prize - a "Bunter Book," (very acceptable for the fact that it was one I had not got.)

Due to the absence of Tom there were no library books for disposal and we missed his "Collectors Item". Before the "eats arrived" at 8.30 there was time for Madge Corbett to entertain us with one of her excellent readings. As a welcome change from Hamiltonia, the one chosen was a short St. Frank's Christmas holiday yarn featuring Handforth in one of his funny (for him) adventures. Fancying himself as a detective he set out to investigate the queer happenings at the house next door, with surprising results. This St. Frank's yarn is a favourite with Madge and it is the second time she has read it to us and as before it went down well and though it was "supposed" to be the work of a sub-writer, "Handforth Investigates" was much enjoyed by all, especially the new members who had not heard it before.

The rest of the night was taken up with the refreshments and discussion over the excellent items in the current C.D. and C.D.A. Those present were Jack Bellfield, Jack and Madge Corbett, Norman Gregory, Ted Davey, George Chatham, Jack Bond, Len Lidsey, Gerald Price, Win Brown, Win Partridge and

the Secretary, HARRY BROSTER.

MERSEYSIDE

Meeting held 6th January, 1963.

In view of the present weather conditions, there was a remarkably large attendance at this, our first meeting of the new year, the only absentee being John Farrell, who was unable to make the long and difficult trip from Wigan; he hopes to be with us as usual next month.

Proceedings opened with the Chairman dealing with various section matters, including a resolution regarding the purchase of a number of books to augment our library stock; this was carried unanimously, as it was generally agreed that our now considerable reserve fund could not be put to a better use. The secretary gave details of the financial situation, which was approved as being most satisfactory, and he then read a long and interesting letter from a former Liverpoolian, Mr. Daniel E. Hobbs, of Seattle, U.S.A. who has been domiciled there for many years. As a means of keeping in touch with the hobby, he has requested that he be permitted to become an Associate member of the Merseyside Section, to which we are only too pleased to accede, and we are contacting him accordingly. We

should like to express our thanks to Eric Fayne for his help in putting Mr. Hobbs in touch with us, through the medium of "C.D."

During refreshments, the company submitted their choice of the six characters from the schools whom they would not invite to a Christmas party, and the reasons given were both amusing and enlightening. The main quiz of the evening was the work of Norman; a long list of posers on hobby and general subjects, which was won by George Riley, with Frank Unwin and Jim Walsh hot on his heels. Book prizes were presented by Norman. A similar type of quiz was conducted by Frank Case, on a three-team basis; this resulted in a win by a substantial margin of points by the "C" team, comprised of Jim Walsh, Bill Galley and Pat Laffey. The library business, dealt with by Jack Morgan, was brisk and the meeting closed at nine-thirty, somewhat later than usual, due to the full and interesting programme.

The next meeting, which promises to be equally entertaining, will be held on Sunday, 10th February at the same time and venue. Will members please remember to bring their entries for Frank Unwin's "Names Doubles" competition, which had to be postponed for a month?

FRANK CASE

NORTHERN

Our January meeting was held as usual at Hyde Park Road on Saturday, 12th. The weather was the only enemy of happy hours, keeping away a number of members, again including secretary Frank Hancock. The fifteen who were able to attend, however, included a "new" member, Mrs. Elizabeth Taylor - whom most of us recognised better as our old friend Elsie Palmer, now newly married. Chairman Geoff Wilde, wishing Elsie every good fortune in her new life, presented her with a small wedding gift from the Club. We'd have made it a run of vintage Magnets if we could - but perhaps Mr. Taylor might not then have shared her pleasure quite so much!

Main fare after the conclusion of the business was a programme of tape-recorded talks, staged by courtesy of Norman Smith, who had brought along his Telefunken recorder. Leading guest speaker was Northern star Tom Hopperton, but members welcomed an opportunity to re-hear the BBC broadcast of Christmas week, "I Say, You Fellows", a really sensible and adult study of Charles Hamilton and his work. For those who had missed the original this was an even greater treat.

Probably our coldest meeting on record, this was a quieter occasion than most of our meetings, but nonetheless the customary warm and cheery glow prevailed within for those who had tramped through deep snow and braved the biting winds to meet once more the friends of boyhood years - who used to do it in every Christmas number!

Next meeting, Saturday, 9th February.

JOHNNY BULL

LONDON

In spite of the inclement weather a few stalwarts braved the elements to attend the January meeting which was held at the home of Mr. Litvak at Ashford (Middlesex). What they lacked in numbers was made up by their enthusiasm, and we were soon off to a quiz by Bill Lofts which was won by Don Webster with our host and Eric Lawrance sharing second place. This was followed by a talk on "How I first made the acquaintance of the Companion Papers," by Isaac Litvak. After a sumptuous tea we had an informal discussion on the hobby in which everybody joined. We finished with a quiz prepared by our Chairman and Bill Lofts ran out the winner with Millicent Lyle as runner up.

Annual General Meeting to be held at Brian Doyle's residence, Sunday, February 17th, at 14a, Clarendon Drive, Putney, S.W.15. (Putney 1086). Please notify hosts if intending to be present.

D. B. W.

AUSTRALIA

Club members were in excellent spirits when they met on Thursday, Jan. 17th. This seemed a good omen for club affairs in the year ahead when it is hoped "The Golden Hours Club" will progress to bigger and better things.

The meeting got away to a pleasantly informal start when Chairman, Syd Smyth produced issue No. 6 of the club magazine of which he is the hard working Editor. There are copies available for our overseas friends and I can assure you there is excellent value for the small cost of 4/- between the new style covers which are most arresting. For the Blake fan there is a tasty dish served up in "Vic Colby's Comments", flavoured with pungent wit to balance the wealth of analytical comment we have come to expect from the pen of this talented Blake expert. For the Hamilton enthusiasts there is a wide variety of articles from H. W. Twyman G. R. Samways, Bill Lofts and J. F. Bellfield who writes on that controversial subject "Snobbery In the Hamilton Stories." Arthur Holland, who is known to you for his unusual feature in this year's Annual has contributed in a different field on "The Jester". And for those who favour the "E.O.P." we have some "Roving Thoughts" by Stan Nicholls whose articles are always welcomed. So that is the treat in store for those who secure a copy of G. H. Mag. No. 6. - remittance direct to Syd Smyth, 1 Brandon Street, Clovelly, N.S.W.

Highlight of the evening was the London Club's Hamilton Catalogue which had been sent out most generously by its producer Roger Jenkins. Members expressed their admiration for a superb production and spent a very interesting time as it was passed around.

Letters and greeting cards were passed around by the Secretary and soon the overseas news was being discussed. It was grand to welcome back our old friend "The Foghorn" as its cheery chatter and well informed news snippets have been greatly missed. From Harry Broster came the latest gossip from the Midland club whilst from Ron Hodgson there were greetings from our Northern friends. Sorry, chaps, that the tape couldn't be made at your Christmas party but good to know it is merely a pleasure deferred. Our members were pleased to receive those clippings giving details of the Hamilton discussion recently on radio. Victorian member, Tom Dobson, who hopes to join us later this year for a meeting sent along a cricket article from a Melbourne paper because mention was made therein of Nelson Lee so this was doubly interesting. Letters from Jack Murtagh in New Zealand and Gordon Swan from West Australia completed the news coverage for the month.

Subjects under discussion for the evening were the new format of the S.B.L. and the future of this publication and secondly the "Stanton Hope - Hamilton" controversy. Victor Colby had been in touch with the S.B.L. Editor and was able to supply direct information in the form of a personal letter from Howard Baker. From all reports so far received the change in format has not been the dramatic event expected and it would appear that greater publicity, easier availability plus modern adult presentation as suggested by Frank Unwin in the Foghorn will be necessary to avert disaster.

After this discussion Stan Nicholls gave a talk on "Biggles Goes to School" and the part Capt. W. E. Johns has played in the school-adventure story saga with his well written and colourful stories.

B. PATE (Sec.)

REVIEW

"LOOM OF YOUTH" (Alec Waugh)

Mayflower Press 3/6.

This book, which was surveyed by our hard-cover expert, Bill Hubbard, some months ago, is now issued as a paper back. Collectors may like to add it to their library. The story created a sensation when first published over forty years ago, but it is difficult to see why it should have done so. Possibly the author intended readers to see something there which he kept obscure - and readers did just that.

It is a wordy, slow-moving story, with little action, and though characterisation is worthwhile, its impact is blunted by the author having too much to say. With drastic cutting, it might have made more impact than it is likely to make in the sixties.

THE MYSTERY OF THE TWO
BOTTLES!

Written by Peter Todd

ONE LITTEL WORD WIF YOU.



There was a crash on the staircase, and Herlock Sholmes sat up frowning. He was resting on the settee in his sitting-room in Shaker Street, taking an occasional swig from a mug of cocaine. A moment later Doctor Jotson entered. He was waving two copies of the Collectors' Digest, and seemed very excited.

"Really, Jotson!" snapped Sholmes, "I wish you would take a little more care when dressing."

Jotson gasped. "I did hurry over it," he admitted, "but how on earth did you guess, Sholmes?"

"From the simple fact that you have both legs down one leg of your trousers," he

said quietly. "But what's the furore about?"

"Have you seen this?" Jotson panted. "Two people called Bottle are both claiming to be the office boy of 'Chips' - one called Horatio and the other Philpot! This seems right up your street, Sholmes!"

"Shaker Street, in fact," quipped Sholmes, with his ready wit; "but let's have a look, Jotson."

Herlock Sholmes perused the accounts of the visits of Horatio and Philpot Bottles to the meetings of the Merseyside and Midland meetings of the Old Boy's Book Clubs, as reported in the Collectors' Digest for September and October of the last year.

"Mmm! Mmm!" he murmured. Then his brow cleared. "Jotson" he said, "please fetch me Volume MMMDDDDCCCLDDDD from our filing cabinet - hurry, but don't trip up again."

In a few minutes, the faithful Jotson staggered in with the book Sholmes had asked for. It was a bound volume of 'Chips' for the year 1900 - from No. 488 - 539.

Sholmes opened the tome to page 3 of No. 512, the issue was

dated June 23rd, 1900. His deep set eyes lit up. "Listen to this, Jotson," he said and read as follows:-

One littel word wif you
The Orfis
Boy's
Column

Ladeys, gents, chaps and uthers,

At larst I as gained mi rites. I, the grate an onley Bottles, am orthur ov orl this wat now apperes in mi kollum.

It wos like this. T'other day, Mister Hubert Trelawney - im wot rote the "House of the Heath" an "Dead Man's Island" kame down to see the Bos aboute a nu storey. "Whi don't yu give Bottles a charnse?" ses e 2 ole Chips. E's gud enuf now 2 rite funny stuf."

"Is e?" snered the Bos. "Thats a matter ov erpinion." Then e smiled silkly, and sed "Bottles shal ave a charnse." Now, wot did e mene?

Still, wotever e ment, I'm ere this weke, an menes to stop."

"You realise what this proves, Jotson?" murmured Sholmes.

Jotson shook his head bewilderedly. He wasn't with Sholmes at all.

"Why, you clot, don't you see that if Philpots Bottles was an office boy in 1900, he must be at least seventy-five now?"

Jotson gasped in amazement at this superb example of Sholmes's skill as a mathematician.

"Ergo" went on Herlock Sholmes, "Philpot Bottler was not the person who attended these meetings. And now Jotson, fetch me the 'COMIC PAPER'S WHO'S WHO.'"

Soon Sholmes was riffling through the pages of the great work - the result of years of research by the indefatigable +.+.+. +++++. which gives the family trees of every character who ever appeared in the A.P. comics.

"Ah! The mystery is solved, Jotson!" Sholmes said in triumph.

"The two blokes who have been impersonating the great Bottles O.B., are the twin grandsons of the original 'Chips' office boy."

"You see here," he continued, whilst Jotson listened with bated breath, "that Philpot Bottles married Sharlot Scroggins, whilst Horatio Pimple - the Funny Wonder office boy - was wedded to Sally Slapca'bage."

The son of Philpot and Shariot married the daughter of Horatio and Sally. Their union was blessed with twin boys, who were named after their two grandfathers. It is these young rips - Horatio and Philpot Bottles, who have been pulling the legs of these Old Boys, as they call themselves!" The great detective yawned. "Pass the cocaine, Jotson," he said.

* * * * *

YOURS SINCERELY

(Interesting extracts from the Editor's Letter-Bag)

NEIL LAMBERT (Chessington): I think the 1962 Annual has surpassed all previous volumes. It gets better every year, and has rapidly become part of the Christmas scene for me. What a pleasure it was to shut oneself away from the trials of this modern age for a few hours and enjoy the literary gems concerning the characters and places in our favourite old boys' periodicals - to bring back memories of a bygone age. It was a welcome change to escape from the type of fiction that fills the bookshops and in which the moral standards are invariably so low - to live once again in that age of our youth where to "play the game" was not a sign of weakness. Congratulations to all who contributed stories and articles to our wonderful Annual.

RAY HOPKINS (London): Tom Hopperton's article was much enjoyed with his summing-up of the reason for the masterly character work in the later Magnets and Gems - a fine piece of writing. I also liked the allusion to the Magnet and Gem being drugs of addiction. How true that is! Brian Doyle's compilation of the stories in the pre-war B.O.P. was full of interest.

A. J. SOUTHWAY (South Africa): Being a Wodehouse fan I much enjoyed "Mainly Wrykyn" by W. J. A. Hubbard. Regarding "The Bunters at Home" by our Roger, why did he not include Wally Bunter? Was it because he was the invention of G.R. Sawways? I was waiting to read what Roger had to say about Wally, but it didn't materialise.

(Wally Bunter was not an invention of G.R. Sawways. He was a genuine character. It was, I think, Mr. Sawways, who turned Wally, rather incredibly, into a form-master. - ED.)

A. FENNER (Highams Park): A big hand for Mr. C. H. Chapman. His new picture of Billy Bunter is really something, and I am sure that every reader of this superb Annual must have been highly delighted when they gazed at such a fine portrait of the "Fat Owl." The Annual was a work of art, and deserves the highest praise.

JOHN TOMLINSON (Burton-on-Trent): Did Charles Hamilton drop Clifton Dawe in the post-war stories? In a "Tom Merry's Own" there was a list of the St. Jim's characters, and in that particular study there were only listed Glyn and Noble. One character almost discarded was that intolerable bore Grundy, for which many thanks I say! Can't stand the chap somehow!

(In the last year of the Gem and in post-war stories, Chas. Hamilton wisely streamlined his list of St. Jim's characters and cut away much of the dead wood. We fully agree with you about Grundy. - ED.)

ARTHUR CARBIN (Rugby): I liked very much the article by Tom Hopperton. He expressed in words much of what I have been thinking for a long time about Charles Hamilton's critics. I liked the little tale "Bedtime at Morecove". It's a pity we can't have more articles on Morecove and Cliff House.

STANLEY PACHON (U.S.A.): Hats off to the indefatigable Mr. Lofts. It's always a pleasure to read his articles.

PETER WALKER (Nottingham): I thought the Christmas Number superb. Just like the thrill one used to get in those far off days when the Double Numbers gleamed on the bookstalls.

A. G. STANDEN (Stockport): It's an Annual to outdo all other Annuals, and the very professional-looking cover is magnificent.

GEOFFREY COOK (Brighton): Many years ago I read a book entitled "The Cruise of the Deerfoot." I cannot recollect the author's name. I think there was a sequel to this story. Does anyone know of it?

JOHN ARLOTT (Alresford): Many thanks for such expert commendation of Alan Gibson's programme.

RICHARD MCCARTHY (Australia): Could you tell me if Warren J. Lawson was the real name of an author who wrote for Triumph in the last few years of that paper? His stories were excellent, but he never wrote for the "Champion."

CHARLES BAKER (Caernarvon): I did enjoy "The Editor's Christmas Party" in December C.D. It was like reading the "Chat" in the dear old Gem. Mr. Buddle was splendid.

CHARLES SKILTON (London): If you have not come across it, you may be interested to know about the reference to Frank Richards in the Guinness Book of Records. He is listed in some detail as being the most prolifically recorded author, together with a photograph which I have not myself seen previously published.

HAROLD LACK (Northampton): Of course, I enjoy all the various bits and pieces in the Annual, and maybe it is invidious to pick out a few of my favourites, but here goes. I liked the description of Frank Richards Christmas with his relatives, the brief details of the life of Pictures and Picturegoer (the silent cinema being another of my interests), "Bedtime at Morecove" and of course, "Danny's Christmas". Best of all, though in my opinion is "Late Summer Folly". Wonderful, just wonderful.

ROBERT BLYTHE (Dollis Hill): Your correspondent Edward Thomas (January C.D.) said 'The O.B.B.C. would not have been heard of but for Greyfriars, etc.' and added that Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee were not good enough to have formed such a club. It's rather amusing to think that if a Nelson Lee enthusiast and a Blake enthusiast had not got their heads together in the winter of 1947, the London Club would certainly not have been formed in 1948, and if a club had not been started then, who knows when, or even if such a Club would have been formed? We all know we owe a lot to Charles Hamilton, but may I say humbly that we do not owe the inception of the O.B.B.C. to him.

THE HARD COVER SCHOOL STORY CLASSICS

BY W. J. A. HUBBARD

No. 9. "THE HARROVIANS" (Arnold Lunn)

It would appear that quite a number of hard cover school story "classics" written in the first 20 - 30 years of this century were conceived under the influence of previous stories of school life. That the "Harrovians" inspired Alec Waugh's brilliant story of school life during the 1914-1918 war - "The Loom of Youth" - is very obvious. In its turn, "The Harrovians" was probably an attempt to present further aspects of school life at Harrow other than those already conveyed by H. A. Vachell's famous story - "The Hill" which had appeared some eight years previously.

That the author of "The Harrovians" was aware of his debt to Mr. Vachell is shown in a Dedication to a friend at the beginning of the book, in which he points out that certain incidents in "The Hill" had given parents and particularly mothers, false impressions of life at Harrow. Such conclusions were, of course, quite unwarranted, as many of the incidents, not only in "The Hill" but in his own book, were quite exceptional, for short-lived relapses confined to one house will occasionally occur at any big school. There is also an amusing parody on some of the people and happenings featured in the "Lords" chapter in Mr. Vachell's book.

"The Harrovians" created quite a stir at the time of its publication in 1913. A story of Harrow School in the late '90's and early 1900's, its presentation of certain unwelcome facts undoubtedly upset a conservative element among the old boys and certain other admirers of the school. That Mr. Lunn had a great love for Harrow however, is plainly shown in the book, while the popularity of the story can be attested by the fact that by 1926 it had run into six editions.

"The Harrovians" is a realistic school story although it is written for boys and is of its kind one of the finest school yarns ever written. It has not a great deal of plot; it possibly has some artistic blunders and it is rather shapeless and disconnected, but it is very true to life in detail. There is little sentiment and the book is avowedly an attack on the autocracy of athletics then prevalent not only at Harrow, but at many other public and grammar schools. It is also rather novel in that it is entirely written from a "House" point of view.

The story was apparently based on a diary kept by the author when a boy at Harrow. It follows therefore, that the hero - Peter O'Neill - is largely Mr. Lunn himself.

Peter O'Neill is apparently an orphan who has been adopted by a childless uncle and aunt. A typical Victorian period couple, they give the author many amusing opportunities for admirable irony and wit. After a short interlude with the hero at prep school, the scene changes to Harrow and we follow Peter's career throughout his six years stay at the school where he finishes as Head of his House and a Monitor.

The fact that the story is based on a diary means that it is written in the first person. This has resulted in too much attention being centred on the hero who completely dominates the book. Even his friends are little more than names while Mr. Lee, the housemaster, whose work behind the scenes the hero augments as House Captain, is largely off stage. Indeed he does not make a personal appearance throughout the entire yarn. The numerous villains are a little too larger-than-life. Admittedly, the book is a story of a duel between the scholars and athletes of a house at Harrow, but one feels at times that Mr. Lunn has done less than justice to Cayley and Cadby, the two chief bad hats of the yarn.

Mr. Lunn does not, of course, make the bad hats cowards as well as bullies, as that would be a technical error. Their prowess at sport is realistic and convincing and we are treated to a first-class description of a Harrow football match between two houses. The authors account of Cadby's reactions when he is awarded his First Eleven colours after a fine century for the School also shows that Mr. Lunn had a brilliant touch of cricket atmosphere to hand when he cared to use. Nor is Peter O'Neill made the perfect hero,

for he figures as an irritating prig at times.

The author boldly tackles two awkward subjects for a school story - Religion and Politics. There is a complete chapter concerning a religious meeting organised at the school by some of the boys which the hero attends while there is the usual left wing incident typical of the times. Mr. Lunn, however, never crosses the line which divides good taste from less pleasant presentation and keep strictly to the path of quiet, but effective realism.

When Peter O'Neill leaves Harrow near the close of the story, he enjoys the personal satisfaction that he has played a considerable part in bringing about reform in his house, and of knowing that other boys have been carrying out similar work throughout the school.

The final chapter sees him return to Harrow as an Old Boy some ten years later, when he learns that the work has not been in vain but has affected a lasting improvement that is appreciated by more than one generation of new boys.

GRATEFUL THANKS TO YOU

ERIC FAYNE expresses his warm and grateful thanks to Collectors' Digest readers and to club members who supported "Billy Bunter's Christmas Circus" during its recent run at the Queens Theatre. Especial thanks to the Old Modernians' Association who turned up in large numbers on the last day of the show to give it such a rousing finale. In the cruel weather which hit all theatres so hard, Eric Fayne deeply appreciated the loyalty of his friends which gave real encouragement to the Bunter Company and to himself.

WAS IT A COMMERCIAL?

We have just come by a copy of "Billy Bunter at Butlin's", resplendent with a special Butlin's dust-jacket and with an interior advertisement for the camps. We imagine that it was probably purchased at one of the camps.

When this story was reviewed in Collectors' Digest, our reviewer, not unnaturally, suggested that it was written with advertising intentions. It will be recalled that it appeared unannounced, between the two normal Bunter books of the year in question.

In a letter to the Digest, Frank Richards denied that the story was written with any advertising tie-up. It would seem that the Holiday Camps have noted its possibilities since.

COMICALITIES

By Tony Glynn

A series of comic papers which seems to be neglected by the collecting fraternity is that from the Dundee firm of D. C. Thomson. This company did not enter the comic paper field until the late 1930's, although its famous string of boys' papers dated from early in the previous decade.

I well remember the arrival of the first Thomson comic, the Dandy, in 1938. It was of the same format as the company's boys' magazines, its price was 2d and its cover featured Korky the Cat, as it does to this day. The clients seemed to get their money's worth in the Dandy and I remember that one of my first reactions was to feel that the paper appeared to be crammed with material. Stories alternated with comic strips, each story taking a double spread of letterpress.

Lined up in the first issue were an odd assortment of characters, some of whom

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In 1963, with snow overhead, frost in the air, and ice underfoot, we have looked back to a wintry set of pictures from an old comic paper. This is how Lot-O-Fun saw the winter of about 50 years ago.

survive in the Dandy. Offhand, I recall Hungry Horace, one of the Bunterite tribe of grub-grabbers; Keyhole Kate, the skinny female Peeping Tom; Freddie the Fearless Fly; Desperate Dan, the cowboy of fantastic strength; Barney Boko, whose nose was as long as a barge pole and Bamboo Town, an animal item of the order of Casey Court, with most of the action taking place in a single large panel. Another character was Invisible Dick, appearing in comic strip form, although he was an old timer, having appeared in stories in the Thomson boys' magazines early in the 1920's. There was also an adventure strip dealing with a Canadian mountie who used a boomerang. (The Dundee school was always an anthropologist's delight when it came to mixing cultural products. If the hero had belonged to the Australian police, he would no doubt have fought crime with an Eskimo harpoon.) Then there was Our Gang, based on the famous Hal Roach comedy films. Among the stories, I recall one about a boy who owned a magic piece of string; one about a brother and sister who were on the run from a Dotheboys Hall style orphanage and Wild Young Dirty, who was a one-boy, post-Culloden guerilla army against the hated redcoats occupying Scotland. How many young Sassenachs, I wonder, have been won over to the banner of the beany prince through Thomson yarns of this kind.

Some time later, the second Thomson comic, the Beano, appeared. It was of the same small format as the Dandy, a size now becoming familiar in the comic paper world, for the Amalgamated Press launched "Radio Fun" and "Knock Out" about this period, although their famed "Film Fun" was a long established small format publication. The Beano's front page featured Big Eggo a comic ostrich. Early comic characters included Lord Snooty and his Pals, Wee Peem, Pansy Potter, the Strong Man's Daughter and Tin-Can Tommy, the clockwork boy.

For many youngsters of that generation, these and other Dandy and Beano characters were to be the companions of the forthcoming war, for both papers survived the conflict, appearing alternately on a fortnightly basis through the paper shortage years.

The third Thomson comic, the Magic Comic, which appeared on the eve of the war, did not survive. Bill Lofts, with whom I discussed this comic in an exchange (cont'd p.32).

The latest novels
in the Sexton
Blake Library re-
viewed by Margaret
Cooke.

Sexton Blake Today

ANGER AT WORLD'S END: S.B.L. 515.

DESMOND REID

The editor informed me that this novel is an adaptation of an original novel by John Newton Chance better known to S.B. readers as John Drummond.

In the capable hands of Desmond Reid the novel retains its freshness and excellence, holding its own with the best of modern science fiction. This is a true spine-chiller, a book filled with terror and foreboding caused by Evil which has lived on long after those who created it have perished. An excellent piece of writing, the novel has pace and excitement coupled with good characterisation, macabre incidents, and a strong Blake facing death at every moment, endeavouring by sheer will-power to conquer the community of World's End plus one Professor Ballantyne - research scientist.

DEATH IN
SMALL DOSES: S.B.L. No. 516

MARTIN
THOMAS

An excellent novel featuring Blake, Paula and Tinker - an intelligent, quick-acting Tinker playing the star role for a change.

Set in California, the book retains all the characteristics of first class English detective fiction with the glamorous setting of Hollywood, film stars, etc., kept as a background to violence and the evil of deliberately induced drug addiction.

Well written, with a sound, carefully developed plot and skilful portrayal of all the main characters but particularly those of Blake, Paula, Tinker, Olson and Zeitsmann; this is a tough thriller which all Blake fans should enjoy. A blend of sadism and deduction, the book has a surprise ending which should interest even the sternest S.B.L. critic.

The next Sexton Blake novels, on sale in mid-February, will be: "THE IMPOSTOR" by Philip Chambers and Howard Baker. "The SLAYING OF JULIAN SUMMERS" by Richard Williams.

(cont'd from p. 31).. of letters some time ago, tells me it ran for 80 issues from 1939 until 1941. Although I read it frequently, I find I cannot recall the name of a single character in the Magic Comic. Even the character on the coloured front page has eluded my memory. I do, however, recall a strip dealing with a boy who owned a set of magic pipes which could bring statues to life and I remember that a comical cowboy cavorted on the back cover.