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COLLECTORS

VOLUME 17

NUMBER 199

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1963

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THE BOYS FRIEND LIBRARY. No 633

THE FOREMOST MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF SCHOOL  
SPORTING AND ADVENTURE

# FOR SALE

BY ORDER OF THE EXECUTRIX OF THE LATE BILL MARTIN'S  
LIFETIME COLLECTION OF OLD BOYS' BOOKS

LOT 31: Offers requested for 24 loose copies, all different, of 'Nelson Lee Library' comprising - 4 copies 1d series Nos. 105, 110, 113 and 121; also 20 copies 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d series in Nos. 163 to 336 range. With covers (but few part worn). Good condition.

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Executrix - Mrs. I. Carpenter  
230 Watford Road,  
Harrow, Middx.

SPECIAL NOTICE - Messrs. Hodgson & Co., of 115 Chancery Lane, W.C. 2 will be auctioning at the end of July, the main extensive book library of the late Bill Martin, comprising Bloods, early Old Boys' Books and Papers. Also numerous Collector's Items. Anyone interested should apply for Catalogue which will contain all necessary details, from the Auctioneers.

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# COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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FOUNDED in 1946 by HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 17

Number 199

JULY, 1963

Price 2s. Od.



## CONCERNING HYMNS

A religious magazine recently condemned the old hymns which we used to sing in our Sunday School days. The writer of the article concluded with the comment that the hymns referred to are "now mercifully, one hopes, out of print."

While it is perhaps outdated in these scientific days to refer to a "Friend for little children above the bright blue sky" or to suggest that "Jesus bids us shine with a pure, clear light," it can hardly be denied that we loved those old hymns and plenty more like them when we were young. Many of us have remembered them all our lives. In spite of their undoubted sentimentality, and, in a few cases, mawkishness, they made their impressions for good. How many youngsters today could say the words of even one hymn? They are the poorer for it.

A clergyman recently welcomed a new hymnal in his church. It consisted of many new hymns, and a few old ones to which new tunes - if one could call them tunes - had been attached. So many people no longer

sing in church, simply because they do not know the tunes.

A great religious leader once asked "Why should the devil have all the best tunes?" He had a point there. It is all too fashionable to condemn good old hymns, and tunes, and stories. How the devil must laugh!

#### OUR 200th NUMBER

Next month's "Collectors' Digest" reaches its two hundredth number. Paradoxically Collectors' Digest is always looking back - yet it has never looked back. That last sentence, by the way, is lifted from an article which appears in our 200th issue.

In August, to celebrate this unique occasion, you will be receiving the greatest issue of Collectors' Digest ever to be published. The 200th edition will be a GRAND SUMMER DOUBLE NUMBER. It will be packed from cover to cover with good things. Apart from all our usual popular features it will contain special articles by all our favourite contributors - Roger Jenkins, Leonard Packman, Tom Hopperton, W.O.G. Lofts, Ross Story, Neil Beck, Frank Shaw and others. Henry Webb draws our special cover for this 200th mammoth issue.

There will be a new story of Slade, entitled "THE BOY IN THE CORNER". The new story of Slade features Pinky-Mi and, of course, Mr. Buddle.

There will be a unique competition with a money prize, and our famous book prizes in addition. There will be plenty of pictures to tickle your heart strings, articles to tickle your memory, and other items to tickle your sense of humour.

It is a number of Collectors' Digest which we believe you will treasure always.

The price of this 200th issue will be 4/-. Last month we explained how we shall handle the subscriptions of regular readers to cover the increased price of this great DOUBLE NUMBER. We expect an unprecedented demand for this number which marks a milestone in our history. The number of copies available will be limited. If you are not a regular subscriber, and you want this 200th SPECIAL, you should order in good time to avoid disappointment.

#### THE ANNUAL

Preparations are now in hand for COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL FOR 1963. Contributors are requested to send in their material as soon as possible.

THE EDITOR.

# DANNY'S DIARY

JULY, 1913

A metamorphosis has occurred with my brother Doug. He has fallen in love. I don't suppose it will last long but it is terrible while it does. Her name is Freda Bonestoril and she is very languid. Doug met her on the tennis court and she plays like an intoxicated moth. She looks at me as though she is looking through a bit of glass.

Doug says she is fragile as a piece of Dresden china. I said she's more like an old cracked pot, and he was very cross.

Doug had half promised to take me to Wimbledon, but after all he took Freda instead, and he saw A.F. Wilding beat Maurice McLoughlin in the gentlemen's singles. Doug says it was a remarkable game as McLoughlin's service is so fast that it is almost untakeable and he is called the cannonball. Wilding is a New Zealander and McLoughlin is an American. At the end of the month America won the Davis Cup.

I think Doug was ashamed of his betrayal of his brother, for he bought me three books. One was a Boy's Friend 3d Library called "The Rival Cinematographists" by Sidney Drew. I don't care much for his stories as they are rather silly I think.

Another book was Fun & Fiction. This had a very funny story called "Summer Lodgings" with two characters Bob Bunkum and Gus Gerkin. The third was a Nugget Library called "Tufty & Co's Yacht" which was quite a change.

I shan't be surprised if I get plenty of books until Doug and Freda get tired of one another. I asked him why Freda talks as though she has a bad gumboil in her mouth, but Doug says that is just her naturally refined speech.

On July 12th there was a bad accident on the Great Eastern at Colchester. The express which left Cromer at 1 p.m. was wrecked through colliding with a light engine. The engine of the express overturned and the driver, fireman and guard were killed. Several passengers were injured but most of them, fortunately, were at the back of the train behind the restaurant cars.

The Gem has been patchy this month. "The Rascal of St. Jim's" was Gore. It was a splendid story in which a gambler called Tickey Tapp opened a gambling den in the house on the moor.

"Taggles' Benefit" was good fun. To celebrate Taggles 65th birthday, the chums got up an entertainment in which Billy Bunter of Greyfriars gave a ventriloquial show. Clifton Dane's parrot, Polly, played a part in the story. In the end they presented Taggles with £7.

In "Schoolboy and Gentleman Boxer", Tom Merry was saved by Tiny Tim, the bantam, who was appearing at Wayland Empire. But Tiny Tim injured his wrist when saving Tom from bandits, so Tom took Tim's place in the boxing bout. A good story.

The last story of the month was called "Misunderstood" and it was not in Martin Clifford's usual style. Manners was accused of leaving Cousin Ethel to be gored by a bull, but actually he was saving a small child. In the end the father of the child gave Manners a lovely camera.

On July 19th the new Kursaal was opened on the Isle of Man. Lord Raglan, the governor, opened it, and among those who appeared were Madame Melba, George Robey and Little Tich.

A good set of stories in the Magnet this month. Harry Wharton was receiving letters from a man called Jem Gadd who thought he had caught out Harry in a blackguardly

## "UNCLE FISH!"

Grand, Complete School Tale.

## "MYSTERIA!"

Sidney Drew's Fine Serial Story.



BRISK BUSINESS IN THE SCHOOL "POP" SHOP.

act, but it was really Skinner who had given Harry's name. The story was called "In Another's Name."

"The Sandow Girl at Greyfriars" told of a visit of Johnny Bull's cousin, Fluffy.

In "Uncle Fish", the American boy put up three brass balls over his study door, and started as a pawnbroker. But Bunter started to pawn things which did not belong to him.

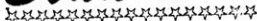
"The False Form Master", was Mr. Quelch's cousin, Ulick Ferrers, who was like Mr. Quelch so he kidnaped the Remove master and took his place.

Robert Bridges has been appointed Poet Laureate,

We had Freda for tea towards the end of July. She said she was a silly puss as she let out that it is her birthday next week. She says she never likes her boy friends to know when her birthday is as they spend more than they should. But she told Doug very seriously that she insisted he should not spend more than £2 on her birthday present.

I thought Doug looked a bit green. Maybe I shan't get any more books from him, after all. Yet while, at any rate.

# Blakiana



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

NAME THE AUTHOR!

By Walter Webb

## PART 2

The well-varied styles of those anonymous, old-time UNION JACK writers offered themselves to easy identification in most cases, and it was only the occasional contributor who was brought in to unfold a particular type of yarn outside the province of the regulars that some difficulty faced the researcher in his quest for authorship. Braydon, Goddard, Hayter, Cannon - all were writers of individuality whose work had distinctive traits or characteristics to separate them from the rest of their colleagues and consequently make him easy prey to the prowlings of the researcher.

There was a schoolmaster named Lomax, whose work under the pen-name of Herbert Maxwell is remembered chiefly by reason of the fact that he created Tinker. The late Herbert Leckenby once wrote that Maxwell had a curious, jerky style. He was also a writer who obviously liked to get to the end of his narrative in the shortest possible time and with the minimum effort, for he had a way of using short, crisp sentences and putting each one down below the other. Here is an example of what I mean taken from the story "CUNNING AGAINST SKILL"

What was the nature of their business with Sir George?  
Were they trying to buy the enamel from him?  
Was he persistently refusing to sell it?  
Was he in their power in some way, or were they in his?  
What was the story of the breastplate?  
And so on.

Setting his sentences down thus the author could use up quite a lot of space with the fewest possible words. This picture of a man in a hurry was borne out many years ago when an editor of BIG BUDGET wrote about an interview he had with Maxwell - or rather what he hoped would have transpired to have been an interview. The editor, having made a special journey to the author's home, was dismayed when the latter declined to be interviewed for the benefit of his readers, jumped into his motor-car and drove off.

WILLIAM MURRAY GRAYDON - who created first Mrs. Bardell and then Pedro - was a very good writer, who simply could not infuse Blake with anything like the virility that most of his colleagues did, and his presentation of the character is identified with a very ordinary Blake of rather moody character and much less physical prowess than has been attributed to him. Graydon also used a word very frequently in his dialogue which was shunned by his contemporaries, and by this fact alone his stories can be easily singled out. That word was "bade", i.e. "Take over my boy," bade Blake urgently. Together with his well-known Scotland Yard character, Inspector Widgeon, no researcher need be in any

difficulty in identifying Craydon's stories.

In complete contrast was Norman Goddard's interpretation of how Blake should be portrayed, and the result was hardly satisfying, for this mercurial young writer went over to the other extreme and framed in the mind of the reader the picture of a somewhat arrogant, authoritative and boastful Blake, quite unlike that designed by any author of that or any other era. To give some idea of what I mean, here are a few examples of Goddard's dialogue:

- (a) "It is my business to know things" Sexton Blake said coolly.
- (b) "Close the door, Tinker," Sexton Blake ordered.
- (c) "I am Sexton Blake," the detective remarked indifferently. "You may have heard of me?"

The verb "ordered" is to be found time and time again in dialogue set down by Goddard and uttered by Blake, and the repetition of such sentences as above form a stigma that an admirer of the detective's character finds distinctively dismaying, since due to the expert handling of the leading authors in general and the incomparable G. H. Teed in particular, our mental picture of Blake is that of a man quietly courageous, modest and somewhat reserved - certainly nothing resembling the rather conceited braggart the author in question portrayed him to be.

Like Maxwell, Goddard had a jerky style and obviously wrote his stories at a tear-away pace - hence the repetition of certain words and phrases - and it is quite easy to discover just when his Plummer stories started and those of the original creator of the character - Michael Storm's left off.

Storm's stories were smoother in narration; he used Blake's surname only in his dialogue and was more punctilious in that he always ended a sentence of dialogue with the name of the speaker. On the other hand, Goddard used the character's full name of Sexton Blake, and, as often as not, ended his sentences of dialogue with the verb or adverb. You only had to look down the first column of print in the first substitute Plummer story to spot the difference, which goes to prove just how important a study of an author's dialogue can be in the tracing of unknown or doubtful authorship.

PART 3

Looking back, one wonders why it was that so many of the authors who came under the notice of Hamilton Edwards and his contemporaries failed to attain any recognition outside their own particular field of boys' fiction. Were they concerned in trying to improve upon their technique as they continued writing over the years, or were they content to plod along aimlessly, distributing the same old stuff, couched in more or less inferior English on manuscripts which, as quite a few oldtime editor have confessed, gave them a headache every time they were called upon to try and elucidate what was written upon them?

A very elderly gentleman, now retired from the editorial chair and living in retirement in the West Country the last I heard from him, had some enlightening views on this subject, for, during many years spent on the BOYS' HERALD and other papers, he came into contact with many of the writers who have been the subject of interesting discussion in the various collectors' magazines. I was frankly informed that many of those writers were just out for money spinning and ground out tons of utter tripe simply to get cash and never took the trouble to try to write a line of decent English.

This probably explains why so few of the early A.P. authors made the grade - money was the evil which rooted the remainder to the foot of the tree of success, of which sweeter fruits they were destined never to taste, whilst those whose ability enabled them to climb it, looked down upon them in triumph.



Of the latter was Charles Hamilton, whose progress from an early UNION JACK writer of the 1890's to a regular contributor to the MAGNET of the 1930's was remarkable, and it is of absorbing interest to follow his development and ultimate near-perfection in writing over the years. Such is the wide gulf in merit between the stories he wrote for these papers that it is difficult to believe that they were written by the same man.

It has already been remarked that a feature of Hamilton's writing was his faultless phrasing, his methodical placing of the verb, which always appeared before the name of the character who was made to speak. But, if you go back to the days when he was a raw beginner, you will find such orderliness lacking, and his dialogue crude, whilst the verb would just as likely be found after the orator's name as before. Skip a few years, survey the Hamilton of 1905, and you will observe a big improvement in his work. Perhaps not yet was there that impeccability in phrasing, nor yet the meticulousness of the dialogue as a whole; but there was evidence of approaching maturity, and there was far more stability in his writing generally. If you read U.J. No. 76 entitled "The Secret of the School" you will observe that the author placed the verb immediately before the name of the character uttering the dialogue, and only on extremely rare occasions did he do otherwise. As a matter of interest, this story featured an S. Blake; but it was not the famous Sexton, of course. The character was Sidney Blake, a new boy at St. Cynthia's, one of Charles Hamilton's lesser known schools. This year - 1905 - seemed to mark the turning point. The author had decided exactly how his sentences were to be framed, and from then right up to the publication of the latest Bunter Books the verb was never used to end a sentence of dialogue.

How many of the early Sexton Blake writers followed this method of sentence laying as favoured by Charles Hamilton? Well, quite a goodly number it seems, and the task of making out categorical lists of the authors and the way they framed their sentences of dialogue has been a most fascinating one, and after many months of deep research, I have placed some of them into their appropriate groupings.

GROUP "A" comprises those who favoured Charles Hamilton's rule and stringently placed the operative word before the name.

GROUP "B" contains those writers who almost followed this method, but on closer inspection were found to occasionally do the opposite.

GROUP "C" finds those authors who favoured the opposite way and were more prone to place the verb last in a sentence of dialogue than otherwise. This method is also preferred by the Blake author of today, as those who read the current S.B.L.'s will know.

GROUP "D" sees those who were very inconsistent in this respect, and who were just as likely to have adopted one method as the other.

GROUP "A" seems to contain the predominant number of writers, and here are some of the better known members of the Blake fraternity, who, with but two notable exceptions, have passed on:

G. H. Teed, Michael Storm, E.J. Murray, T.C. Bridges, E.W. Alais, W.B. Homo-Gall, Alec G. Pearson, Cecil Hayter, T.G. Dowling Maitland, Arthur S. Hardy, Edwy Searles Brooks and Horace Phillips.

GROUP "B" has in it some well-remembered names, and these include: Herbert Maxwell, Paul Herring, H. Gregory Hill, Crichton Miln, J.G. Jones and William J. Bayfield.

GROUP "C" also has some distinguished names, still remembered with affection as being those of writers who gave many hours of enjoyment to their readers during Blake's halcyon years:

Norman Goddard, Andrew Murray, Jack Lewis, E. J. Gannon and Cicely Hamilton,

GROUP "D" The stars in this category did not shine quite so brightly, and, apart from two of them, they have not gained the attention which, in various measures, has been

showered on their predecessors.

W. Murray Graydon, S. Gordon Shaw, Ernest A. Treston, Houghton Towler, and Singleton Proud.

(continued)

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LAST WORD ON AN ARGUMENT

By W. O. G. Lofts

I have read with considerable interest the recent articles by Ernie Carter and Walter Webb on the controversial subject of the actual authorship of S.B.L. 1st series No. 5 ('Midst Balkan Perils).

Having been directly responsible for obtaining the official S.B.L. and U.J. list of authors, I feel I can add considerably to the argument and perhaps have the last word on the subject.

Firstly, I couldn't agree more with Walter that the story, and especially the theme, reads like William Murray Graydon; but I could not disagree more with him that there is an obvious mistake in the official records. Having personally met many Blake authors - and in some cases striking up a personal friendship - and learning quite a number of things that went on behind the scenes, I would say that Walter overlooks the fact that writers are only human. I could quote many instances where an author has written a story and handed it to someone else for that person to receive payment. Who knows what arrangement W.M. Graydon and E.S. Brooks may have had in 1915? Maybe W.M.G. 'owed' E.S.B. a story - or helped the latter out when he was indisposed. Official records show, for instance, that Gwyn Evans wrote 'The Mistletoe Milk Mystery' (U.J. No. 1365) but George Rees confessed to me that he wrote it for Gwyn when the latter was indisposed.

With all respect to Walter, here is another point; can he tell W.M. Graydon's style with certainty? Despite the fact that this was reputed to be easy to detect, several U.J. stories that Walter has been unable to trace have been proved to have come from Graydon's pen. I also well remember some years ago when the late Herbert Leckenby claimed to tell W.M.G.'s style instantly, and yet - along with Walter - he was querying for years the authorship of the 'Derek Clyde' detective stories in the "Detective Library" which were later proved to have been written by none other than William Murray Graydon!

Walter (and others) are of course quite entitled to their own opinion that the story under argument was written by W.M. Graydon, but so far as official records go E.S. Brooks is credited with writing it,

and this should be accepted.

\* \* \* \* \*

(In all fairness to Walter Webb I would explain to Bill that Walter told me himself that the stories he had listed as "untraceable" were so stated only because he did not possess a copy of the particular issues and was thus unable to trace the authorship for that very reason. J.P.)

\* \* \* \* \*

### THE PASSING OF SEXTON BLAKE

The Sexton Blake Library comes to an end this month. This is what Michael Moynihan, writing in THE SUNDAY TIMES, had to say about it:

After 70 years of active life, but still up to his penetrating blue-grey eyes in trouble; Sexton Blake has conducted his last case.

The world's longest-serving detective made his debut in "The Missing Millionaire" in 1893 - a sturdy figure with a high-crowned bowler, elastic-sided boots and a heavy walking-stick. He takes his bow this month in "The Last Tiger" sprightlier than ever as he copes with a pocket of Japs who think the war's still on - but falling at long last, to a woman.

Devoted readers might have sensed there was danger ahead in 1956 when Blake acquired a New Look - and a blonde secretary called Paula Dane. Until then he had been faithful to his Baker Street apartments (he was known as the "office-boy's Sherlock Holmes" in his crumple-eating days). His housekeeper Mrs. Martha Bardell (that fount of malapropisms) and Tinker, the boy of indeterminate age who was his Watson.

When Fleetway Publications took over he found himself in an office in Berkeley Square, a cross between a Cheyney character and James Bond, with Tinker playing second fiddle to the leggy Paula and the brunette receptionist, Marion. Only last year, a Mrs. T. Clancy of Gillenbat, New South Wales, warned the authors that they were making too much of the girl.

Too late. The man who could once spurn the glamorous Roxane on her luxury yacht, with "If I admit any of the softness of what you suggest into my life, it means my career would suffer," has proved no match for the Provocative Paula. Wedding bells on a Pacific island have spelt Sexton's death-knell.

Indeed, it was darkly hinted yesterday by his latest chronicler "William A. Ballinger" that he may yet pop up again. "Why not a Return of Sexton Blake? Holmes made it."

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WANTED FOR RUN COMPLETION: First two C.D. Annuals 1947, 1948. £1 each offered. C.D. January 1959, 7/6 offered.

WRITE: BOX C.R. c/o Collectors' Digest, Excelsior House, Prove Road, Surbiton, Surrey.

WANTED: Nelson Lee Libraries 1924-1933. Also St. Frank S.O.L.'s. First class condition essential. Fulllest details to: NORMAN PRAGNELL, 33 BRAE STREET, LIVERPOOL, 7. Anfield 7740.

DON'T MISS - COLLECTORS' DIGEST NUMBER TWO HUNDRED - NEXT MONTH

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 10 Schoolgirl's Owns 1924 - 5. 25 The Schoolgirl from No. 1 1922 - 3.  
 Schoolboy's Own Lib. Nos. 21, 26, 30, 69, 72, 73, 75, 79, 80, 83, 87, 88, 93, 98, 101, 102, 105 (2), 106, 110 111, 115, 125, 126, 131, 133, 136, 143, 146, 154, 158, 217, 295, 298, 350, 368, 374, 383, 406, 407, 384. Frank Richards The Lone Texan.  
 B.F.L. 3d 24 The Great Unknown (Nelson Lee) 25 The Stolen Submarine (Nelson Lee)  
 134 The Mill Master's Secret (Sexton Blake) 124 Across the Equator (Sexton Blake)  
 68 Sexton Blake's Trust.  
 B.F.L. 3d. 367 Cousins: Ethel's Schooldays. Top of first pages mutilated and a bit tatty.  
 B.F.L. 3d. 153 The Silent Three (St. Jim's)  
 B.F.L. 4d. 273 What's Wrong with the Rovers (Nelson Lee)  
 B.F.L. 4d. 479 Redfern Minor (Chas. Hamilton) 509 The Schoolboy Castaways (M. Clifford)  
 Many 4d and 1d Marvels and 4d Pjucks, Boys Champion, The Champion Annual 1914.  
 B.F.L. 4d. 410 Rook Patrol (Pentelow) 558 The Rival Captains (Wycliffe) Pentelow  
 752 The Sixth Form at Haygarth (Haygarth) Pentelow  
 756 The Barring-Out at Haygarth (Haygarth) Pentelow  
 9 Carden of Cardenshire (Pentelow) 93 The School for Hard Cases (Pentelow)  
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**WILL EXCHANGE:** "Frank Richard's Autobiography" for 2 Bunter Books.  
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 1 - 4d Green Gem No. 40 (1907) 1 - 4d Magnet No. 97 (1909) 1 - 4d Boy's Realm  
 Football Library No. 25 (1919). Early 3rd issues S.B.L. and few 4d S.B.L.'s. S.B.L.  
 Annual No. 2 Early 3d B.F.L. Early 4d B.F.L.  
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**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.

**DON'T MISS - COLLECTORS' DIGEST NUMBER TWO HUNDRED - NEXT MONTH**

# Hamiltoniana



## Let's Be Controversial

### No. 68. THE HEAVENLY TWINS

The Gem and the Magnet are linked together for all time. To speak of one will be inevitably to bring to mind the other. They are as synonymous as eggs and bacon, fish and chips, Laurel and Hardy. They were truly "companion papers" - more so than any other two periodicals in the history of light literature.

Their great affinity was that each told the full story of one of the two greatest schools in the world of make-believe. Yet their courses, as papers, were individual. They ran by no means on parallel lines.

Each paper enjoyed its heyday at a different time. We have already passed the opinion that the Magnet was at its greatest in the period roughly bounded by the years 1927 and 1933, for the simple reason that the writer was then at his greatest. But the Gem, for the largest part of that period, was in the hands of substitute writers, and from mid-1931 was presenting re-prints.

One of the great charms, for me, of Roger Jenkins' articles, is the way he slips in an item - easily, thoughtfully, and with conviction - that is pure commonsense to every student of Hamiltonia. Last month, for instance, he was writing of the Indian Summer of the Gem - that is, the period roughly bounded by the years 1921 and 1924. He commented: "But though the plots were good and the details well thought out, there was undoubtedly something missing. The long stories of the blue Gem afforded a more leisurely approach -"

And there he gave us truth in a nutshell.

My own view is that the golden age of the Gem came roughly in the years 1911 - 1913. At that time Charles Hamilton was pouring his greatest gifts into the Gem, just as, many years later, he was to pour them into the Magnet. The genuine Gem stories were then at their longest in the history of the paper. I consider, in fact, that the author was far more successful with these long Gem stories than he was in similar very long stories which appeared in the Magnet in the later thirties. I think the reason for this is obvious. Almost every long Gem story held a plot which was complete in itself. In the long stories of the later Magnet, each long story was only part of a series, and this meant, inevitably, padding to spread out the plot over a number of weeks.

In the blue Gem of 1911 - 1913 the school story was, without any question, the star attraction - and it was presented as such. There was no pretence of the supporting programme which was to shorten the main story in later years. Just the main feature - and the serial. And even the serials in these years were probably the best in the Gem's long history - "The School Under Canvas", "Birds of Prey", "Sir Billy of Greyhouse."

There is ample evidence that St. Jim's was more popular than Greyfriars in these years - and Charles Hamilton knew it, and gave it of his best. When the Penny Popular started in 1912, it gave its readers not the early tales of Harry Wharton but those of Tom Merry. It was not until 1915 that the early Greyfriars tales featured in the Dreadnought, and by that time things had changed. Early in the life of the Penny Popular the first two Greyfriars stories were serialised for a few weeks - and then dropped. It was not until 1916 that Greyfriars joined St. Jim's regularly in the Penny Popular.

And while the Gem was enjoying its heyday, the Magnet also presented plenty of excellent stories - and bolstered up its programme with three pages of comic pictures which lowered its tone.

Great stories were to come again in the Gem in later years. The Indian Summer of the Gem, from roughly the years 1921 to 1924 brought scores of unforgettable tales, but, as Roger Jenkins so sagely observed, they were marred by their shortness. Always the St. Jim's story was the main attraction, but by the time of the Indian Summer, the supporting programme was too heavy. I wonder what proportion of readers ever bothered to read the items in that supporting programme.

I think that, taking both papers as a respective whole, the Gem was the more dignified paper. The two-column page helped to preserve that dignity. The Magnet went over to three columns early in the first Great War, and kept it till the end. The Gem reverted to the two

column page after the war and did not abandon it in favour of three columns until the middle thirties when St. Frank's became a guest in the Gem.

Two columns presented a neater, more dignified appearance than three. Just what was the reason for three columns? Well, obviously more reading matter could be crammed into one page, particularly where dialogue was concerned. Such ejaculations as "Ha, ha, ha!" and "Oh!" and "What" occupied a whole line, and it made a saving of space if that line was only part of a three-column page. Maybe Greyfriars had more of these short ejaculations than St. Jim's.

I think the blue cover of the early Gem was more dignified, though not necessarily more attractive to boys, than the red of the Magnet. And in 1923, the red white, and blue cover of the Gem, always a joy, certainly had the edge of the yellow and black cover of the Magnet. Just why the Gem abandoned that red, white and blue jacket in 1938 in favour of a mustard shroud can only be explained by the fact that the latter was cheaper, but even so it is inexplicable that a brighter tint was not adopted, while the reduction of page size is equally unaccountable.

Probably the least attractive time for both papers was the year 1918, when all frills were abandoned, the interior illustrations were small, the print reduced in size, the three-column page giving the impression of everything being cramped. Plus, of course, the reduction in size to 16 pages, on poor quality paper. Many Gem readers find the illustrations of Warwick Reynolds a redeeming quality for this sombre period, but, in fact, both papers were so comparatively poor at this time that it speaks much for their popularity that they were able to outlive this section of their history.

By 1920 the Gem was at an unattractive stage, when the school story was sandwiched between two serial instalments for many months, a period which passed gradually into the Indian Summer with the paper glowing again though never quite recapturing its old magic. And as the years passed, the substitute writers gradually became more evident until by 1927 we found them supplying all the stories.

With the advent of the reprints in 1931 we found yet a new glow over the Gem, which slowly dimmed as the old stories were too drastically pruned, the two-column lay-out gave way to three columns, and, looking ahead to sadder days perhaps, the Gem even used its centre pages for a serial story in pictures.

The Magnet never passed through the ups and downs experienced by the Gem, but, due to the many years that its centre four pages were



*HAROLD SKINNER*



used for "Supplements" of varying types, it was more of a hotch-potch of a paper. Though its finest stories appeared at the close of the twenties and the opening of the thirties, it was not until its final few years that it found a dignity which was entirely worthy of it.

It's just my point of view! What's yours?

\* \* \* \* \*

### CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

#### No. 66. THE VITAL SPARK

ROGER JENKINS: Your latest Controversial touches on one of the greatest mysteries of Hamiltoniana, and indeed of all creative writing. I think that anyone who reads through the Magnet stories from beginning to end must agree that the years 1927 - 34 roughly constitute Charles Hamilton's greatest achievement. I think he agreed with this, though he was sometimes reluctant to admit that there was a falling-off after 1934. But when I examined the Magnets in his study cupboard at "Rose Lawn" (which represented a few deliberately held back when the remainder were given for salvage during the war) I discovered that they were all from this very period. He himself must have known full well that they represented the summit of his achievement when he selected them for retention. I feel that this is a case of the author's decision being final!

The reason why this period should have been so splendid and why there should have been a falling off later, is a very difficult one to answer. I feel that the assistance with the construction of the plots can be only half the answer. The only way to solve this difficulty is, I think, to look at the work of other authors and to realise that when genius comes to full flower it cannot remain indefinitely in that stage. George Bernard Shaw, for example, lived to a great age and went on writing almost all the time; he used to say that his last plays were his best, but critical opinion prefers those of his middle period. The most popular Dickens' novels are those of the middle period. And Shakespeare (who 'lifted' the plots of all but one of his plays from other authors) wrote all the famous plays in his middle period. It seems that, in middle life, a writer's genius still retains its youthful zest and is at the same time combined with maturity and experience. At all events the Magnets of the Golden Age have a quality which none possessed before or after. The 1929 Christmas holiday at Wharton Lodge has an atmosphere that sparkles like the bubbles on champagne. As I was only four at that time, I think I can truthfully say that my judgement is not clouded by my youthful nostalgic memories!

JOHN TROVELL: Endorsing the choice of the years 1927 to 1934, as the period our beloved Charles Hamilton was producing work of such variety and distinction in the Magnet. I would particularly stress 1927 to 1930 for the outstanding series that appeared during that period. The Game Kid, South Seas, High Oaks, Hollywood, Brander Rebellion and the inspired China episodes, surely remembered with affection and nostalgia. One wonders in what order of preference readers would rate these and other series written during those halcyon years, when the Vital Spark burned at its brightest and best.

JOHN WERNHAM: Mighty daring I venture to cross swords with such students of Frank Richards as our Editor and Mr. Jenkins. Frank Richards did not agree with the idea that 1927 - 34 was a golden age. I once met a professional writer of boys books who was too young to have remembered the 'peak' period, and he remarked that he found the older stories unreadable. When I first became interested in the Magnet in adult life I came across two copies with the salmon cover and, there were the Chapman drawings with plenty of Bunter, snow and Wharton Lodge. There was all the fun, as of yore, and I knew nothing

about Richards or that I was reading a bit of the lengthy Lambe series. It was the mixture as before and Bob Cherry was as noisy as ever. In the nineteen thirties Richards was in his fifties and it could be said that this is the prime of life, but this is not to say that genius flowers best at this time. I think that he could write a rattling good story at any time during his life but, not every week in all the years and I am sure that a collection of Gem and Magnet stories published in an omnibus volume would contain something from every decade of that half century in which Frank Richards laboured without ceasing.

**ROBERT KELLY:** I regard the years 1927 to 1930 as being the greatest in the Magnet's long history. Not only was Charles Hamilton at the height of his powers at this time, he seemed to be taking a pleasure in developing the Greyfriars scene once more after the years of domination of substitute stories. In the 1930s Hamilton reached even greater heights with dramatic series like the Lancaster, Vernon Smith captain and Second Wharton Rebel series - but for consistently good entertainment the period 1927 to 1930 was never equalled again.

In your article you point out that in the later years of the Magnet genuine serials gave way to episodic series. But this change was making itself felt even in the early 1930s. I have just finished reading the Smedley series (1934) which suffers from being too long and has too many repetitive episodes showing the new master trying to disgrace Smithy. This episodic development masks an interesting deterioration in the master's character - at first he is merely content to trap a wrongdoer, then as time goes on he resorts to half truths, and finally to incrimination by criminal methods.

One point you ignore in your condemnation of long series is that in 1937 Charles Hamilton reverted to much shorter series for a time. This period of the Magnet is unfamiliar to me so I don't know if the experiment was successful, but Roger Jenkins rates three of the series - Mr. Welch's gold chain, Mr. Vernon Smith in peril and the Wibley-Popper series - quite highly.

**PETER HANGER:** I agree that the Carter series is a collection of complete stories, but I do not agree that a reader could be content with just one of them. One of the great yearnings of my life was to obtain the whole series when in 1942 I obtained three of them. I specially recommend "The Schmeer of the Remove" which I regard as the funniest story I have ever read.

**ERIC FAYNE** adds: I did not condemn long series as such. I enjoyed plenty of the long series - the Hollywood series, for instance - and was sorry when they ended. My criticism was of long series in which the basic plot was not furthered. Also a very long series entailed the risk that, should a reader not like the theme, it overstayed its welcome very seriously.

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### REVIEW

**"BILLY BUNTER'S BEANFEAST"** ..... Frank Richards ..... Four Square 2/6d.

This is the first of the Bunter stories to be reprinted as a paper-back, and if it sells well it seems reasonable to think that other reprints of the series will follow.

This is one of the longer of the post-war stories. Mr. Bunter who has now become a director of a shipping company, arranges for his son to take a party on a day trip to Boulogne. Vernon-Smith loses his money on the gaming tables in the French resort, and is tempted to steal from Coker. It is a well-worn theme, which was much more convincingly handled in the red Magnet where Hazeldene was the tempted gambler. A false note is struck with the wealthy, hard-headed Bunter being tempted to steal in order to gamble on a day

trip. However, it reads pleasantly, and it should get by more easily than when it was written eleven years ago, before day trips had been resumed and while strict currency regulations were still with us. When it originally appeared, it rather failed to ring the bell as the author was not quite "au fait" with conditions which existed outside Rose Lawn at that time.

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WHO'S WHO! WHAT'S WHAT! or "THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS WHAT THEY APPEAR"

By Stan Knight

The Rev. Marcus Denham, D.D., the Master of Rookwood School, shook his venerable head as he read the letter he held in his thin white hands. etc., etc.

"Founded in Elizabethan times and built handsomely amid a cluster of trees near the Hampshire village of the same name, Rookwood steadily increased in reputation until it ranked among the first six schools of the country ....."

Then follows book length story of 176 pages. Finally Chapter XXXII "Footnote by the Author".

I have attempted to show you that there are ordeals and triumphs behind the scenes in school life, as well as in the class-room and on the playing field. I hope to have shown you how closely bound are the interests of the masters with the welfare of the boys, and, on the other hand, how tremendously important is the spirit of the boys themselves.

The story of Rookwood is based on fact. That imposing place in beautiful surroundings, was threatened with extinction through sheer inanition; then it was threatened by the builder.

It survived both perils and today it is among the first ten schools in the country, etc. etc."

Author: C.H.?? No - J.H. i.e. Jack Hening. Title - "Playing for the School."

Published by Purnell & Sons Ltd., 1961. Purchased at "Boots" Book Bargain Sale, price 2/6 reduced to 1/- (some bargain).

Paper outer cover indicates a story of "Brookwood School" (enough to attract a Hamiltonian interest) but this turns out to be a printers error as the actual story is about Rookwood without the B. (Intriguing - what!!!)

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**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. GEMS - many issues between 400 and 500. Many issues between 800 and 879. Also numbers 935, 953, 954, 956, 975, 980, 985, 989, 990, 992, 933, 998, 1129, 1150, 964. 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 FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE ROAD, SURBITON, SURREY.

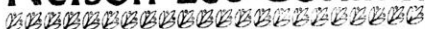
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**DON'T MISS:** Collectors' Digest Number Two Hundred. Great Summer

Double Number.

A milestone in our history.

# Nelson Lee Column



Conducted by JACK WOOD

## WAS IT A CASE OF FORMAT?

By Alex Parsons

Bob Blythe's open letter certainly opened this old codger's eyes. How nice to know that the Nelson Lee is more popular than generally realised; and what pleasant music to all those admirable Lee fans who have kept the banner of the little book flying through the long years. Nonchalantly I say, why shouldn't this be so? To this writer, at least, the Magnet, Gem and Nelson Lee have always been as inseparable as The Terrible Three.

Many old boys with whom I have discussed the paper-back reading of the Golden Years, and who, incidentally, have not read them since, have almost invariably quoted the Magnet, Gem and Nelson Lee. They have named others, of course, The Boys Friend, Union Jack, Marvel, etc., but the three true school papers have almost always come first and listed together. Companion papers in essence if not in fact.

Along with the Magnet and Gem I was still reading the Nelson Lee when it came to its end in 1933, practically my first break since Green Triangle days. Then as now, I wondered if the N.L.'s format was its own executioner. How did this first compare with those of its "companion" papers? Not very favourably with me I'm very sorry to say; for what schoolboy didn't like a whopper in the literal sense?

I have always believed that had the Nelson Lee's format been similar to the Magnet and Gem it would have been just as popular and widely read as either, in that day and in this. I believe also that it would have gone on living, at least until the death of all such papers in 1940.

Size and format were of great importance in boyhood days, and must have influenced most of us in forming our taste for schoolboy literature. This still holds good with this writer. When laid side by side with the Magnet and Gem, the dear old Nelson Lee doesn't quite have their magical appeal. Word for word, story for story, it is equal to either.

Some may say, "If a whopper of a Lee then why not one like the Boys Friend?" To me this is an impossible picture. I always thought the B.F. too unwieldy. Reading it under a desk top during lessons was like trying to read a folding map in a high wind. Apart from this, drawer space in a large family was strictly limited and never wide enough to accommodate such a whopper without folding and this took away some of the charm. I could never visualise a Lee the size of the Boys Friend.

The Nelson Lee had one good advantage in those days, it could be easily slipped into an exercise book when there was the danger of being caught out. Alas, it could also become frayed and dog-eared with being carried in the pocket, a thing one would never dream of doing with the Magnet and Gem.

I am a Greyfriars man first and foremost and am sticking out my neck when I state that, in my humble opinion, E.S.B. was in some respect a superior writer to my favourite, Charles Hamilton. Of course, one must take into consideration that, in view of C.H.'s prodigious output, he would certainly not have had much time for finesse. This, however,

does not alter the fact that many St. Frank's stories reached the heights, particularly in atmosphere and descriptive narrative, and were surely not the cause of the N.L.'s decrease. Nor was it, I think, due to a change in taste. My memory of the early thirties tells me that school stories still held top priority at that time. Fortunately or otherwise, according to your point of view, boys had not then come under the influence of the Bug-Eyes Monster of Plant X.

Mr. E.N. Wyatt of Hornchurch, Essex, states that he turned from the Lee to the Magnet when the Lee's format was changed round about 1926. Mr. Wyatt's change of love illustrates the tremendous influence that format can exert even on a confirmed reader. I must add that (presumably) Mr. Wyatt changed his affection because of the increased size of the N.L. and also that, in his opinion, the St. Frank's stories deteriorated from 1926 on. I have great respect for Mr. Wyatt's opinion but still think the larger Lee more attractive than the small one of earlier years. I have acquired several of the latter recently and find them rather pathetic-looking in comparison with the other weeklies. Their contents, however, are excellent.

Taking a leaf out of Bob Blythe's book, I have done a little survey of Who's Who to find out of 83 readers and collectors of the Blake saga, 39 state their preference for the Union Jack, 12 the S.B.L., 5 the modern Blake and 27 for all. Same characters, same authors, different format! There can be reasons other than format, I know, but is it, I wonder, just a coincidence that the majority who state their particular likes prefer the Union Jack whose format is similar to that of the Magnet and Gem?

I always thought that the St. Frank's stories seemed to have an added charm when published in the Monster Library, even though they were re-hashes of previous stories. Consequently, I find it very easy and satisfying to visualise a Lee the size and shape of the Magnet and Gem.

How attractive this would have been, and what a perfect trio!

\* \* \* \* \*

#### AN APPRECIATION

By Victor Colby

I read Ross Story's "Magic of Brooks" in the Collectors' Digest Annual for 1962 with a good deal of head nodding and exclamations of approval.

This article expressed my sentiments so exactly in a way so much better than I could hope to do, that I felt the least I could do would be to thank Ross Story through the "Nelson Lee Column" and say how thoroughly I enjoyed the article.

How wonderful it was to see Brooks getting real unstinted praise from an admiring reader who is in turn a noted author. I loved those phrases, such as "Compared with Brooks, all the other writers seemed dull;" "there was punch and gusto in his writing;" "his stories had everything." It did my heart good.

My own favourite, Edward Oswald Handforth, was warmly praised and other characters dealt with in a really perceptive manner.

Edwy Searles Brooks created a very real world with his St. Frank's School and the characters he fitted into it. It was a world in which I as a boy, loved to dwell, and as a man, love to revisit. I feel that

my life has been enriched because of hiding there and absorbing the atmosphere of mystery, adventure, humour and right good fellowship that is always present.

Thank you E.S. Brookes for your creations and thank you Ross Story for so ably giving him his due, and in the process, giving me so much pleasure with your fine article.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Yours Sincerely*  
Interesting Items from  
the Editor's Letter-Bag

R.M. WINTON (Louth): May I say that I look forward to every month end and the coming of the Digest. It is always a joy. I must confess that, in common with a lot more readers, I am very fond of Danny and Mr. Buddle.

C.L. FARRON (Boston): I wish you knew the joy Collectors' Digest has brought to the evening of my life. How I wish I had known about it fifteen years ago. I do so look forward to its arrival early each month. Thank you for the enjoyable article on the Monster Library. Is it possible to have articles on Boy's Magazines (Falcon Swift), Football Favourite (Percy and Steve), Modern Boy, Young Britain, Rover (Telegraph Tim)? What about the gifts - sepia plates of football teams with Boy's Magazine, coloured plates of railway engines with the Popular, warships with the Magnet, etc?

ROSS STORY (Worthing): Over the past few months the Digest seems to have become even more interesting - perhaps because the Lee Column seems to have taken on a new lease of life. Certainly we Lee-ites cannot grumble at the amount of space given over to our favourite paper in the June issue.

J.A. WARK (Dunoon): So Sexton Blake has come to the end of the road. Despite its sadness, it is marvellous that the publication had such a long run. My first sample of Blake was from the Union Jack, and, at first, I found it much heavier reading than the Hamilton yarns. I have said before, and I make no apologies for repeating myself, that the "old maestro" had them all licked at the art of story telling.

W.T. THURBON (Cambridge): It is interesting to look back and see how often the editors of the various papers tended to mislead their readers. Very rarely did they honestly say they were going to reprint a story. None of the preliminary advertisements for the Popular suggested the stories were to be reprints. Pluck often reprinted earlier stories "Guy of the Greenwood", "The Red Scarab" and others. But one of the most interesting examples I have just found is a serial which appeared in the 1913 "Cheer Boys Cheer". The Editor made a great fuss about a new serial he was publishing by Robert Louis Stevenson,

called "The Forest Outlaws." In the number preceding the new serial there was an article about R.L.S. a whole page advertisement, and the Editor claims 'I will only say that it has been one of my proudest achievements to secure such a magnificent story by a writer of the first magnitude.' It is something of a shock therefore to find that this serial is an abridged version of "The Black Arrow" first written in 1888. I wonder how many readers of the journal recognised the tale, and what their reactions were?

W.J.A. HUBBARD (Kenya): I think you are on the way to creating a "real" school in Slade and its inhabitants in the same way as J.B. Priestly created the Conway family in "Time and the Conways." Why not a serious and dramatic Slade story featuring the senior boys Pinky-Mi and Antrobus? and introducing a cricket match as a thrilling climax to the yarn? I am sure it would be a really first-class job.

## THE RECORD MAKERS



**THE SCHOOLBOY STORIES**

THE MOST PROLIFIC WRITER FOR WHOM A WORD COUNT HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED WAS CHARLES HAMILTON (1875-1964) OF KENT, ENGLAND. WRITING UNDER THE NAMES OF FRANK RICHARDS, MARTIN CLIFFORD AND OWEN CONQUEST, HE CREATED THE FAMOUS CHARACTER BILLY BUNTER AS WELL AS ALL THE OTHER CHARACTERS OF HIS SCHOOLS, GREYFRIARS, ST. JIM'S AND ROOKWOOD.

AT HIS HEIGHT IN 1908 HE WROTE THE WHOLE OF THE BOYS' MAGAZINES "MAGNET" AND "GEM" AND MOST OF TWO OTHERS TOTALING 80,000 WORDS A WEEK. HIS LIFETIME OUTPUT WAS AT LEAST 72,000,000 WORDS.

Illustrated by Los Angeles Times Staff

(The Slade story "The Boy in the Corner" which appears in our next issue features Pinky-Mi and is in rather more serious vein than usual. As will be appreciated, any serious story is heavily handicapped by the extremely limited amount of space available for it. - Ed.)

CHARLES DAY (Keighley): In moments of worry or frustration, which we all experience in these hustly, bustly days, I turn to the Digest, Frank Richards, and the various books in my small collection, and lose myself in "our special world". This is not pointless escapism. I find it the best and quickest form of relaxation I have yet discovered.

PETER HANGER (Northampton): It is not true to say that the Sexton Blake Library is the last of the Old Boys' Books. We still have the Wizard born in 1923. If it lasts another year it will reach No. 2000. I think this has happened only twice before in the history of boys' papers.

(cont'd page 32...)

The above appeared recently in a Californian newspaper. It reached us through the courtesy of W.H. Bradshaw and Len Paakman.

ON THE BALL

By J. R. Murtagh - New Zealand .

In the November 1960 issue of C.D., Mr. W.O.G. Lofts wrote an article about Charles Hamilton's football song. Further mention was made of this song by Mr. Lofts on page 22 of the Australian Golden Hours Magazine of March, 1962, and it was mentioned here that the song was very popular and was sung in New Zealand with much gusto even a few years ago.

I decided to try and get the words and music here and found to my surprise that the New Zealand "On the Ball" song is entirely different and the music and words were written by E. W. SECKER.

The details and words are published in the 1870 - 1945 History of the New Zealand Rugby Union by A.C. Swan.

However, even though it is not written by our dear old friend, I feel it is just the sort of thing he would have written and the sort of song Bob Cherry, Harry Wharton, Nipper and Co., and all the others would sing very heartily so here are the verses. I'm sure you will all get as great a kick out of them as I did. I am still trying to obtain the music. I and I'm sure many others would like to read the words of the other two verses of Frank Richards version that were not published in Mr. Lofts' original article - how about it W.O.G.L?

Now here's the New Zealand version of "On the Ball"

Oh, some talk of Cricket and some of Lacrosse,  
Some long for the Huntsman's loud call;  
But where can be found such a musical sound  
As the old Rugby cry, "On the ball."

On the ball, on the ball,  
Through scrummage, three-quarters and all,  
Sticking together, we keep on the leather,  
And shout as we go, "On the ball."

On a cold wintry day, when the ball is away,  
Let sluggards at home then remain,  
We'll kick and we'll follow, run, pass and collar,  
As we shout the same merry refrain.

(Chorus)



This life's but a scrummage we cannot get through,  
 But with many a kick and a blow,  
 And then to the end, though we dodge and we fend,  
 Still, that sure "collar" death takes us low.

(Chorus)

But although brought down, there remains still a chance,  
 To pass if we play the right game;  
 And the poor weary soul may at last win that goal,  
 Which is every true footballer's aim.

(Chorus)

Remember then boys, as we journey through life,  
 There's a goal to be reached by-and-by,  
 And he who runs true - why he's bound to get through,  
 And perhaps kick a goal from his try.

(Chorus)

Words and Music by E. W. Secker. (Published by Charles Begg & CO.)

\* \* \*

The composer was one of the first Rugby players in Manawatu, and was captain of Palmerston North Club in the middle eighties. He dedicated his work to A.D. Thomson, the latter one of the leading players of his day in Wanganui, Feilding and Wellington; and a respected Rugby opponent of Mr. Secker. All towns mentioned here are, of course, New Zealand towns.

\* \* \* \* \*

"THE HARD COVER SCHOOL STORY CLASSICS

By W. J. A. Hubbard

No. 10. "Playing Fields" (Eric Parker)

Not so long ago in C.D. a contributor and a correspondent expressed their opinions as to the "best school story ever." I am afraid that I would never dare to be so venture-some on such a subject for very obvious reasons. I will go so far as to say, however, that

I would put "Playing Fields" in a list of the best six school stories ever written.

"Playing Fields" is a story of Eton. Originally published in 1922, it has been reprinted a number of times since. Its author was for many years Editor of "The Field" with a number of highly successful books on the countryside and fishing to his credit, as well as at least two novels of which "Playing Fields" is one.

The Eton which figures in "Playing Fields" however, is not the Eton of 1922, but the Eton of the middle and late 80s of the last century. In view of the fact that Mr. Parker was an old Etonian and the writer of a serious study of life at the school at that period, there can be little doubt that "Playing Fields" is largely autobiographical and the hero - Martin Wardon - really Mr. Parker himself.

I think we are all agreed that the most successful stories of school life are both dramatic and gripping with considerable emphasis on character work. "Playing Fields" not only possesses these attributes but has many touches of comedy and contains both sentiment and more than a touch of pathos, for Martin's father dies during the course of the yarn. It is, of course, "adult" and full of realism although not to the same extent as certain other stories previously reviewed in this series. Its supporting sequences are authentic but it is pleasing to note there is none of the almost fanatical denunciation of the cult of athletics that is a feature of some stories of school life. And throughout the book there is a certain undefinable charm that adds greatly to its attraction. One feels that Mr. Parker enjoyed the time he spent at Eton. Why this truly wonderful story of school life has been so badly neglected by readers is really a puzzle for apart from myself I know of only two people who possess copies, both of them members of the London O.B.B.C.

It is interesting to compare "Playing Fields" with "The Oppidan". Both are stories of roughly the same period of time at Eton although "The Oppidan" really belongs to the next decade. "The Oppidan", however, shows that it is written by a famous historian who has decided to give details about the school and its educational development in the form of a story of school life. "Playing Fields" on the other hand, while featuring real people, both under their real names and pseudonyms, and real places and events, concentrates more on its schoolboy characters and is far more personal in tone, while it is also free from the unhappiness and air of impending tragedy that hangs over Sir Shane Leslie's book.

Although "Playing Fields" is a story of school life in the 80s it is not dated and apart from certain references of time and place could well be a study of Eton at the present time. It is a story of a King's scholar (a scholarship boy), a boy of considerable intellectual power but who is, incidentally, a more than average sportsman.

The story does not start at Eton, however, for we are first treated to two interludes with the hero as a small boy at his home in the country where we meet his parents - a couple with a very modern outlook towards children by the way - and his sister. We then follow him to a "prep" school, from which he wins a scholarship at Eton. These two interludes fill nearly a quarter of the book and they present the author with every opportunity to display his brilliant descriptive powers of the English countryside and his love of nature which are, in fact, an outstanding feature of "Playing Fields."

Then follows the hero's career at Eton from the insignificance of a Lower Boy to the pre-eminence of the Sixth Form. There is not a great deal of plot in the story which mainly consists of episodes which mark each stage in Martin Wardon's career and the gradual development of his character. Each episode, however, is vividly described and our attention is held from the beginning to the end of the book. There is hardly a detail of Eton life that does not come under the author's scrutiny - we are treated to some fine classroom scenes, unusual in that they are mainly conveyed to us through the medium of conversation between the schoolboy characters, we undergo, with Martin and his friends the pleasure of intellectual attainments and prizes, we overhear, with them, schoolboy politics and scandal - who has been given colours at Cricket, Football and Rowing, and who has been turned out of the various XI's, etc., etc., - and we venture on the river and visit places near to both Eton and Windsor dear to the heart of any old Etonian.

There are scenes on the school cricket ground, at Lords, at Henley and at both Oxford and Cambridge. We read of Martin's love of fishing which he endeavours to hide as far as possible from his friends and we visit the famous shops near the school, which have catered for so many generations of Etonians, many of which are still going strong today. It is impossible, in the space at my disposal, to do justice to the many fine scenes and characters, each with a distinct separate personality, featured in the book.

Curiously enough, especially in view of its prominence in other stories, cricket takes rather a back seat as far as the hero is concerned but one feels this is due to accident rather than design for the author's love of the game is evident. Instead we have prominence given to Eton football - both the Wall and Field Games - at which Martin gains his College Colours, Rowing and Shooting for such Public School Trophies as the Ashburton Shield and the Spencer Cup. We also experience the pleasure, or otherwise, of a number of Field Days with the Eton College Cadets.

The author does not hesitate to present the dark side of school life and Martin has to struggle before he can throw off the influence of the "Bad Hat" of the yarn. We also share his dismay when a marked athletic type who he and other boys greatly admire is expelled from the school.

Mr. Parker seems to have been perfectly aware of the inherent difficulties surrounding the writing of the school story. I would therefore like to close this review of a remarkable book by including a passage towards the end which probably explains far better than I can do the real reason for its wonderful charm and hold over the reader. It consists of a conversation between some of the boys. Here it is:

"Yes, well, I mean, it's really true what Massinger was saying. That you don't get plots in school life, You don't get extra-ordinary things happening. You just get people going on day after day. And sometimes they do things and sometimes they don't. And there are hundreds of people who don't do things and two or three who do. And the real school story's about the people who don't."

# OLD BOYS BOOK CLUB

## MIDLAND

Meeting held May 28th, 1963

Instead of the extra fine meeting we had expected for the A.G.M. there were only seven present. Some were away on holiday or on account of illness or business commitments. We got over the main business of electing the officers for the coming year very quickly, at least as far as the settling on Treasurer and Secretary. The result was the same as if the full crowd had been there. The writer and Norman Gregory back in office as expected. The Vice Chairmanship as per club rule passed on to Jack Bellfield as retiring Chairman. Jack Corbett and Madge declined the job owing to business reasons so it lay between Norman and Tom Porter. Three votes each and Ray Bennett arrived just in time to give the decision in favour of Norman. Though the two proposed members held the position of Treasurer and Librarian respectively it was thought that Tom had made such a good job of the Library that he needed full time to maintain the good progress.

Norman presented his balance sheet for the year which showed a slight decrease in profit. Again it was emphasised that the need was for more members and more subscriptions. Tom also declared a small profit in his library accounts added to the fact that over one hundred Magnets had been purchased for the Library. There was only an improvised programme tonight. No Quiz or games, but the "Guess the Number" item was won by the Secretary - A "Modern Boy" No. 203 - my guess was very near - 201. I also won a Geo. Rochester B.F.L. in the Library raffle plus some more "Modern Boys".

The Collectors Item exhibited by the Librarian was B.F.L. No. 276 "Through Thick and Thin" by Martin Clifford. Keeping up his practice of producing an old boys' book bearing the day and month of the Meeting, Tom passed round a mint copy of the Nelson Lee Library No. 312 old series, dated May 28th, 1921. This was the cricket yarn of St. Frank's "Australian Wonder" - Jerry Dodd.

The evening finished with a reading by Jack Bellfield from a Holiday Annual.

HARRY BROSTER - Secretary.

#### NORTHERN

We assembled at 299 Hyde Park Road for our June meeting on a glorious summer evening, although the attendance was below average, due to holidays and sporting commitments.

The Secretary and Treasurer-Librarian having disposed of the formal business, Gerry Allison read us an extremely interesting batch of correspondence received this month, including letters from John Jarman (now well on the way to recovery after his recent illness) and David Lancake, two members who are seldom able to attend our meetings but who hope to be at Manchester on July 7th. There was also a letter from our Canadian member, Ian Menzies.

Geoffrey then read an extract from the Sunday Citizen stating that the Sexton Blake Library is to cease publication with the June issues, which means that the only old-timer to survive two world wars will be lost to us. The article estimated that more than 200 million words had been written about Blake. There was a discussion on this subject, and members recalled the many fine writers who had penned the Blake stories over the years.

Jack Wood produced a copy of 'Billy Bunter's Beanfeast' published by Four Square Books in paper-back form, which excited much interest. We all hope this new venture will meet with public support.

Next we had a quiz by Gerry Allison on Hamiltonian subjects and characters, which was won by Jack Wood, after which we adjourned for refreshments.

The second half of the meeting was devoted to the game of cricket, this month's reading, given by Geoffrey, being an extract from the Teddy Lester story, 'Three School Chums,' by John Finmore, which originally appeared as a serial in the Boys Realm. The meeting closed a little earlier than usual at 9.10 p.m.

Next meeting, Saturday, 13th July.

F. HANCOCK Hon. Sec.

#### AUSTRALIA

Despite the wintry weather outside the atmosphere was warm and cheerful at the usual rendezvous when the regular members of the Golden Hours Club met at 6.15 p.m. on Thursday, June 13th.

It was with pleasure that an enthusiastic welcome was extended to three visitors whom it is hoped will become regular members. Hamilton enthusiasts in the circle were happy indeed to find that John Gardiner of Pennant Hills and Don Harkness of Bondi shared their deep interest in the Magnet, with our third visitor Mr. Saunders, a supporter of Chums and the B.O.P.

Copies of the C.D., C.D. Annual, S.P.C., Golden Hours, and the club catalogues were then passed around amongst the visitors whilst members explained the details of these

helpful and priceless publications which form such a strong link in hobby circles.

A letter from Tom Dobson was read by the secretary who announced that in July Tom plans to spend part of his leave in Sydney and will be travelling up from Victoria mid-month to share an hour or two, discussing hobby affairs, with his friends. As we have very happy memories of Tom's last visit with us this one is happily anticipated.

Blake enthusiasts were well catered for by Jim Cook who had sent Stop Press news of the publicity accorded the retirement of Sexton Blake by the London dailies. Sad news indeed but at least some consolation to know Blake has not died entirely unsung. Further interesting data on Blake came in a letter from West Australian collector Gordon Swan who started quite a lively discussion concerning little known author Lester Bidston whose work appeared to owe a great deal to earlier writer David Goodwin.

From closer at home came an always welcome letter from Arthur Holland whose views and discussions bring him most actively into the meeting despite the distance between.

Another long distant guest was Bill Gander our very good friend from Canada whose friendly letters and valued S.P.C. have done so much for hobby members everywhere.

As usual the rest of the evening was spent in general discussion and with three visitors anxious to learn further details of the book club fellowship it was a full and informative hour with something of interest for all members.

Following our usual practice the evening was continued and concluded most enjoyably at 9 o'clock with a half hour in the local coffee shop.

B. PATE - Secretary

#### LONDON

##### Meeting held 16th June 1963

Once again it was a pleasure to visit Excelsior House, Surbiton, with the garden looking at its "rosiest", and with Eric Fayne as our host. A record attendance of 40 turned up to greet our President and Mrs. Harrison, Charles Hamilton's sister. In the absence of Uncle Benjamin, on holiday, Don Webster acted as secretary-treasurer.

Bob Blythe opened the meeting, and after the routine business had been concluded, Roger Jenkins entertained us by reading an amusing extract from Magnet No. 1078 "The Japer of Greyfriars". A short discussion then took place as to the possibility of holding an annual dinner, and arrangements were left in the hands of John Wernham, Brian Doyle, and Don Webster. We then proceeded to emulate the Bunter family by making inroads into piles of sandwiches and cakes of all kinds.

After tea we adjourned to the Fun and Games Room where two teams battled for the honour of scoring most points in three competitions. (Needless to say, Roger's team won as usual.)

Thus ended our "Ascot" meeting for this year and all present agreed that it was one of our happiest and most successful.

Next month we visit "Greyfriars" - but it's been moved to Berkshire, where Eric and Betty Lawrence are our hosts. Let's give them a good attendance and a meeting to remember.

DON WEBSTER

#### MERSETSIDE

##### Meeting held Sunday, June 9th:

In the absence of our chairman, who was on holiday in North Wales it was my duty to announce the sad news that Frank Case had had to resign active membership. I say active membership because, although he may no longer be able to attend our meetings regularly we still regard him as one of us, and just as much a member in spirit as ever he was before. On the behalf of every member of the club, I wish him the very best of luck in his new job in Nottingham. Some of us will, of course, be seeing him at the Manchester meeting.

Holidays and the abnormal English weather (the sun was shining) curtailed the attendance, but we had an enjoyable evening. Although Frank Case was not present, he played his part by sending a quiz based on books and their authors which was won by George Riley. The evening concluded with a discussion in which no holds were barred and punches were delivered straight from the shoulder. At the end of it I, as (cont'd on page 32.)

CURTAIN*Sexton Blake Today*

It has been but rarely that a periodical has died with dignity, with a smile, with a look back, and without excuses. The Sexton Blake Library has done just that. The dignity of its final

curtain has been worthy of it, and that has been mainly due to the fact that to Mr. Howard Baker the editing of the S.B.L. was more than a mere job. Like his readers, he really loved the Library.

Mr. Baker has made the final issue of the S.B.L. (issued in mid-June) one that readers will ever cherish.

It was pleasant, if touching, to read the comments of folk who have been connected with the S.B.L. for many years. Perhaps the most striking of all, taut, penetrating, and characteristically satirical - came from Jack Trevor Story. He wrote:

"The Sexton Blake Library, in common with other dead publications, lacks everything it takes to appeal to the mass audience now emerging from the new eleven-plus machine; it lacks dullness, it lacks puerility, it lacks sterility, it lacks pictures that could obviate reading altogether, it lacks all the things that are vital to an unimaginative, non-reading, non-thinking, non-living, telly-watching public. It is therefore not an economic proposition and I'm surprised it has lasted this long."

Jack Trevor Story's words will find an echo in all our breasts. Nevertheless, he does not really give the true picture. He blames the public for lack of support - and, for once, the apathy of the public is not the cause.

The blame, as we have been saying for a long time in the Digest, rests squarely on the distribution system and the lack of advertisement. The public cannot be blamed for failing to support a periodical when only the loyal and true knew that it still existed. So far as we know, the S.B.L. was not even advertised in other Fleetway Publications.

It can hardly be denied that there is a giant reading public for detective stories. It is insatiable. The whole mass of crime stories which Agatha Christie has been writing over the past forty years are reprinted and reprinted and reprinted again. There has been no modernising of Agatha's stories - yet the public laps them up all the time. It would have lapped up the excellent Sexton Blake tales in the same way - if it had had the chance.

Inevitably, there will be an inquest, lasting for years, on the passing of Sexton Blake. It can be admitted without prejudice that many Collectors' Digest readers, who naturally are of the older brigade, did not favour what has been termed the new look Sexton Blake. It can also be admitted that some have been biased and a little unfair. It is feasible to assume that our older readers are fairly representative of the views of older S.B.L. readers throughout the country.

My personal opinion, which may not be worth anything, is that the new look was carried a little too far and adhered to a little too stubbornly. Generally speaking, I did not think that Tinker was particularly well-handled in recent times, and I think the feminine regular characters were rather over-played.

Nevertheless, the Sexton Blake Library has offered excellent detective and adventure stories in recent years, and I am convinced that the general public would have delighted in them, had it known about them.

So the Sexton Blake Library, born in 1915, has died in 1963. But Sexton Blake and Tinker are not dead. The curtain has fallen - but curtains often rise again. Maybe, if Blake lovers make their voices heard, we shall yet see more stories of the great British detective.

Collectors' Digest has secured a few extra copies of the last two issues. If any reader has found it impossible to acquire copies, they are available from this office at

cost price plus postage.

On the inside covers of these last issues, there is an advertisement for the new publications, Fleetway Colourbacks. In the forefront is CRIME U.S.A. And a little bit of old England has gone —

### THE CURRENT ISSUES OF THE SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY

Reviewed by Margaret Cooke

I review the final issues of the Sexton Blake Library with a sense of deep personal loss. Month after month for forty-two years each new chapter of this great saga has thrilled, mystified, entertained, informed or excited me. In the process of growing up from child to adult I have journeyed with Blake to all quarters of the globe in his fight against crime and criminals, played hide and seek with spies and counter spies, and faced danger, even death, in his company. In recent years I have enjoyed the company of the nicest group of friends and helpers anyone could wish to meet, in the staff of Sexton Blake Investigations Ltd. So vividly have his authors written of his exploits and character that he has always been for me, as for many other readers, a living person, as real and substantial as any of my daily contacts.

Now, after a period of alarms and rumours the axe has fallen. Blake is no longer an economic proposition and from henceforth will continue to live only in the imaginations and memories of his readers. That those same memories and imaginations will function happily for some years to come I think all those authors who have given of their best month after month, year after year, maintaining an incredibly high standard of literature and fiction in these small books.

I understand that the publishers will retain the authors services in other fields of literature and I wish them all every success in the years ahead. To all old friends and readers of the CD, I wish long life, long memories, and keen imaginations. Perhaps from time to time one of us will set pen to paper and write a short Blake for the amusement of the rest of us. Perhaps an author, freed from the restrictions and limitations of the SBL will be moved to renew acquaintance with our old friend and give us a Blake when we least expect it. Perhaps we shall never see another new Blake story. Whatever happens in the future I am intensely grateful for the years of interest and pleasure represented by the SBLs on my bookshelves. Till we meet again within their pages - goodbye - Sexton Blake.

THE SOUND OF MURDER: S.B.L. No. 525

Martin Thomas

Martin Thomas at his best in a spine chilling novel of murder and fraud at a country club where Crispin Tallos met the members of his Anti-Lethan Society and promised complete rejuvenation to a group of old men.

When one of these old men disappeared from the face of the earth, his nephew called in Sexton Blake who had great difficulty in finding any lead to Julius Champ's activities until Linda Skuse, his secretary, was murdered. Then, with the aid of Tinker, Paula and Marlon, he set out to capture the most cold-blooded murderer of all time.

Story, dialogue and characterisation are all excellent. The novel has pace, tension, excitement and that touch of the bizarre which we have come to associate with Mr. Thomas.



Wm. A. Ballinger



Advertised at the back of 'The Sound of Murder' as 'the last issue in the present Sexton Blake Library series' and what an issue - worthy of all the other wonderful issues of this great case-history.

This is a really great book telling of the efforts of Blake and Paula, aided by Tinker and Marion, to discover the reason why passenger planes flying from Honolulu to Sydney were disappearing over the Pacific. The assignment is fraught with danger for Blake, brings death and resuscitation for Paula, and brings them both into conflict with a remnant of the Japanese army based on a coral island. The novel ends as all such novels should with 'Sexton Blake and Paula lying side by side on the golden beach in Honolulu determined to take the Vicar of Hand's advice as soon as possible, and with Tinker walking hand in hand with Marion into an equally happy future. A most fitting and comforting end to the public life of these 'crime-busting, trouble shooting detectives.'

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YOURS SINCERELY (Cont'd from page 23)...

A. BARUDEN (Bexhill): I have read your letter in the current and last issue of the S.B.L. and write to say that I endorse your hope that popular demand will one day bring about the return of Sexton Blake. I have been a reader for more years than I can remember and the sudden cessation of publication came as a shock.

WANTED: - Sexton Blake Library, Series ending May 1941, copies of Nos. 580 - 740, especially stories by Anthony Parsons, Donald Stuart, John G. Brandon, Rex Hardinge, G. H. Teed.

P. M. KING, "HAVERCROFT," KIRBY ROAD, WALTON-ON-NAZE, ESSEX.

REQUIRED: Lees (OS, 2nd, 3rd New), SOL's, Magnets. Will buy or exchange for 'School and Sports', various Lees, SOL's, Magnets, Gems, Hamilton Hard-covers. Write listing what you have:-  
JOHN BECK, 77 HIGHDOWN ROAD, LEWES, SUSSEX.

O.B.B.C. (continued from page 29..)

acting Chairman, gave the verdict as a draw and we all went home still the best of friends.

Regarding the meeting in Manchester on July 7th, the details are as follows:- Meet at Liverpool Exchange Station (under the clock) at 9.50 a.m. Lunch will be at the New Millgate Hotel, Long Millgate, Manchester 3 (near Manchester Exchange Station) at 1 p.m. A meeting will then follow until 5 p.m. after which tea will be served. We hope to see some of our friends from Leeds and Birmingham at the meeting, and, who knows, maybe London as well.

BILL WINDSOR