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2nd

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FORGOTTEN MEMORY:

To stir forgotten memory
And whisper "Thus it used to be".

A reader sent me that quotation a month or two back. What actually did the poet mean by a forgotten memory? For, if it is forgotten, how can it be a memory at all? Is it that our memory plays us tricks? Of course it does at times.

I read in my newspaper that our climate is no different at all now from what it used to be. When it is good, it is very good indeed - but when it is bad it is utterly wretched - and, said the newspaper, it is, and always has been, usually wretched.

And I could have sworn that, years ago, we used to get far better summers than we have had in recent years. Every summer there seemed to be a number of heat-waves. I can even remember the delightful exponent of poetry in the old Greyfriars Herald writing:

The heat waves come, the heat waves go
This is the worst we've had, you know.
I'm melting to a grease-spot, oh!

July.

We never melt to grease-spots nowadays. Is it just that we wear more sensible clothes than we used to do? Do we get the same heat waves now, and fail to notice them.

When I was a child I had a sled which I kept for year after year, hoping for snow which never came. Only our fictional heroes seemed to get the snow in those days. We had green Christmases which, according to tradition, fill churchyards. I'm sure they don't. Mild weather never killed anyone.

Does our memory play tricks with us when we think back on the old stories? I daresay it does at times. It was either faulty memory or chronic old age which caused me to credit Pentelow with Phyllis Howell in last month's Digest. Having written out a thousand times, on impot paper, "G. R. Samways invented Phyllis Howell", I would add that Mr. Samways was probably the delightful exponent of poetry referred to above.

MORE FAULTY MEMORIES:

As we said in last month's issue, advertisements are welcome. They help in the difficult task of balancing the budget. Quite a large number of readers, however, send in advertisements without including their name and address. It adds to the already hefty number of little jobs at this office. We remind our friends that names and addresses must be included, and paid for, with all advertisements.

THE ANNUAL, 1963:

I promised that this month I would lift the curtain on some of the good things that come in COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL for 1963. For Roger Jenkins fans (and that must mean everybody) there is the exciting prospect of a double helping of reading matter from one of our most popular writers. First there is "FLAWS IN THE DIAMOND" in which Mr. Jenkins views Hamiltoniana from a fresh angle. Whether you agree or disagree with all or some of the arguments in this most readable article, you will be interested - and you will talk about it for a long time to come. This year (with two helpings of Mr. Jenkins for the price of one) he turns far from his normal hunting ground, and in an article called "MORE WILLIAM" he gives his own impressions of Richmal Crompton's lovable hero.

Geoffrey Wilde turns the spotlight on the St. Frank's stories in

the Gem. This is a masterly review of a rather neglected branch of old boys' book lore. Brian Doyle completes his trio of smash-hit, fact-packed achievements with "THROUGH THE YEARS WITH 'THE CAPTAIN'". Messrs. W. O. G. Lofts and Derek Adley come well up to scratch with another massive piece of research work under the title "A CATALOGUE OF COMIC PAPERS". New Zealand contributor Albert Watson turns up with an original idea - "Analysing the CHAMPION LIBRARY". Frank Hancock discusses Charles Hamilton's School Stories.

And that is about all the space for our first "trailer". It will give you an idea of the good things to come. Have you yet ordered your Collectors' Digest Annual for 1963?

THE EDITOR.

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OUR 200th NUMBER COMPETITION

Rarely have we run a contest which created so much enthusiasm as that reproduction from the Greyfriars Herald in our recent Double Number. At least a hundred readers wrote in to say how delighted they were to see it. For so many it brought home to them how vastly superior were the competitions of the old days when compared with the monotonous specimens of this day and age. So popular was this contest that we shall, as time goes on, reproduce another old time puzzle for the attack of Collectors' Digest readers.

The following is the solution of the Greyfriars Herald puzzle as written out by C.D. editor:

A miller's son who had got into the king's favour by reason of his cat was presented with splendid attire by the king. Some days afterwards the cat persuaded the giant occupant of a large castle to turn himself into a rat, whereupon the cat ate him. The cat then told the king it was his master's dwelling and later the miller's son wed the princess.

The first prize of £1 is awarded to R. M. Jenkins (Havant) whose entry differed in only two places from the correct solution.

Next in order of merit were J. T. Mann (Retford, Notts.) and R. J. Godsave (Leytonstone) who each receive one of our special book awards.

* * * * *

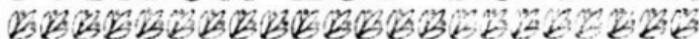
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Nelson Lee Column



CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD

A VISIT TO THE HOME OF MR. EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

By Robert Blythe

Thirty years ago, and that's a sobering thought to begin with, a young man decided to visit, without an invitation, the author of the stories that he had admired ever since he had discovered the Nelson Lee Library in 1926.

The paper had been going downhill for some years past and now, in 1933 the blow had fallen. He had been told that if he wanted to read more about St. Franks then he had to buy the Gem from then on. This youth felt so indignant that nothing would do but to go to the fountain-head, as it were, and find out why.

Instead of being thrown out on his ear as he deserved for his cheek, he was hospitably received and, whilst being regaled with tea and cakes, was told as much as the author deemed advisable of what went on behind the scenes at the A.P. and why the Nelson Lee was forced to such an ignominious finish. And with that this impetuous youth had to be satisfied.

Now you do not have to be a Nelson Lee to work it out that "he" was yours truly and yours truly, remembering that occasion, has never ceased to extol the St. Franks stories and has defended E. S. Brooks against all comers. And there have been plenty of "comers".

This love of the Nelson Lee blossomed forth at the end of last year, as you know, with the Nelson Lee Catalogue, and so it was that a few weeks ago I, in the company of Len Packman, made a return journey to that same house visited so long ago. This time we had been invited and the reason was to present Mr. Brooks with a copy of the book that represents so much of his life, the literary side, at any rate.

First then, he lives in a secluded part of Norbury in South London. His house lies tucked away in a corner of what is roughly a large triangle, rather like a village green. As soon as one opens the gate one realises that someone is obviously a first class gardener, as

the short drive is a mass of flowers. This, as we soon found out, was the work of Mrs. Brooks, who is a member of the Royal Horticultural Society. Later, when our visit was nearly over, she showed us the grape-vine that she had growing in one (!) of her greenhouses. It looked like the one at Hampton Court, only smaller (!). She also told us that she had been up until 2 a.m. bottling fruit from the garden. As you can realise from learning such homely details, success and fame had not altered them, and make no mistake, Brooks is very successful in his own line. His books have world-wide circulation.

However, all this is jumping the gun a bit, as we haven't even got to the front door yet. Anyway, having passed a Jaguar, (car, not animal) on our right, we rang the bell. How would we be received? After all, Brooks has not been very co-operative over the past few years and getting a reply to a letter was a question of waiting. So Len and I had our fingers crossed. The result of pushing the bell button wasn't very encouraging, as a very large sounding dog started barking like mad. Resolving to go down fighting, we braced ourselves — and then a pleasant faced Mrs. Brooks was welcoming us in.

The dog, having decided that we weren't edible, made the best of a bad job, and became friendly. Mr. Brooks shook hands with us and we went into the drawing room. Mrs. Brooks proceeded to supply us with coffee which she grinds herself.

As to the appearance of the room and of others that we saw there was no ostentation. Apart from one or two obviously expensive items it was a room that one might expect to find in any ordinary home.

Later we were shown where Brooks does his writing. This was, in effect, an extension of the dining room (a perfectly ordinary dining room, by the way) and to me, at any rate, it came as a bit of a surprise, for there was nothing to indicate comfort or any of the usual trapping one might associate with an author's sanctum. First, the desk on which the typing is done. Above the desk and extending along the entire wall is a window with various pot plants on the sill, some of them, according to Mrs. Brooks, rare varieties. The wall to the left of the desk from floor to ceiling contained nothing but books and not all of them by any means his own. At the rear of the desk from left and right a short projection from the walls of the dining room proper, more books, also from floor to ceiling, and to the right a door leading to the conservatory containing the grapevine.

So much for the topography. As to what we talked about, well that is a different matter. It's rather difficult to record a conversation that went on for nearly two hours. In any case a lot of the talk

concerned matters that have already been discussed within the pages of C.D., such as the reason why the Nelson Lee came to an end. However, some new items came up which will be of interest. For instance, have you ever wondered why St. Francis was chosen for the name of the school? Well this is Mrs. Brooks's christian name, or rather the female version, Frances. So when Mr. Brooks was casting around for a name he added the Saint, and there you are.

The earliest record we have of a story by Brooks is as given in the catalogue. That is 'The Iron Island' which appeared in the Gem in 1910. Now we learn that there was a short story of about four thousand words written whilst he was still at school, which appeared in a magazine called 'Yes and No'. This in fact was his very first effort to be accepted.

He went on to tell us that he did pretty much as he liked under the editorship of the easygoing Mr. May. He admitted that he found the new editor's restrictions, and dictating of policy, irksome. As a result, the quality of his stories fell. It may be added in passing that he now enjoys a very friendly relationship with his present publishers and, in fact, has never had a single story rejected by them. His, I think, is something of a record when you remember that Collins have published just over eighty of his novels since 1938. Incidentally, we looked through several of his manuscripts, and they are perfect models of what an author's mss. should look like, for there was hardly an alteration, or revision, to be seen. Perhaps one or two in about five pages, but no more.

When I think of what it costs me in perspiration and mental strain to even write a letter, and this article, if it comes to that, well it shakes me!

We were also told that his books are even more popular, if that's possible, on the continent, than they are here. He showed us some copies of a German edition. Apparently, when the book is first published, it appears both in cloth and paper editions. Later, when sales have slowed down, it is reissued in a pocketbook format. He also showed us a Dutch edition, which was bound in red cloth with a black inset on the spine, with letters in gilt. Very impressive! Editions are also printed in the Scandinavian countries where they are very popular. They are also printed in Spanish. On top of all this, Collins having branches in various parts of the Commonwealth, editions are available in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

Also of interest I think, is the fact that a German film producer has bought the screen rights for four of his novels with an option on

quite a few more. A far cry indeed from his days with the A.P.

Well there's a lot more I could tell you, of his friendly attitude and his candid comments concerning the A.P., but I fear this article is already too long. However, there is one thing I must mention. One of the last things he said just before we left was "If you wish me to come to one of your meetings, and if you really think that your members would be interested, I'd like to come along." You see he is basically a very shy man although he manages to conceal it under a bluff exterior. I'm sure in my own mind that he wasn't at all looking forward to being interviewed, if that's the right word, by a couple of admirers. In spite of this he has volunteered to come to a meeting where he knows he will be bombarded with questions. So when he does, and we're hoping it will be at the Dulwich meeting in December, we hope we shall see a good many people from the other clubs coming along to give him a right royal welcome.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - PART 2

By Norman Pragdoll

KENNETH BROOKES

Between the years 1925-1929 the illustrations in the Nelson Lee Library compared very favourably with those in the Magnet and the Gem. The drawings by Arthur Jones reached their peak during the early part of the First New Series, for by then the Nelson Lee had changed its format and had appeared with larger pages, thus giving the artist considerably more scope. Although Arthur Jones had done a vast amount of work in the Old Series, much of it was crude and unimaginative, and bore little resemblance to his later work. Probably his finest illustrations appeared in the Northestria series. They were beautifully drawn, with the utmost attention given to detail. A glance at the first number of the Northestrian series will prove the point. The drawing of the castle showed a high standard that was never to be bettered in the life of the Nelson Lee Library. When Arthur Jones retired from the scene his place was taken by a Mr. C. Ambler, who carried on until the end of the First New Series in January, 1930. In many respects his work was equally as good as that of Jones. His touch was a great deal lighter, and most of his characters appeared to be fair as against the dark and rather heavy appearance of Jones's characters. Nevertheless, his "Portrait Gallery" was the last we were to see of Jones and Ambler. When the Second New Series appeared with Nelson Lee's Detective Academy, the illustrations were done by Saville Lumley, and it was not until St. Frank's re-opened that the illustrations by Kenneth Brookes appeared for the first time. These were without doubt the poorest ever to appear in the Nelson Lee. The St. Frank's characters were drawn with no detail at all, and were completely expressionless. Only Handforth could be identified, by means of his hair quiff. This was disappointing to the reader, as it could in no sense represent a real return to St. Frank's. The continuity of both stories and illustrations was broken, never to return.

In the middle of 1931 it was decided to give readers a real return to the old days, at least, these were the sentiments expressed by both Edwy Searles Brooks and the Editor. And what better way to do it than by a return to Northestria. The series was well written - I don't think there can be any complaint about that, - but the illustrations -

what a let-down!

If ever there was a contrast between the work of two artists, it was shown here. Comparing the illustrations between the first and second Northeastria series was like comparing sherbet and champagne. It looked, too, as if complaints were being sent in. A well-known correspondent, Dorothy Leonora Baber, was told by Brooks that any letters regarding the illustrations should be written to the Editor, and not to him, the author of the stories. In fairness to Kenneth Brookes, it may be said that he, like Brooks, realised that the Nelson Lee Library was on the down grade, and therefore had little incentive to give of his best. What did E. S. Brooks think about all this? Let me quote Brooks himself: "I do not know why Arthur Jones was dropped as artist in favour of Kenneth Brookes - but again that was purely an editorial decision. I agree with you that such damage was done to the paper by the change."

Towards the latter part of the Second New Series a new Portrait Gallery was introduced, the characters being portrayed by Kenneth Brookes. No doubt Brookes did his best, but they bore no resemblance to the names we loved so well, and must have had the effect of making many loyal readers turn to other boys' books.

One can only assume that Kenneth Brookes was out of touch with things, and it certainly seems that there was little co-operation between E. S. Brooks, Kenneth Brookes, and the Editor of the Nelson Lee. This seems quite logical when one looks at the illustrations in the "Caronia" series, where we see the Moor View girls still in their gym slips, despite the fact that they were on a holiday adventure abroad. Also in the final Waldo series, we note that Nelson Lee was given a moustache.

To sum up, perhaps we should say that Kenneth Brookes was one of the many tragedies that befell the Nelson Lee Library between 1929-1933. His efforts in other fields were, no doubt, of the highest order, but in the Nelson Lee his illustrations must be regarded as a complete failure. In our next article we shall discuss the last few months in the life of "Between Ourselves".

Since this article was written the writer has been in touch with Kenneth Brookes, who in a very co-operative manner has offered to give his views on his side of the St. Frank's Saga. These, when available, will appear in the C.D. later.

MORE ECHOES OF ROSS STICKING HER NECK OUT

WALTER FLEMING writes:

Ross Story's article was very good and shrewd and I am in full agreement. Although Charles Hamilton has long been a favourite author of mine I think for all round work Brooks has him beaten. When an element of mystery has been introduced in the Hamilton stories the solution has usually been fairly obvious, whereas Brooks' mystery stories have, more often than not, been a little more thought-provoking. I hope Ross Story will stick to her guns.

JAMES W. COOK writes:

May I remind Robert Kelly that Ross Story is a professional writer, an authority on the art of story writing, and to state that the points she has made in reference to Charles Hamilton's inability to reach Edwy Searles Brooks' perfection in school story presentation are ridiculous is impertinent. I do not know whether Mr. Kelly is a qualified psychologist to assume that "far too many Lee enthusiasts carry a massive inferiority complex..." but if he is not I would urge him to refrain from using medical jargon and confine himself to that more healthy expressive literature which is found in Hamilton's tales.

Like so many more overt, self-opinionated post mortems on the life of The Nelson Lee Library, Robert Kelly takes leave of absence from his beloved Hamilton and finds time to decide on the cause of death of a paper he no longer bothers about until a broadside is fired from a competent critic at his favourite author.

Mr. Kelly states that "... the Nelson Lee might indeed have survived until 1939-40." But it did. Stories reprinted from the N.L.L. were appearing in the Schoolboy's Own Library right up to then and even the MAGNET and GEM alongside the S.O.L. were forced to stop. His suggestion of a fall in quality in the stories in the N.L.L. about 1928-29 can only make me believe he hasn't read any of this period for some very interesting series appeared at this time.

Maurice Kutner blames the artist Arthur Jones for lack of appeal and expresses the possibility that he, Kutner, may have become a staunch Nelson Lee fan had the illustrations been done by somebody else. Dear me, Maurice, haven't you heard of Picasso? The adepts in artistry in Cubism and Surrealism came after A. Jones and after all, Jones' work in the Nelson Lee was hampered by his very limited canvas.

ROBERT WHITER writes:

I think Robert Kelly gave a very fair answer to Ross Story, and puts some interesting points to ponder on.

WILLIAM H. GANDER writes:

Maybe I have become mellow with the advancing years. Whatever it is, I can read Ross Story's opinion that E. S. Brooks was, or is, a better writer than Charles Hamilton without rushing to my typewriter. And it is the same in other instances of differing opinions.

FOR EXCHANGE: Sexton Blake Library (2nd Series) Nos. 41, 77, 401; (3rd Series) Nos. 105, 127, 138, 141, 145, 457, 474, 478, 507, 521-525 (including final issues); exchange for 2d. Series Nos. 400 - 740, especially stories by John G. Brandon, Anthony Skene (Zenith stories), Coultts Brisbane (Ferraro stories), Anthony Parsons, Donald Stuart, E. S. Brooks. Will purchase if exchange unsuitable. Please state terms.
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THE NELSON LEE CATALOGUE: A few copies are still available price 1/6 inc. postage. This book is now regarded as a 'MUST' for Lee collectors. It will not be reprinted after these are sold.

Write to:-

ROBERT BLYTHE, 40 ELLESMERE ROAD, DOLLIS HILL, LONDON, N.W.10.

Hamiltoniana



DO YOU REMEMBER?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 45 - Magnet No. 288 - "Shunned by the Form"

Double numbers have a special attraction for collectors, and those that were issued just before the first World War now seem to shine with an added lustre. It is true that double numbers were published during the war, and even afterwards an enlarged number made an appearance once in a while, but they never really equalled those that were issued when the world was young. The 1913 Summer Double Number of the Magnet is a typical example of these renowned issues.

The plot is a relatively simple one. A new boy named Brandreth arrives, and is denounced by Snoop as the son of the swindler who is wanted by the police for defrauding his father. To state that it is Mr. Snoop who is the guilty party will spoil no one's pleasure in advance, since most collectors know that the adventures of Convict Snoop were related in blue and white days. What is of interest is the way in which the juniors react to the situation.

Wharton and his friends support Brandreth until his conduct becomes suspicious, whilst Snoop and Vernon-Smith lead the opposition, though even the Bouncer refuses to go all the way with Snoop. Interesting sidelights are the cunning way in which Bunter contrives to change studies twice, and the way in which Mr. Snoop tries to get Mr. Vernon-Smith to invest money in his financial swindle.

Yet when all is said and done, the story hardly seems to be twice the length of the normal Magnet story: there may be twice the number of words, but not twice the number of incidents. Furthermore, there is only one climax, and the story seems to have been extended by relating every incident in full detail, instead of explaining some happenings through conversation. These are criticisms which have indeed been levelled against the Bunter books. But it does at least explain why the Schoolboys' Own Library reprints are more satisfactory

to read, despite their abridgements: they contain a series of climaxes, which give a satisfying ebb and flow to each reprint, whereas the double numbers and Bunter books have only one climax apiece.

Finally, mention must be made of the coloured cover of Magnet No. 288, a sailing boat containing three schoolboys with a background of a pier jutting out into the sea. It has no connection with the story, but it typifies the serene, halcyon world that existed when the double numbers were in their heyday.

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 70. THE ONE AND ONLY

Surely the most lovable character in the whole of Hamiltonia is Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's. Oddly enough, he was never imitated at any of the other Hamilton schools. I say oddly enough, because most of the big Hamilton successes in characterisation found their counterparts elsewhere as time passed.

Gussy was created at the end of 1906. He was really believable only for a few years following his creation. Ten years later he was dated. Yet we have gone on reading about him down the years, and even to-day we do not feel that we are reading of a dated character.

By the end of 1906 Charles Hamilton had created a number of schools which had stayed for a short time and then passed on. He had no reason to think that St. Jim's would last any longer than the others had done, or that Arthur Augustus, whom he had introduced into that modest little series in Pluck, would still be featuring in new tales fifty years on.

Gussy was not larger than life. As a schoolmaster I would hesitate to say that any fictional schoolboy, with the exception of the very wicked, was larger than life. But Gussy was dated by his monocle, his speech impediment, his "fivahs".

Even when most of us were children, Gussy was dated, though it never occurred to us. We loved his aristocratic background without any sense of jealousy. Although we seldom had five pence in our own pockets, we were thrilled to read of a boy who frequently received five pounds from his "patah". I doubt whether Gussy is any more dated in 1963 than he was in 1923, but I think he would cause more resentment to-day, with far less reason.

When Gussy was introduced to St. Jim's in 1906, he was really a stock Edwardian character. Clearly he was originally intended for

light relief only. It was left to Martin Clifford, as the years slipped by, to develop Arthur Augustus into one of the Hamilton "greats".

We were never told whether the monocle was merely affectation or whether Gussy was defective in the sight of one eye. We can accept that Gussy had one weak eye, for though he was fastidious, he was never affected.

But the monocle heavily dated Gussy. None of us, I would wager, ever saw a schoolboy wearing a monocle on account of weak sight. For the past fifty years, I would imagine, no school in the country would allow a boy to attend wearing a monocle. Yet, to us, Gussy without his monocle, would not be Gussy at all. In the post-war stories, Charles Hamilton played down that monocle. There was but little reference to it - but we old-stagers must always have sensed that it was there.

The speech impediment dated Gussy even more than his monocle, yet so much of the gentle charm of Arthur Augustus lay in that speech impediment. To-day there is much in speech which grates horribly upon sensitive nerves, but actual speech impediment is almost unknown in normal youngsters.

Martin Clifford developed Gussy from the stock dude of the earlier stories to the simple, kind-hearted youngster who was one of nature's gentlemen in the finest sense of the expression. In almost every story of St. Jim's ever written Gussy played his part, and he starred on countless occasions in innumerable great stories. In many ways, in certain circumstances, Gussy served Martin Clifford every bit as well as Billy Bunter served Frank Richards.

The story "Bought Honours" is a classic among school stories for every one who has ever read it. In this story, the simple Gussy was persuaded by the cunning Levison to cheat in an exam. It is an unforgettable episode in the St. Jim's saga. It was Gussy's connection with Oliver Lynn which placed the Schoolboy Pug series among the Gem's greatest. So often Gussy's simple faith - sometimes misplaced but always endearing - brought the lump to the throat. In lighter mood we recall Gussy and his chequebook; Gussy adopting a donkey in the brilliant little "D'Arcy Maximus"; Gussy going to work at various jobs, and always with hilarious results; and Gussy running away from school and taking refuge in turn at Greyfriars, Rookwood, and Cliff House in a series which is as delightful to-day as when it was written forty years ago.

Gussy was undoubtedly the greatest piece of character painting

at St. Jim's. Yet it was Gussy who inevitably dated St. Jim's. But it was a dating which, in my view, the reader never really noticed.

* * * * *

DAVID NIXON GOES TO GREYFRIARS

David Nixon, one of the most likeable personalities on television, joins the cast of the Bunter show in the West End this coming Christmas season. With the intriguing title of BILLY BUNTER MEETS MAGIC, the play, which opens at the Shaftesbury Theatre on December 23rd, would seem assured of success.

David Nixon plays a conjuror who can do wonderful tricks when he is all alone, but finds things begin to go wrong when anyone else is present. And when Billy Bunter happens to be present - well, imagination boggles. In recent years there have been a few minor grumbles because the Greyfriars chums spent Christmas abroad. This year they are in good old England - at a lonely place in Cornwall - and surely many hearts will warm spontaneously when we say that the place has been named POLPELLE.

Peter Bridgemont, who was such an outstanding success last year, once again plays Billy Bunter. When he meets David Nixon, who plays a conjuror who has a mild flair for villainy, things really happen.

Last year the Billy Bunter show, though it did the best business of all the Christmas matinee shows, was hard hit by the weather. Another bad season would mean the end of Billy Bunter as a stage attraction. Let us hope for good weather, and give the show every support in our power. If you can display a bill profitably, let us know here at the Digest Office, and we will send one to you.

Make an early appointment to meet Billy Bunter and the Greyfriars chums, not forgetting Mr. Quelch, when BILLY BUNTER MEETS MAGIC at the Shaftesbury Theatre. More news of the show in future issues of Collectors' Digest.

* * * * *

SUPPLIERS OF HAMILTON'S PLOTS

- - -

By Derek Adley

Once again it was a pleasure to read an article by Roger Jenkins in C.D. - I refer to 'More News from Rose Lawn'. It was indeed interesting to read about Charles Hamilton's home and neighbourhood, and note that Roger felt there was little to support the idea that Hamilton was ever supplied with plots for his stories.

(continued on page 18) ..

October 1913

The Great Pearl Robbery. That sounds like the title of a story in the Union Jack, but it isn't. In July of this year a Mr. Mayer bought some magnificent pearls, worth £130,000. They were in a morocco case, wrapped in cotton-wool and tissue paper, and this case was placed in a special wooden box which was nailed down. The box was wrapped in blue paper and the small parcel sealed with red wax, each seal being stamped with a capital "M". The parcel was registered to an address in London, but when it arrived, apparently untampered with, it contained only lumps of sugar.

The police have just solved the mystery and the criminals are going on trial for theft. What a wonderful real-life story!

Both the Gem and the Magnet have been first class this month. The first Magnet story was "The Sneak's Revenge" in which a new German master named Herr Gans came to Greyfriars, and the Bounder and Skinner conducted a feud against him. After that, in a tale named "The Greyfriars Herald," Fisher T. Fish started a junior magazine at the school.

But the month is quite memorational for the final two stories. In "Game to the Last" the Bounder was gated by Mr. Quelch, but he still went to play in a football match at St. Jim's. When Mr. Quelch found out, the Bounder was expelled. The sequel to this story was "The Vanished Schoolboy" in which the Bounder, rather than be expelled, hid himself in the ruined tower. Eventually Mr. Quelch found him there, but part of the tower fell away and the Bounder saved Mr. Quelch's life at the risk of his own. I shall keep these last two Magnets for ever.

A new German airship, the L.2, was on trial near Berlin. It caught fire, the envelope was destroyed instantly, and the almost bare aluminium frame fell to the ground. The 26 men on board all lost their lives. The L.2 would have been the finest unit in Germany's aerial fleet.

Mum had answers one day this month. She is interested in a new hospital serial "The Angel of the Ward". It is very dramatic.

My brother Doug is absolutely ruthless and merciless. It makes me quite sad to think of any chap refusing to show mercy to his own brother. He had promised to take me to Drury Lane to see "Sealed Orders" and I was looking forward to it very much. But he didn't take me, owing to a playful, harmless little act of mine.

Doug often wears a straw hat, which he calls his boater. He wears a black cord, which is screwed on to the back of the hat, and the other end of the cord is fastened in his button-hole. This is in case the wind blows off his hat.

Doug and I were walking, and suddenly we met his old flame, Freda. As Doug was about to raise his hat to her, I could not resist putting my hand at the back and jerking

DANNY



"QUICK, SIR—CLUT
(A thrilling incident in the long, etc.)

DIARY

the cord. Of course, the hat shot upright on Doug's head. Freda cackled like a hen, but Doug was very angry. He told me I have made him the laughing stock of his friends. He said that now he wouldn't take me to Drury Lane - and he didn't. Though I begged him with tears in my eyes.

However, Dad took Mum one evening to the Adelphi to see "The girl from Utah", a musical comedy which starred Edmund Payne and Phyllis Dare.

The Penny Popular is exactly one year old this month, and Doug bought me a copy. I think it was his conscience. In church I whispered to him that St. Mark wouldn't have felt malice against his brother, and Doug hissed back that St. Mark didn't have a brother like me. But the next day he bought me the Penny Popular.

It contained a story about the St. Jim's parliament called "Told by Telephone". The Sexton Blake story was entitled "In the Czar's Domain". Mr. Lindsay, who is a Sexton Blake knowall, told me that it appeared in the Union Jack in 1908 when it was called "Sexton Blake in Baku". What an amazing brain Mr. Lindsay must have!

Kent are the county cricket champions this year. I would rather like to be a county cricketer when I grow up.

The Gem! Corks, what a month! Grand tales. The first was "At the Eleventh Hour", and it related how Mr. Latham was a man who studied old fossils. (Not the human kind.) Tom Merry was sentenced to a flogging in this story, but Gussy saved him.

"Tom Merry Minor" was a monkey which Tom Merry saved from a cruel man who had stolen the monkey. "A Disgrace to his House" was a marvellous tale. A new boy named Koumi Rao came to St. Jim's, and he had a violent quarrel with Tom Merry. It all came right in the end. "Straight as a Die" was the story of Lynn, a new bootboy, who fell foul of Levison. All four were wonderful tales.

Towards the end of the month there was a train crash in a fog at Waterloo Junction on the South Eastern & Chatham Railway. The 7.32 train from Elmers End ran into the back of the 7.35 from Blackheath. Three people were killed, and many injured.

One night the suffragettes burned down a pavilion belonging to Bristol University, at Coombe Dingle. The undergrads retaliated by wrecking the suffragettes' H.Q. in Queen Street the next day.

I have had a number of Comic Cuts this month. It doesn't alter much as time goes by. Tom, the Ticket of Leave Man, is still on the front page, and the Mulberry Flattites on the back. Inside are



SH ME AND CLIMB!"

(This tale of School Life in this issue.)

Waddles, the Waiter, Pansy Pancake, the cook, and Harold Hazbean. The stories are Martin Steel and his 12 girl detectives, The Red Rovers, which is a football story, and a new serial called "Queer Street". I have a soft spot for Comic Cuts.

The Queen Elizabeth, a fine new British battleship, has just been launched. She is a pioneer in many ways - the first to burn oil only, to mount the new 15-inch guns, to be specially armoured against air attack, and to have anti-aircraft guns.

On the night of October 27th there was a dreadful thunderstorm in South Wales. Two people were killed and seven injured, and an enormous amount of damage done.

I have forgiven Doug for his dreadfulness. I think it is only right to return good for evil, so I am trying to be very kind to him. It is my birthday next month.

HAMILTONIANA - Suppliers of Hamilton's plots (continued from page 15)..

Whilst I do not want to criticise the article I would like to confirm that Hamilton definitely was supplied plots from time to time by a number of people. I would like to let readers know that this is not just assumption so here are the fact that I have.

Although I have not met many boys story authors, I have over the past ten years or so had correspondence with several hundred and have all the letters neatly filed. Going through these letters I find that I can name six men that supplied Hamilton with plots. I feel that if I can name six surely there could have been others.

The famous Bunter Court series was written in draft form first by a well known Fleet Street character namely Hedley O'Mant. Another figment of O'Mants imagination was the St. Jim's series The Schoolboy Airman featuring Angelo Lee.

Kenneth Newman who was revealed as a substitute writer also confirmed that he was paid a fee of three guineas for every plot he supplied for a Greyfriars or St. Jim's story.

Famous for his editorship of the Union Jack, H. W. Twyman also supplemented his income by turning out Hamilton plots, and it is interesting to note Mr. Twyman's own words: "We were all required to feed Hamilton with plots, and of course it's not to be wondered at that he needed it, considering his output."

Two others I can name here are L. E. Ransome and former A.P. director Reginald T. Eves.

Last on my list was not surprising in my view for surely he would be the one to have made the policy decisions of the Magnet and Gem, - C. M. Down so long editor of those papers.

I have deliberately left Mr. Down until last as he said that it was not detrimental to Hamilton to be supplied with plots for it would have been impossible to have kept going for so long without a considerable amount of repetition unless fresh minds were brought in on the plots.

I think Mr. Down sums up quite nicely when he says that no one else would have written up these plots as Hamilton did for it is one thing to think up a plot and another thing to write it and had these stories been written by other writers they could never have captured the readers in the same way.

(EDITORIAL NOTE: We feel it proper to advise readers that articles of the type of Mr. Adley's, printed above, must be received with such reserve as the individual reader may think fit. We say this, not because we doubt the information given in the article, but because anybody could, if he felt so inclined, claim to have supplied plots, now that the author is no longer with us to confirm or deny the statements.

In our May issue, our "Let's Be Controversial" contributor wrote: "There is nothing belittling to Mr. Hamilton in this. These plots would have been nothing without the skill of a brilliant writer to turn them into little masterpieces."

That, surely, must be the verdict of us all. Authors glean their plots from all sorts of sources, and a man with a gigantic weekly output needs a phenomenal number of plots. There can be no doubt at all that most of the plots were the author's own.)

* * * * *

MAGNET MESMERISM

By John Trovell

The fascination that a boys' publication can assert upon those of us who no longer regard ourselves as such, and even have some difficulty in recalling those distant days, is a tribute indeed to the talent of a man who obviously loved and regarded with pride the characters he created for the delight of so many admirers.

The genius of Charles Hamilton was never more apparent than in the Magnet particularly during the period from 1927 to 1937, and fortunate indeed were those of us who made the acquaintance of the Greyfriar's scene during those years.

What a magic endears us still to the stories of an imaginary group of schoolboys, attending a fictitious school who, far from falling by the wayside, have thrived and flourished, to enthrall even today. To attempt to analyze this appeal is an absorbing subject and no doubt has been the basis of many a lively debate between Hamilton admirers.

Combined with the superb illustrations of Leonard Shields, the credibility of the many and varied characters that graced the Magnet pages was a prime factor in its long and successful life. These characters were so vividly and sincerely portrayed, by both author and artist, they influenced our youthful lives. We saw in the Famous Five the counterpart of all we wished to achieve, a zest for adventure, prowess at sport, a sense of humour, combined with a belief in fair play and the triumph of right. The wayward Bounder, an obstinate Wharton, a foolish Coker, even a caddish Skinner were familiar to us in real life, and added to the appeal of so many Magnet episodes.

Charles Hamilton's ability to create the impression that the reader was participating in the adventure and drama, was sheer artistry. In company with Harry Wharton & Co. we strolled over Courtfield Common, in the certain knowledge that from a fight with Ponsobny to a meeting with a bank robber would result. Dropped from the Cloister wall after lights out, to experience the thrill of defying authority, with the (continued on page 28)..

BLAKIANA

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

'SINGLETON POUND' was a Sexton Blake Writer!

By W. O. G. Lofts

Walter Webb in the September Blakiana seeks the identity of the well known writer 'Singleton Pound'. From an official source I can say that he was none other than Oliver Merland - the Blake Library writer of the character the TOPPER. Walter, should know this gentleman well enough, without myself going into details - as he once wrote at length about him, the main characteristic that one will always remember, that Merland like Gussy - wore a monocle!

Although Oliver Merland has not as yet been proved as having written any Sexton Blake stories in the UNION JACK - it is quite probable that he did so, and his name will be no doubt discovered in time. Readers will be interested to know, that I hope, given reasonable time to solve all the remaining mysteries of authorship surrounding the UNION JACK and other papers. Already, I know the official identities of 'John Stanton' and 'Herbert Chandros' who wrote in the U.J. prior to Blake stories becoming a regular feature. All these facts - plus fresh information about new authors discovered, will be presented in Blakiana in a series entitled 'SEXTON BLAKE - "UNION JACK" - OFFICIAL INFORMATION!.

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THE CASE OF THE EMPTY COFFIN

By Tom Hopperton

So you are gathered together to mourn the passing of Sexton Blake and so, with a marked and more than Mark Antonian diffidence, come I to speak in Caesar's funeral. You see, I think you are a bit belated in the obsequies. I paid my sentimental tribute by buying the last two copies of The Sexton Blake Library, but any tears I had to drop on Blake's tombstone were shed many years ago.

In any case, his passing is not really a matter for the OBBC. It falls within the province of the Communist Party, for Blake is clearly

the latest victim of American Imperialism.

Frank Richards officially disclaimed anti-Americanism. In private he lapsed into caustic remarks about how the Americans had vulgarised everything (his words!) and when I said that in all the thousands of titles in the Dime Novel Club's catalogue there did not seem to be a single school story, his reply was more or less: "What else can you expect from such an uncultivated bunch?"

"Vulgarised" aptly sums up the situation. Everything is reduced to its crudest and rawest to make the maximum impact on their appallingly wide market of intellectual eunuchs and near-illiterates. Mozart gives way to beat music: Shelley's American heirs are Ferlinghetti and Ginsberg: in our own field, the boys' stories which were a stepping stone to literature have been almost destroyed by that abominable export from the U.S.A. - the all-in-pictures comic book engine of illiteracy.

Blake has been shifting his ground ever since he was born. He began as the ha'penny Sherlock Holmes, a palpable crib, and as the purely inductive and deductive story had limited scope in the callow market at which he was aimed, he was edged over into a fascinating and effective blend of thriller, deduction and bizarre characterisation. This reached its peak in the 'twenties, and if the staunch Blakians would only search their souls they would probably find that what they are really lamenting is not the passing of the name but the loss of the peculiar atmosphere which was Blake at his most effective - the wonderworld of The Union Jack some forty years ago.

Yet this atmosphere, gripping as we now regard it, could not keep The Union Jack waving, which was its real and original home. It paled visibly during the 2nd series of the library, and the 3rd moved further from tradition until we had the melancholy spectacle of the Blakians desperately striving to delude themselves that the new look in some way dealt with the Sexton Blake and Tinker of cherished memory.

At the risk of raising Mr. Baker's temperature, it seemed pointless to remove Blake from the crushing competition of the picture libraries only to shove him into paltry herring-gutted pamphlets so obviously and pathetically poor relations of the paper-backed book. There must still have been a fund of goodwill in the name, and if it was worth saving at all, the only way was to give Blake a new-new look modelled on Mickey Spillane.

In spite of Blake's university education (or educations), his medical degree, his mixing with the highest, and his casual display of mastery in all sorts of subjects from Black Magic to Chinese

sanitation, he remained completely and unvaryingly unsophisticated. The devotees of James Bond, who derive a snobbish vicarious satisfaction as they participate in his high living and impeccably U standards, would look down their noses at Blake as the sort of chap with 23" bottoms to his trousers, who would meekly accept South African sherry and never know the difference. Blake had to find his market among those who buy their suits at Burton's with nary a hanker after Saville Row, and no-one should know better than Fleetway that here the customers have had their brains beaten out by the Americans.

A little random sampling in a chain library will show that there is a much heavier turnover in American crime titles than in English. They are all reprints from which the weaker sisters have been weeded and most of the series show an almost unflinching standard of technical competence to back the novelty of the themes and settings. The ranker rubbish is being pushed on sale or return into every newsagent's. The pulp mags, with eighty 11" x 9" pages for 1/6d, dwarf the English libraries. The Confidential Detective type with photographic covers display busty blondes who are unable to get themselves murdered unless their skirts are around their waists. The art-cover jobs sandwich detection between war stories with a lecherous slant and vice exposés and rely on more busty wenches, this time of assorted hue and without any skirts at all, generally torturing or being tortured by Japs or Nazis. By the way they insist on jamming Man's.... into the title and their general approach, they seem to be desperately re-assuring their readers of a perhaps doubtful virility.

By the time a youth has read a few of either the better or the worse of these imports, what is the use of trying to interest him in anything like the atmosphere of The Union Jack? We blithely accepted that every time Scotland Yard was flummoxed it ran in despair to Sexton Blake. We revelled in our favourite master criminals and waited with our tongues hanging out for the next appearance of Mr. Reece, the original Big-head, Zenith the Albino who showed Omo the way to whiter than white, and Waldo the Wonder Man. Here, I can for once scoop Bill Lofts by giving you an exclusive release on the origin of Waldo. He was moulded on that Little Jim in the poem by Farmer who said: "I have no pain, dear mother, now, But, oh; I am so dry." The lad who, as Fishy would have put it, has cut his eyeteeth on tough private eyes and Capone-like master criminals would deride them as incredibly naive.

Besides, Blake is an austere puritan, unmoved from ascetism by even the most glamorous of adventuresses and when he was lately nudged

into feminine society it was distinctly reminiscent of Harry Wharton and Marjorie Hazeldine. It is obvious enough that restrained Americans like Frances Crane enjoy only a moderate success: the record sales are notched by such blood and guts, sex and sadism, booze and lechery mongers as Spillane.

It is the readers who have tried to keep Blake static. The A.P. and their successors have never hesitated to modify him as they felt it necessary. The formula for another successful transformation seems clear enough, but, from our point of view, to what end? It would only sharpen the dilemma confronting the old stagers who have stayed with the new look. They were right in accepting that if the name of Blake had to endure he had to change, while the more he changed the less he remained the Blake to which they cleaved and the greater their dissatisfaction.

The new look was a wishy-washy compromise which only nibbled at the edges of the problem. In spite of it, or rather because of it, Blake, or what was left of him has now had thrust upon him the final degradation of being superseded by comic books about private eyes and spacemen. The saddest thing of all is to see our friends who knew him at his best keening at his wake: if they would only lift the lid, they would see the coffin is empty.

* * * * *

Sexton Blake - "UNION JACK" - Official Information
No. 1 by W. O. G. Lofts

I would hate to be classed as a typical Johnny Bull and say 'I told you so', but following my recent revelation of yet another author who wrote Sexton Blake stories in the UNION JACK - the Rev. Herbert Escott Inman (Henri Garrock - "The Snake" - Series), which confirms once again both Derek Adley and my own statement in the 1959 C.D. Annual 'that many more new authors will be brought to light should any official UNION JACK list be brought to light'. I am most pleased to announce that quite a great deal of new information has been gleaned from official sources, and rather than give all this data in one article I propose to so do in a series, and to also give as much gen as possible about the new authors discovered as having proved to have written a Sexton Blake story.

Firstly, in answer to two recent queries which have cropped up in Blakiana, I can confirm and inform Mr. S. Gordon Swan of Australia, that UNION JACK No. 69 entitled 'Sexton Blake's First Case' was written

by Stanhope Sprigg, which was the real name of the author, and he of course was the author of '999'.

In answer to Walter Webb, the name of Geoffrey Andrew Murray was given on official data I have personally seen relating to records kept of the authorship of Sexton Blake Library and Union Jack stories he had written. Several authors that I have met who knew him personally when he was writing in the 1920s - have told me that he was known to them as Geoffrey - whilst I believe that the son of Henry St. John Cooper told me that he was known to him as 'Nicky' (he had a personally autographed book from him under a pen name of his 'Nicholas Islay') but as Walter has proved that his real name was Andrew Nicholas Murray, I accept it as binding, and it will be entered into our records. It is difficult to understand why he used such variations of his name, but it was a well known fact that Murray was something of an eccentric (due to a type of mental illness) in his last years, and I think that in the circumstances we need not dwell on it further.

UNION JACK No. 149 dated 18.8.1906 entitled 'Sexton Blake's Romance' was written by Charles E. St. John Pearce, when it has previously been assumed by many to have been penned by Arthur S. Hardy.

"Do you know Charles E. St. John Pearce" I asked an old editor friend of mine down Fleet Street recently.

"Of course I knew him" was his reply. "I ought to as he in fact married my secretary" - "when I was running the SCHOOLFRIEND at Fleetway House. "Pearce was in 1923 editor of SCHOOLGIRLS OWN, and once asked me to help him out for a yarn he was doing for FOOTBALL FAVOURITE, as he was not well up in England's National winter game."

Writer of many bound books, the first in 1882, C. E. Pearce at the turn of the century was a prolific writer for boys and girls - Aldine Mystery Novels - Aldine Novels - Mascot Novels - the Lloyd publications and libraries, apart from writing for the R. T. Eves group of papers - 'Champion' 'Triumph' etc.

Probably his best work was a bound book in 1924 entitled 'Unsolved Murder Mysteries' proof that he was not only well up in crime, but quite capable to write a Sexton Blake yarn. Charles E. St. John Pearce died before the last war, and so probably a full complete list of all his works will now be never known, though it is more than likely that other U.J. Blake stories came from his pen.

Other official data which readers may care to write in their records are as follows;

(continued on page 28)..

OLD BOYS BOOK CLUB

MIDLAND

Meeting held August 27th

Holidays took heavier toll than usual this meeting as only seven members attended. It was a pleasant surprise to welcome Joe Marston from Burton however and he brought apologies from John Tomlinson, still on the sick list. No programme had been fixed so after minutes had been read, we settled down for a general chat on old boys' books matters. We discussed the likelihood of the earlier "Magnet" stories being republished in "Look and Learn". This was very welcome news and something to look forward to though one or two members were not so sure that these would be any improvement on the last reprints of Rookwood in the "Knockout". Jack Bellfield produced a very good copy of Joseph Parks' "Collectors Miscellany" which he had obtained from Bill Martin's sale recently. This started off a discussion on Bill Martin and his collection. Then bookshops in general and the pleasant hours we had all spent in such (and searching for them). As there was no quiz fixed, a quiz in the "Collectors Miscellany" was tackled. It was mostly Sexton Blake lore and more difficult than the usual sort. The Secretary had most answers but quite a few were beyond him even. During refreshments the raffle was held and Jack Bellfield was the winner with a Bunter Book as first prize. The last instalment of Jack Corbett's article in 1947 C.D. Annual was read by Tom Porter and the evening closed with a reading from a St. Jim's S.O.L. by Jack Bellfield. This featured Baggie Trimble and Clarence York Tompkins.

NORTHERN

Meeting held on Saturday, 14th September, 1963.

The attendance for our September meeting was well below average, some regulars being absent because of holidays, and Gerry Allison, with Myra and Molly, had gone south to attend the meeting at Maidstone. As chairman Geoffrey Wilde pointed out, it was also very unusual for another reason - all the ten members present were males! It must be a very long time since we had a meeting without any members of the fair sex being present.

Formal business was cut to a minimum, and then Jack Wood gave us his news of the month, the chief item being P. G. Wodehouse's new book. Next Frank Hancock gave a talk which he entitled 'The School Stories of Charles Hamilton; some reflections on looking back; possibly unfair,' which dealt with the stories, characters, devices of plot, etc., down the years. Members found this interesting, not all agreeing with some of the views expressed, and there was a lively discussion on several points.

Geoffrey Wilde took over with a competition he had devised which most of us found a pretty stiff test. He gave us a short sentence or phrase about a school or character, and we had to devise a short rhyme or couplet to fit it. It was pretty hard going, but when Geoff read out his answers it all sounded very easy and obvious!

We then had the usual interval for refreshments, with Jack Allison officiating very ably in the absence of the ladies, and the second half of the meeting was entirely devoted to a reading by Jack Wood of a Greyfriars story, 'How Horace Coker got his Remove,' the episode chosen by Jack relating how Coker's formidable Aunt Judy came to the

school and persuaded a reluctant Dr. Locke to give Coker his remove from the Shell to the Fifth. Aunt Judy's faith in her darling Horace, and the way she overcame the Head's objections, made very entertaining listening.

This took us on nicely to nine o'clock, when the meeting terminated, rather earlier than usual.

Next meeting, Saturday, 12th October.

F. HANCOCK - Hon. Sec.

LONDON

From London's Victoria Station forecourt, on Sunday, September 15th, 30 members and friends left by coach bound for Maidstone to attend the President's meeting. A fine summer day, the journey was delightful with an interesting buzz of conversation all the way down, subject, I should surmise, old boys' books. Amongst the occupants of the coach were Gerry, Myra and Molly Allison of the Northern club and Charles Skilton, the first publisher of the now famous Bunter books. We were very pleased to have these visitors with us. On arrival at the Royal Star Hotel, Maidstone, the party was welcomed by John Wernham, our worthy President; with him were Roger Jenkins and Eric Lawrence. Proceeding to the Oak room of the hotel, the party partook of an excellent lunch. The suitably printed menu cards were provided by the President and the front page was graced by an excellent drawing by C. H. Chapman. Guest of honour was Miss Edith Hood. After lunch Don Webster proposed the toast "Old Boys Everywhere." The responder to this toast was Gerry Allison. The President proposed the toast to the guests and Charles Skilton replied. A truly memorable occasion.

After lunch the party boarded the coach for the short journey to John Wernham's house. Here there was a room displaying the collection so far assembled of the Frank Richards' museum. Another room had been set aside for the two librarians, Roger Jenkins and Bob Blythe, to dispense their wares to the borrowers. Later on to the meeting room where the attendance had been increased by the appearance of Millicent Lyle and her brother Frank Lambe. Chairman Bob Blythe welcomed one and all and then after the usual formalities, minutes, correspondence, financial report, librarians' report, Bill Lofts rendered another of his articles from the Fleetway Publications house magazine, on D'Arcy. This together with a humorous reading by Roger Jenkins from a "Magnet", year 1928, was greatly enjoyed by the company. As a light relief from Hamiltonia, Gerry Allison conducted his Comic Paper Characters Quiz. Winner Len Packman, second Bill Lofts, third Don Webster. Eliminator Quiz, key word "Carboy" was jointly won by Gerry Allison and Bill Lofts. Len Packman was third. An excellent tea followed, Mrs. John Wernham and her lady helper pouring tea from the large teapot expertly. After tea there was a cinema show, two excellent films, one of scenes where Frank Richards was portrayed plus drawings by C. H. Chapman and the other a film dealing with the changing places at Greyfriars for a short time by Billy and Wally Bunter. An interesting spectator of all these proceedings was Miss Edith Hood, housekeeper to Frank Richards for so many years.

All too soon came call over and it was a happy party who boarded the coach for the return journey home.

Sunday, October 20th, is the date of the next meeting, address 35, Woodhouse Road, Leytonstone, London, E.11. 'Phone MARYland 1757. Hosts Reuben and Mrs. Godsave. Kindly inform if intending to be present.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

MERSEYSIDEMeeting held Sunday, September 7th

Holidays again interfered with the attendance which was below average.

The financial statement read by the chairman indicated that we are still solvent and it was felt that we would like to use some of our surplus cash to improve the library - anybody got anything to sell - cheap?

Among the correspondence were letters received from Tom Porter, Alf Hanson, Frank Case and Don Webster. Nice to hear from absent friends. We are hoping to meet some of them again in the near future. After the business Norman Pragnell gave us a reading from a 1960 C.D. of an account of a London meeting attended by Richmal Crompton's William and his gang. He then introduced a quiz which was won by Walter Prichard. To finish up he proposed the subject for discussion which was based on the benefits, or otherwise, of the correspondence column in the Nelson Lee, in which E. S. Brooks invited criticism and ideas from his readers. Would this have benefited the Magnet?

This was Norman's night and as usual it passed too quickly.

The next meeting, which is the A.G.M., is on Sunday, October 13th, 6.0 prompt.

BILL WINDSOR

AUSTRALIA

An extremely good attendance on Thursday, September 19th, was a pleasing omen for what proved one of the club's most enjoyable meetings.

Members were happy to welcome again John Gardiner and Don Harkness who by their enthusiasm are confirming our original opinion that they will be valued additions to our circle.

Chairman Syd Smyth opened the meeting at 6.30 p.m. and letters from our friends here and abroad were read by the secretary. First interesting news item came from New Zealand via Jack Murtagh who sent details of his latest scoop at the sale of the late Bill Martin's collection - also from this part of the world it was pleasing to hear from Geoffrey Harrison who was writing for details of club members here.

Blake enthusiasts were catered for as letters from Josie Packman brought the news that the Sexton Blake Catalogue is well under way whilst from W. A. collector Gordon Swan we hear that there is a strong movement to bring back Blake & Co. This was further confirmed by Victor Colby who reported that his letter advocating the use of Blake in other publications put out by the Fleetway House had been accorded a courteous reply.

Ron Hodgson brought us the news behind the news from his part of the world.

From Harry Broster came the popular "Newsletter" and the comments therein sparked off some interesting discussions, particularly when the merits of the "hard-cover" school stories versus Richards and Brooks came under fire. Bill Hubbard, who is such an ardent supporter of the former, will be pleased to hear that his articles came in for favourable comment as the members felt that discussion in this field definitely had a place in C.D.

Letters from our friend Bill Gander plus an advance copy of S.P.C. No. 84 sparked off a verbal battle, this time on the much discussed mystery of Charles Hamilton's early schooldays. Most members had personal experiences to contribute concerning the different attitudes here and overseas towards one in relationship to one's old school, and this discussion, followed by letters from South Australian collector Harry Matthews and Arthur Holland's always interesting pot-pourri of news and views occupied the rest of the evening.

The final battles re the old school tie etc. were waged in the local coffee shop where the soothing influence of the espresso enabled members to cool down before the

meeting concluded at 9.30 p.m.

B. PATE - Hon. Sec.

HAMILTONIANA - Magnet Mesmerism (continued from page 19)..

cool headed Bouncer as a companion. Pulled our boat up the gleaming Sark for a forbidden picnic under the oak on Popper's island, and felt the dismay at being discovered by an irate Sir Hilton. Even winced at a well deserved 'six' from Henry Samuel Quelch. Such was and still remains the Hamilton spell, and fortunate indeed, are those of us who can forget the years, turn back the clock, and delight once more in the adventures of those immortal characters created by an inspired author who provided the magic of Magnet Mesmerism.

BLAKIANA - Sexton Blake - "UNION JACK" - Official Information
(continued from page 24)...

U.J. No. 77. "On the Track"	T. G. Maitland
81. "The Ocean Detective"	E. A. Treeton
91. "The Warder Detective"	E. A. Treeton

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

LEONARD M. ALLEN (Bournemouth): I was most interested and pleased to read indefatigable Bill Lofts' solution to my ten year old enquiry about the identity of 'Charles Wentworth'. Surely this must be some sort of record and proves that back numbers of the C.D. never fade away. Perhaps Bill or some other fellow collector could supply information about another of these mysterious 'authors'... John Andrews who was credited quite a

number of stories in the Boys Friend 4d. Library (New Series). I have a record of a few of these, some obviously based on Maxwell Scott yarns but not all - No. 300 Peril Pit (Ferrers Locke), No. 372 Million Pound Secret, No. 628 Bodyline Bill the Bowler, No. 635 The Silver Dwarf, No. 687 The Stationmaster's Secret, No. 696 The Secret of the Missing Convict.

At one period a few of the B.F. series were credited to famous sporting personalities e.g. No. 242 - Cloyne of Claverhouse by Wally Hammond, this was republished later, strange to say, under exactly the same title but no author mentioned - No. 676, possibly the 'ghost' was Sidney Horler who undertook quite a lot of this work.

NORMAN LINFORD (Cannock): Am enclosing two pages from THE SCHOOL FRIEND dated 10th August, as it was a great surprise to see the new character called BESSIE BUNTER.!!! I wonder who is doing this for Fleetway Publications, and whether any more of Charles Hamilton's characters will be in danger of being "mutilated" so!

JOHN STEELE (Nigeria): Have now received the 200th edition of the C.D. and it is a magnificent number well worthy to bear the proud number of 200. It was like receiving a mid year Annual so chockful of interesting items and articles. I also thoroughly enjoyed 'The Boy in The Corner' - hope we shall be having more of Slade soon. Danny's

Diary is also a popular favourite of mine - and I am glad to see the same high standard of the Diary has been kept up.

MARGARET COOKE (Manchester): I feel like a lone voice crying in the wilderness but I regret the passing of the modern Blake and am intolerant of those who are so happy to return to the old stories and their own nostalgia. Sexton Blake is indeed dead. So many people are busy delving into his past that no-one has time or inclination to give to his future.

CHARLES DAY (Keighley): I have read with interest, the various tributes to Sexton Blake, and for my own part, I think that the removal of that splendid artist, Mr. Eric Parker, as principal cover artist, put The S.B.L. right into the rut, along with the rest of the strip monthlies.

When E.R.P. illustrated, the Library stood out like a beacon amongst all the other publications. This is not to say that the New Look covers were not good, they were, but...they lacked the vital lines of E.R.P.

Secondly, the discontinuance of the Father/Employer relationship between Blake and Tinker, (how I missed the familiar "Guv'nor" -) and the introduction of the female element, to say nothing of the acquisition of sumptuous quarters in Berkeley Square. All these things, I think, helped to hasten the end. Well, the New Look Blake has gone, but "our Blake" still remains....with us.

HERBERT W. HILTON (Oldham): Collectors' Digest - that priceless packet of pure pleasure which, in my opinion, gets better every month. To yourself, Mr. Editor, and your valued contributors, very many thanks for the grand work you do.

(And thanks, Sir, to you, and to hundreds of readers like you, who give us such wonderful encouragement. -ED.)

CONCERNING CHARLES HAMILTON

By The Editor

Under the title "WHERE CHARLES HAMILTON WENT TO SCHOOL" an article by Mr. W. O. G. Lofts appears in the current issue of our contemporary, STORY PAPER COLLECTOR. Mr. Lofts quotes from the prospectus of one of the schools which, he alleges, Charles Hamilton attended.

For many years there was a rumour that Charles Hamilton was expelled from Charterhouse. The source of this absurdity has long been lost in the mists of time. But even in the past year or two equally absurd rumours have found their way into Collectors' Digest office to be taken with the customary grain of salt. It can be said that these rumours were largely due to the reticence of the author, but, as we have said more than once, it was no business of ours.

Mr. Lofts is well-known to us all as a hard-working and dedicated research worker. In the past, he has found out invaluable items

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concerning the old stories and their various authors. He is, deservedly, the Sir Bernard Spilbsury of old boys' books.

So far as Collectors' Digest is concerned, we have never pulled punches concerning criticism of the work of authors, but we have set our face against delving into the private lives of these people. Anent this latest article, we can only say that if it stills some of the absurd rumours of recent years, it will have served a purpose.

We do not suggest that there is anything inaccurate in Mr. Lofts' article in S.P.C. In fact, some of the details are much which we assumed. In my postscript to the Autobiography, last year, I wrote: "It seems evident that Charles Hamilton was educated at a first-class private school." At that time, Mr. Lofts disagreed with me over that comment.

While not questioning Mr. Lofts' good faith in the slightest, Collectors' Digest considers that he should disclose the source of his information. Any people, who were children at the time when Charles Hamilton was a child, must be very elderly people indeed to-day. It is nearly eighty years since Charles Hamilton was at school, and that is a long time. It is, at least, unusual that a prospectus should still be extant of the very school which the author attended - unless it was retained for some reason by a relative. Mr. Lofts does not tell us that the information comes from a relative. In fact, he speaks of passing on information to Mr. Hamilton's niece for biographical purposes.

The comments of Mr. W. H. Gill, which appeared a few months ago in this magazine, were criticised in the S.P.C. article. We have again contacted Mr. Gill, who is a barrister. He informs us that he had many long chats with Charles Hamilton from 1949 onwards. The author stated that he spent much of his boyhood in Berkshire, and that the topography of many of his fictional towns and villages was taken from the Berkshire towns and villages which he knew as a boy. There can hardly be any question that Mr. Gill has merely repeated what he was told by the author.

If Mr. Lofts gives us the source of his information - and there is surely no reason why it cannot be given - readers can decide for themselves whether to accept wholeheartedly the S.P.C. article, or whether to accept it with any reserve which they may deem fit.

Candidly, as we have said before, we don't bother two hoots where Charles Hamilton went to school, and we don't want to know. He was a great credit to his school, wherever it was - and that's enough for us.

"DON'T BE HARD ON THEM-!"By J. R. Swan

You know it's allright for devotees of the Old Papers to belittle the periodicals of today which the present generation of boys and girls are reading - but we can't blame them - they cannot help being born in this era - the same as we couldn't help being born in the era before the last World War or First World War!

Thus, those who were brought up on the 'bloods' of 1840-'60 - viewed with scorn (?) the periodicals of 1860 - '80! (Boys of England, Boys Standard, B.O.P. etc.). Boys who were 'weaned' on these papers viewed with a critical eye the type of reading that was printed for their sons and heirs between 1880-1900 (along with the papers THEY used to read - but still had a sneaking regard for - papers between 1880 - 1900 to name a few: Boys Comic Journal, Boys Friend, Marvel, Union Jack, Pluck, Chums, B.O.P., and not forgetting the Aldine Libs!

During the period between 1900-1920 there was quite a shoal of Boys (and Girls) literature - even with a Great War breaking it up with the thunder of battle. Fathers and grandfathers must have cast a sorrowful eye on the new papers springing up - Boys Herald, Boys Leader, Boys Realm, Boys Friend, Gem, Magnet, Popular, Dreadnought, Nelson Lee, etc. But I daresay their faces brightened up when they saw a lot of their old favourites still running - Chums, B.O.P., Marvel, Pluck, U.J., Boys Friend Weekly. ("Not a patch on the old stories we use to read though, old man!")

The ladies I have no doubt, when looking at the copies of Girls Own Paper also had pleasant memories of earlier stories. Though as we well know THEIR daughters also took to the Gem, Magnet, Popular and Nelson Lee. We come to the period now where quite a few of us can recall our papers, libraries and comics between 1920-40 - that we used to read and our fathers and grandparents used to view with a "not bad - but they don't hold a candle to the papers we used to read". But again their faces used to light up when they saw their old papers still going strong! Magnet, Gem, U.J., Nelson Lee, Boys Friend, B.O.P., Chums, etc. WE got stuck into Rover, Adventure, Hotspur, Wizard, Boy's Mag., Champion, Triumph, Boys Cinema, - along with the papers our fathers read once - (and they still did on the Q.T.!!)

And so of course we come to the period of 1940 - to date. A lot has been written about what happened during this time and only just recently - when the S.B.L.'s packed in! There are still a few of the "old 'uns" being published - Scout and B.O.P., though very much changed



AFTER THE ATTACK ON SIR GEORGE HANSON! "Mr. Greely!" "Sir George!" Mr. Greely, having recovered his wind, helped the baronet to his feet. The two damaged gentlemen shook hands. Smithy and Tadger wriggled in the grass, with a stream of unpleasant remarks. But they could not get loose. Four sturdy Rookwood juniors were quite equal to the task of holding them down.

FAMOUS SERIES: The above picture comes from the popular Rookwood series in which Mr. Greely opened his own school in opposition to Rookwood.

from what they were - but holding their own! The Thomson Papers are still with us - Wizard, Rover and Adventure, New Hotspur - so when we look at what the younger generation of today are reading, we are thinking the same as our fathers and grandfathers did all the way back to the 1840s. "Not a patch on the yarns we used to read old man!"

It will go on and on, each generation turning round and saying the same old thing - so don't let us be too hard on the present day boy and girl - I saw a young chap enjoying his Valiant and Knockout the other day, just as I enjoyed my copy of Magnet, Gem or Wizard thirty years ago! Boys and girls don't alter - just the period!

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