

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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AUGUST 1964

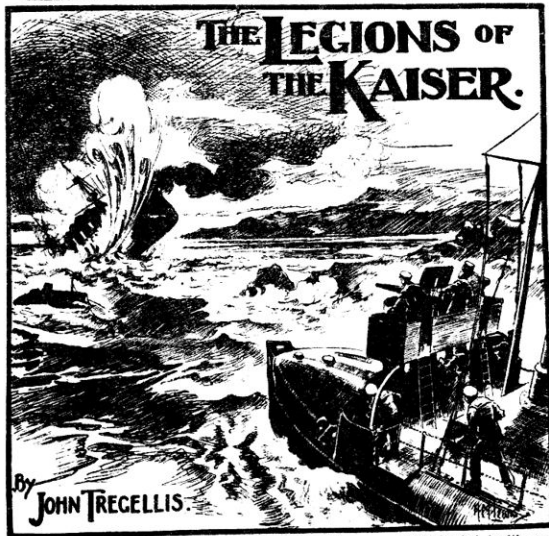
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No. 697—Vol. XIV NEW SERIES.]

ONE PENNY.

[WEEK ENDING AUGUST 29th, 1964.]



There was a thudding shock afar off, and the German warship heeled bodily over whilst a great fountain of spray sputted up close against the heaved-up cruiser's side.

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

FOUNDED in 1946 by HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 18

No. 212

AUGUST, 1964

Price 2s. Od.

IN YOUR EDITOR'S DEN.



FIFTY YEARS ON:

The wars of this century have brought about an immense amount of change. Modern war has speeded up progress.

There is something ironical in the fact that, to a large extent, we owe our present high standard of living to the two world wars which are a blot on the lifetimes of so many. Without the first world war which started fifty years ago this month civil aviation would have been much slower in getting into its stride. We should have had much longer to wait for the joys of radio, and other blessings which we take for granted to-day. Whether the world would have been a better place now without those two wars is a moot point. It would certainly have been quieter and more leisurely for a good deal longer.

It is interesting to take stock of the effects on our own hobby of the two world wars. The first one had but little lasting effect on the old papers. The second one destroyed them.

As we commented last month, it is obvious that when war occurred in August 1914 there was an enormous output of periodicals of all types for youngsters. The only immediate effect was the war flavour which was introduced into most of them, but the papers carried on much

as before. For a long time, there was no reduction in size or increase in price.

There seemed to be no shortage of paper, nor, apparently, was there any concern that such a shortage might come. In late 1914 and in 1915 plenty of new periodicals were issued to join the mass of established ones. Many of them were war magazines, but the Nelson Lee Library and the Sexton Blake Library were both launched in 1915. As late as November 1915 the Greyfriars Herald was introduced to an admiring juvenile public. The price - one halfpenny.

In 1915, to celebrate a change of editorship, the Boy's Friend issued several giant numbers with mighty, glossy-papered coloured covers, the like of which was never to be seen again. Those papers make a fascinating study.

Nobody seems to have allowed for the fact that the war might last. Yet it does not appear to have been an unexpected war. A browse over the old papers issued between 1907 and 1914 shows plenty of stories which told of mythical wars between Britain and Germany. When war broke out a serial, "The Legions of the Kaiser," had been running for some time in the Boy's Friend. It strikes me as rather odd that this was so. There was no such "jumping the gun" before 1939 so far as I can remember.

The first indication of any shortage came in the autumn of 1915 when the Magnet replaced its red cover with a white one. Even then, it was merely the shortage of a certain dye.

It was not until 1916 that one saw periodicals growing smaller, a process which was to continue in 1917, when shortage becomes obvious. Papers were amalgamated; all were drastically reduced in size. Yet the number of real casualties on the book stalls was fairly small. Prices rose from 1d to 1½d. The 3d libraries rose to 4d. Such increases are almost laughable to-day.

The Greyfriars Herald had only lasted 16 weeks. It vanished in 1916. The amazing thing is that it was ever issued at all. Others disappeared as time went on, some for good. The Penny Popular went in 1918, but after the armistice it was soon back again, with no change at all in its format.

After the war most papers quickly increased their size without any increase in price. By 1922, papers like the Magnet and the Gem had risen from 16 pages to 24 pages, still at 1½d. In the autumn of that year, all the popular periodicals were again increased in size, coloured covers were introduced, and the price rose to 2d. They were almost back as it was in the beginning. And they remained so, for

the most part, until late 1939.

So, although there were many changes, due to the coming and going of a great war, the effects were not so very substantial in the world of boys' papers.

How different were things when the second world war started! Within a few months almost all the old papers were gone, and they have never come back. Just what was the reason?

It is clear that casualty and change in the first world war was due to a paper shortage which only slowly was felt. In the second war, the sudden collapse of the book empire was a shock for all who bought the periodicals. Either the printing world was less prepared or else preparation was made against a shortage which must eventually come.

Rising costs were a minor factor after 1918. But from 1945 costs went up and up - and they are still rising. The dearth of periodicals to-day is not due to lack of interest among the youngsters, as has been vacuously suggested sometimes. It is due to prohibitive production costs. Those costs must surely be attributed largely to the greed of mankind. Many people, already highly paid, are constantly demanding still higher pay. And firms, making gigantic profits, are all out for still higher profits. If the highly paid would take a little less and the employers would be contented with smaller profits, we might all benefit. Only then could we see on the market once again grand old papers like the Magnet, the Nelson Lee, and the Union Jack. And probably not even then. The old papers we possess are relics of a lost art.

THANKS FOR THE POSTCARDS:

Scores of readers when on holiday remember to drop a picture postcard to this office. They bring delight to the heart of your ancient editor, who is thus enabled to share your travels. Every card goes up on the walls of the editorial den. Many thanks to you all for the kindly thoughts.

THE ANNUAL:

We repeat the appeal, made last month, for contributions to the 1964 C.D. Annual. We are now in high summer, and Christmas seems a long way off. But time is passing. Please do not leave it too late.

THE EDITOR

WANTED: 3 preferably 6 months runs Magnet 1930 to 1940.

Offers to: HERSANT, 228 Archway Road, Highgate N.6.

Last month Collectors' Digest carried a review of RED PLUSH AND GREASEPAINT, a delightful new book written by CLARKSON ROSE, most brilliant star of the English Music Hall. Mr. Rose came across our review, and has now sent us the following charming article which he has written especially for the Digest. We present it to you with the greatest pleasure. Although it does not deal with our own hobby, it goes back to the time which was the hey-day of the old boys' papers, and in the little true-life story which Mr. Rose relates, we can detect something of the "play the game" spirit which the grand old papers instilled in us. In passing, Clarkson Rose's magnificent show TWINKLE is one of the main attractions of Llandudno where it is playing for the summer season. So he brings you a breath of the sea in this, our August issue. - - - - -

"STRIKE!"

By CLARKSON ROSE

Strikes seem to be a prominent feature of the British way of life at the moment, and even occur in our profession, so perhaps it is not inopportune for me to recall my first experience of a strike in the theatre.

It was at the Opera House, Burton-on-Trent in 1912; I was a member of Estelle Stead's Shakespearean Repertoire Company; older readers will recall that Estelle was the daughter of the famous Spiritualist - T. W. Stead, of the "Strand Magazine," and she had spent a lot of the money he had left her in going into management, being her own leading lady, and touring really lavish productions of "Hamlet," "The Taming of the Shrew," "Romeo and Juliet," "Richard III," "Twelfth Night," "Henry V" and "The Merchant of Venice." Her leading man and partner was a fine actor of his day, who had done splendid work at London's Lyceum Theatre - Farmer Skein - and she left all business arrangements to him. Skein was inclined to be wild and tempestuous, and if he had had one too many, could be awkward.

It was the Friday and the last week of the tour; a dispute had arisen among members of the company as to the payment of the artists' fares back to town (London). Skein had refused. They came to me and asked if I would join them in a strike which they proposed to stage at the beginning of the trial scene in "The Merchant of Venice" that night. Now Estelle Stead had given me my first chance in Shakespeare, and I had, what in those days, I considered a good job - i.e. £2.10s.0d. per week, for which I provided my own swords and tights!! My contract contained nothing about the payment of fares back to town, and although, perhaps, I should have seen that it did, the fact that it didn't, in my opinion, made it wrong for me to join the strikers, and I refused, and became what they called a 'blackleg.'

The curtain rose on the Trial Scene, and, with the exception of

Miss Stead as Portia, and her friend and assistant - as Nerissa, and an elderly actor named Stirling, who was the Duke, there was no-one on the stage except myself, who was playing the small part of Salarino.

It happened that, having understudied all the parts, with the exception of Shylock, I knew the lines, and I just walked from place to place on the stage, and spoke Bassanio's, Gratiano's, Antonio's and so on - - in fact, the lot!! Skein was quite unperturbed, and the scene finished to a really solid round of applause. How we got through the rest of the play, I do not know, but we did, and, at the final curtain, Skein made a speech in which he told the audience that there had been a strike, brought me forward, and gave me very fulsome praise, and begged the audience to note that "The Taming of the Shrew" would definitely be played at tomorrow's matinee and night show. He sent for me afterwards, and told me to sit up all night and learn the part of Lucentio, which is almost as big a one as Petruchio's. My landlady got me some black coffee, and I sat up and learnt as much of it as I could. The next day, at a brief rehearsal, to which he had called in several local amateurs, we did a sketchy run-through, and, at the matinee, the show went through quite well, with the aid of a prompter. After the final curtain on Saturday night, he sent for me, gave me my fare back to town, and a present of two quid!!

I was quite naturally shunned by the other actors, who had gone into the gallery for the final performance, expecting to see some chaos, and they were all on the station on the Sunday morning, and, of course, gave me the cold shoulder, but I confess to a little chuckle of triumph when Mr. Skein and Miss Stead arrived, and gave me V.I.P. treatment, by inviting me into their compartment!!

There was no such thing as Equity in those days, protecting the rights of actors and actresses. There was what was known as the Actors' Association, which had very little power. The circumstances were reported to them, and they sent for me, but there was no reprimand in fact, one of the old actors on the Committee, followed me downstairs, after the meeting, and said, in the real actor-laddie manner - "Quite right, my boy - - the curtain must go up" !!

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LUNCH WITH LESLIE CHARTERIS! By W. O. G. Lofts

Mr. L. S. Elliott in the June issue of C.D. asks readers if they remember THE THRILLER. I can reply that most certainly we do! As Mr. Elliott so rightly points out, many now world famous authors made their first appearance there - including Leslie Charteris creator of THE SAINT - known to millions of people throughout the world.

As most members of the London O.B.B.C. are aware, it has been my good fortune to be in lengthy correspondence with Mr. Leslie Charteris out in Florida, in connection with a full length article I have written for the Fleetway Publications RECORD giving full details of his stories in THE THRILLER - and an authentic account of the history of THE SAINT in films/T.V./comic strips and so on. This will also appear in THE SAINT MAGAZINE at a later date - but I am hoping when the copyright question has been settled I can do an abridged version for the C.D. or Annual.

Quite recently I met Leslie Charteris in London, when we had a four hour lunch session - which would have been the envy of Billy Bunter at one of London's leading hotels! Six feet 1" tall - lean and extremely fit at the age of 57; an extremely pleasant and friendly disposition speaking with a soft transatlantic drawl; my firm conviction that Mr. Charteris had based his character THE SAINT on himself seemed more feasible as our talks progressed.

Born at Singapore, the son of a surgeon, our writer at an early age had an urge to write, and like many famous authors produced his own magazines. Not having the ability to draw - he cheated the art work by drawing matchstick figures in later years when he wanted a calling card for the SAINT - he remembered his early youthful efforts - and just added a halo! Educated at Cambridge - he never read THE MAGNET or GEM - but until the age of 12 was an avid reader of CHUMS - and can remember vividly reading the yearly bound red volumes of stories of pirates - swashbuckling adventurers, and these stories influenced him a great deal to write in later years thrilling stories about THE SAINT. As Mr. Elliott rightly points out the first ever SAINT story was published by Ward Lock & Co. a year or so before the THRILLER appeared - this was entitled "Meet the Tiger" - and was incidentally reprinted in THE BOYS FRIEND LIBRARY retitled 'Hidden Gold' in the 30s - when the author's name was not given. I should think this issue extremely valuable to any collector who may have a copy!

Before passing on to CHUMS, Leslie Charteris as a toddler was very fond of Tiger Tim and the Bruin Boys. Writing very little these days,

his stories are still selling in umpteen editions that he wrote before the second world war - with a further 39 instalments to be made of the highly successful T.V. SAINT series featuring Roger Moore as Simon Templar. Nevertheless he always remembers his early days on THE THRILLER, and is grateful for the great support and interest by the many old readers of the popular Amalgamated Press 7/6 full length thriller story for 2d!

Hamiltoniana



THE HIDDEN LIFE OF FRANK RICHARDS

By TONY GLYNN

The other day, I came across a couple of reminders of the hidden life of Frank Richards. Strictly speaking, I am not a Hamiltonian, although I have always enjoyed a Charles Hamilton story, particularly a Greyfriars one, so I offer the "hidden life" period of Hamilton's career to valuable Hamiltonians like our editor or Mr. Roger Jenkins. Doubtless, they will find it a rewarding field for research when others have dried up.

By the "hidden life" of Frank Richards, I mean that twilight period when the "Magnet" and "Gem" were no more, but when Frank Richards was finding employment for his pen wherever an opening presented itself. Of particular interest is the period at the end of the war, and just after it, when paper rationing was less tight, but Hamilton had not yet found his new lease of life in the Bunter Books and on television.

My two reminders of this period are a copy of "Autumn Pie," for 1945 and a 20 page booklet "Top Study at Topham," dating from about 1947.

I discovered them among some books which I had kept stored away and unopened for several years and I have retained them from my boyhood simply because they contain the work of Frank Richards.

"Pie" is a magazine now forgotten, but it was a smart little magazine put out by Hutchinsons during the latter part of the war.

Frank Richards had a regular spot in it with his "Chronicles of

Carcroft." The only story in this series I ever read is the one in this issue for Autumn 1945. It is called "Roger's Way" and the magazine makes a point of mentioning that its author is "Frank Richards, the man who invented Billy Bunter."

Carcroft was a vaguely Greyfriars-like school and the hero of this tale is Dudley Vane-Carter, called V.C. for short, in tribute to his courage. He is rather languid and given to taking risks like going down to a pub called The Lobster Smack to place a bet. What strikes me about him is that we've met somebody rather like him elsewhere - our old friend Herbert Vernon-Smith of Greyfriars. Dudley Vane-Carter, however, seems to lack the vicious streak the Bounder sometimes displayed.

Come to think of it, there are others on the scene who look like pale shadows of old friends. The "Carcroft Co.," made up of three fellows named Compton, Drake and Lee, seem to have some of the characteristics of five famous fellows we used to know at Greyfriars. There is a Lord Talboys, who is not likely to replace dear old Mauly in my affections, and there is a fat boy called Turkey Tuck who steals other people's grub and reminds us of - but, there, why should I labour the point?

Perhaps the writing was a shade slicker than the average Frank Richards' tale in the Magnet, but "Pie" was sophisticated quarterly and not specifically a boys' magazine.

"Top Study at Topham" is another matter. It is specifically a boys' publication. It is No. 1 in the "Mascot Schoolboy Series," published by John Matthew (Publishers) Ltd., Blonfield St., E.C.2. Whether there was a number 2 in the series, I do not know, for this dates, as I have said, from about 1947, a period notorious for the mushrooming of comic papers and pulp publications.

It is interesting to note the choice of name for this undoubtedly short-lived series. "Mascot" is quite close to "Magnet" and, as in the case of the "Pie" yarns, the reader is reminded that the story is by "Frank Richards, author of Billy Bunter." In this twilight period, Frank Richards seemed to cling to his earlier reputation as to a life-line and he probably knew when turning out yarns like "Top Study at Topham" that this was merely work for a mushroom growth and he was not likely to start any new traditions.

The story itself is pretty much of a muchness. It features Bob Hood and, while this is only number one of the series, we are told on the heading that it is "A Bob Hood story," as if there was already an established body of Bob Hood stories. Japing plays a strong part in

it.

It deals with the meeting of Bob Hood and Harry Vane. Vane is a new chap, on his way to Topham School and the opening scene is set on the train - a good Hamilton situation. There is a fat boy called Bunny Binks in the story but he is somewhat less objectionable than Bunter.

Note the Hamiltonian penchant for using the same names. Vane-Carter, Harry Vane and Binks. Didn't Bunter have an "Uncle Carter" somewhere and didn't Hamilton, as Martin Clifford, write of Binks the boot-boy at St. Jim's?

And while on the subject of names, here's a thing that interests me.

The Head at Topham is one Dr. Carfax.

Carfax is the name of the central landmark in Oxford and, when I first went there in 1948, there was a cutler's shop immediately across the street from Carfax Tower. The name emblazoned above the window was one with which I was familiar, thanks to Frank Richards, but I had never hitherto encountered it in real life. It was Quelch.

The cutler's shop is still there, although it has changed ownership. Nevertheless, under the new owner's name, there is a reminder in brackets that it is a continuation of the very old-established firm of Quelch.

Has anyone ever met up with this unusual name in real life, - or is it a unique name, likely to be encountered only by those who knew an old-established shop across from Carfax Tower?

Carfax. Quelch. The names of two Frank Richards' schoolmasters, one obscure and the other world famous.

Can it be that Charles Hamilton had another hidden life, - one with an Oxford setting?

* * * * *

A Visit to Apple Trees

By Roger M. Jenkins

It was a perfect June day, hot and cloudless, with a slight sea breeze blowing on to the Kent coast, and the air was heavy with the fragrance of flowers. It might have been the setting for any summer story in the Magnet. In point of fact, John Wernham and I were leaving Rose Lawn with Miss Hood for a trip to Apple Trees, which was probably Charles Hamilton's favourite residence.

Hawkinge is the first village out of Folkestone on the London Road, and it was here, in 1914, after returning from the Continent when war broke out, that Charles Hamilton stopped his taxi at the Post

Office to enquire whether there was a room available in the village. As it happened, there was a room available at the Post Office itself, and this was his first connection with the village he was to know and love so well. On his morning walk across the fields he would stop and exchange a friendly word with Miss Hood, then a child on her way to school.

Even then, Charles Hamilton was something of a wanderer, and might leave Hawkinge for a visit to Hampstead Garden Suburb or his cottage in Bucks (where he spent much of World War II) but Hawkinge always seemed to draw him back. In 1919, he took Clyde Cottage in Hawkinge and Miss Beveridge, his housekeeper, ran it for him. It is a small, gaunt, grey cottage (now with another name), but Apple Trees was being built, and was ready in 1921.

To visit Apple Trees one must go several miles out of the village, and then leave the car in a winding lane, and take a steeply descending footpath to the garden gate. The garden slopes steeply down to the bungalow, which is completely sheltered from most of the bad weather and all noise of traffic, and enjoys fine views across the Downs. It is a tiny cottage with two small bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living room, and provided an ideal retreat for a busy author. In 1921 it had oil lamps, paraffin for heating and cooking, and only well water. It is not surprising that even as late as 1938 Charles Hamilton would say without any warning that Miss Hood was to pack things up as a car was ordered to take them from Rose Lawn to the heart of the country. I think, by the way, that the bungalow described in Magnet 1365 has many points of resemblance with Apple Trees, down to the telephone which constituted the only sign of modernity.

Building restrictions were troublesome even in 1921, and a sun parlour that was added at the back of the house had to be built entirely of wood. In the garden was a small pond, and Charles Hamilton used to enjoy boating with the certain knowledge that he was never far from shore. It was only the steepness of the ascent from the cottage that caused Charles Hamilton to give up visiting it after 1938, and it was sold after the war. The name of the bungalow was then changed to Peacehaven, but it is good to know that it is again called Apple Trees today, the old name having been revived by its present owners who are, curiously enough, old friends of Miss Hood. So not all the links with the past have been severed.

Back at Rose Lawn I fell to musing about the substitute writers. Even though Charles Hamilton wrote all the Magnet stories after No. 1220, there were of course substitute stories in the Holiday Annuals

right to the end, and an odd passage or two in Magnet stories would be written in so that the artist could provide a striking cover picture now and again. Some years ago I instanced the cover picture of Magnet 1369 as an example of this interpolation. At Rose Lawn at an earlier date I had noticed that Charles Hamilton had indignantly scored through a passage in Magnet 1432 which was written in to provide the artist with a cover picture (there was no real reason why Farmer Piker should lay his whip round Billy Bunter in that story). On this occasion at Rose Lawn I saw that in a Holiday Annual the words "By Frank Richards" were heavily scored through in pencil, and in a 1940 Holiday Annual the whole of an offending Rookwood story had been torn out roughly and with obvious feeling. I could not help feeling glad that he had been spared this vexatious trouble for the rest of his life. As he said to me in a letter dated 1946, "It is a great relief to my mind to have done with other writers butting into my work, which used to get me very often into a state of exasperation. My present publishers would not dream of that kind of thing, even in a nightmare."

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 78. THE RIO KID'S GOLD-MINE

A few days ago, while browsing through a box of oddments among my treasures, I came upon a Boy's Friend Library. It was "The Rio Kid's Gold-Mine." Feeling in the mood, I read it, once again to fall under the spell as I had done many times before.

Individual tastes differ, but I think that very few readers who know the entire Rio Kid series would quarrel with me when I say that this was the finest of them all. "The Rio Kid's Gold-Mine" did, in fact, appear twice in the Boy's Friend Library, a concrete indication of its quality.

It originally was published, as eight separate stories, in the Popular of 1928, very early in the Rio Kid series. As I have confessed before, when I read those stories as a youngster, it never occurred to me that Charles Hamilton was the author, though the Kid tales were the only ones which misled me. I was fooled by the perfect western atmosphere and idiom which the writer welded so skilfully, almost lazily, into the tales he was producing. Reading them to-day, I find countless Hamilton touches, and I can only marvel at my lack of common-sense, long ago.

In 1928 Charles Hamilton was at the peak of his powers as a writer. In January of that year he introduced the Rio Kid, and some eight

months later he invented yet another character in yet another part of the world - Ken King of the Islands.

Small wonder that he only found time to write four stories for the Gem in 1928, while in 1929 he wrote not one St. Jim's story.

Whether we find it deeply regrettable that the author, now at his pinnacle, turned his attention to new characters in new types of stories, depends upon whether or not we have a love for the Rio Kid and Ken King. If we like neither of them, we feel saddened that he neglected St. Jim's in those halcyon years. We must feel grateful that the Magnet was not similarly neglected. Whatever our feelings, we cannot but admire the brilliance of the writer who was able to infuse such wonderful, convincing atmosphere into his stories of the wild west and those of the South Seas.

The "western," whether it be a book or a film, has been amazingly popular for as long as we can remember. The odd thing is that the same western has appeal for both the child and the adult. As boys we loved such western stars as Tom Mix, W. S. Hart, Hoot Gibson, and Ken Maynard. Our parents loved them, too. As time passed, great epics like "Virginia City" and "Santa Fe Trail" packed the cinemas, and later still "Shane" comes round as regularly as leap year. On television, right from the start, the western has held its own. Programmes come and programmes go, but the western goes on for ever. In most libraries there is a special section devoted to "westerns."

Lacking smut, sex, romance, and the kitchen sink, which television and film producers seem to think we ought to have, the western holds its own. "Laramie" makes its impact without sex or horror.

There's plenty of violence, of course, but somehow it's a clean kind of violence. The Rio Kid killed enough people, as he rode the "Popular" ranges, to fill a cemetery. He "pumped lead" into enough bad men to fill Blair Hospital over and over again. And yet, even for the squeamish, that violence is never distasteful. It is violence without sadism.

It is, perhaps, not altogether surprising that the great Magnet masterpieces have not been republished. The best of the stories are so long that drastic pruning would be necessary to publish them in book form, while the appeal of the school story at the present time may be suspect.

I do find it surprising, though, that the Rio Kid stories have never been published in book form in recent years. Written for boys, they carry equal appeal for adults. The question of length would never arise, for eight of the old tales would be the perfect verbiage for the

modern novel. They would sell like hot cakes, for all westerns sell that way. In quality, they would equal or surpass anything on the market. Written well over thirty years ago, they never date, for westerns do not date. If anything, the settings of the Rio Kid stories, as they progressed, became a little too modern.

"The Rio Kid's Gold Mine" is a wonderful story, with a superb plot, packed with incident, and with never a dull line from start to finish. Whoever owns the copyright of the early Rio Kid series has a gold-mine within reach. Maybe, some day, somebody will tell him so.

I am astonished that so few, comparatively, of our own number have much acquaintance with the Rio Kid at his best. I would recommend anyone who admires the work of Hamilton to try to acquire the years of the Popular which contained the stories, for they are, almost certainly, the most remarkable Hamilton achievement. To follow the Kid as he trails across the wilds of the United States - and back - is a great experience, and the reader is filled with wonder at the author's delightful prose, his command of western terms and dialogue, and his charming descriptions, always varied, of a part of the world he never visited.

The stories are, probably, more easily obtained in the B.F.L., but the reader must appreciate that in this format they were pruned. The shrinkage did not spoil them unduly, though the pruned tales are obviously the second-best thing. Shrinkage in those days was an art. In recent years it became a disease.

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CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 76. THE ART OF CONTRIVANCE

REG SANDERSON: Bunter portrayed as a crafty villain captivated me. I liked his "He, he, he," when he stumbled on information with which he could blackmail Loder; the "Oh, lor!" when he realised justice was catching up with him; the abuse he hurled at Quelch from the temporary safety of a locked room during his barring-out.

Whether we liked Bunter as a potential criminal or as a lovable fool, we owe a lot to him. Long after Rockwood had died as modestly and gracefully as it had lived, and Brooks (working under orders we are told) could not prevent Handforth punching the heart out of the Nelson Lee, and the Gem just breathing with sub-writers and reprints, Bunter was still carrying Greyfriars on his shoulders quite successfully.

It would only take a simple equation to prove that if Bunter had never been born, I should not be collecting Nelson Lees to-day.

ROGER JENKINS: I should think it quite possible that Charles Hamilton culled the topographical and social details about India from the travel books he possessed. There were quite a number of these books in his den upstairs, and nearly all of them could be linked with a Magnet or Gem travel series. He may, of course, have met people who gave him first-hand information about these countries, but I think that this was unlikely, considering how secluded his life was after he gave up his own foreign travels in the 'twenties.

ALEX PARSONS: If John Geal (Controversial Echoes, July) will kindly remove his window-boards and lower the drawbridge it will give me great pleasure to present him with a nice, big fat bouquet of orchids. John's itch is the same as mine, apparently. I endorse his statements heartily, and am with him when and if the brickbats are thrown.

Whilst I acknowledge respectfully the rights of the purists I admit frankly that all this weary business of sub writers is so much dandruff - easily gets in the hair but hard to rub out. It keeps showering down on the shoulders every time one opens the C.D.

I've read the old papers since 1915 and never knew that there were such monsters(?) as sub writers until I discovered the C.D. in 1960. Perhaps I wasn't intelligent enough to find out for myself. I was certainly too intelligent to dissect the best boys' papers in the world. One might as well analyse Santa Claus and shatter the fascinating illusions of childhood. To me, the book was the thing. Greyfriars and St. Jim's and the schoolboys who lived therein were all that mattered. I loved the writer of them, and now I know that this should read writers, I love them too. The stories were nearly always excellent, sometimes indifferent, but never bad whether written by dear old C.H. or the monsters of Outer Fleet Street.

One last word. If any purists are ready to chuck out their sub Magnets and Gems, I sincerely hope they will throw them in the direction of John Geal and me. I assure them that all contributions will be thankfully received.

GEMS OF HAMILTONIA No. 10 (New Series)

There was no further flight for the Rio Kid. The high mesa, tangled with chaparral, was surrounded, and on the only accessible side the enemy were advancing. All that remained to the Kid was to sell his life dearly - unless a miracle came to his aid.

But his face was cool, even smiling, as he looked along the rifle-barrel, watching through a chink in the rocks. They were coming, but they would not get him easily. Back in the chaparral the Kid's mustang was in cover, safe from stray bullets. It was characteristic of the Kid that he looked to his horse's safety before his own. Before long bullets would be flying thick over the mesa. The Kid's rifle was ready to join in the chorus.

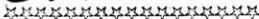
Many times during the long and deadly hunt the crack of the Kid's guns had been heard; and every time it was heard it meant that one fewer foe trailed the outlaw. Many a wounded man had gone back to the camps thanking his lucky stars that the Kid had not burned powder to kill. The Kid could plant his lead exactly where he liked. And for some whim, difficult for his hunters to understand, he chose to plant it where it would disable and not kill. It was not with any thought of propitiating his foes, for the Kid knew that he had no mercy to expect. It was one of the Kid's ways, and that was all.

WANTED: Good loose copies or bound volumes containing any of the following:
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GEMS - Many issues between 400 and 500. Many issues between 800 and 879. Also Nos. 925, 935, 953, 954, 956, 975, 980, 984, 985, 989, 990, 992, 993, 998. POPULARS: 183, 190, 370, 385, 396, 452, 455, 466, 474. EARLY PENNY POPULARS: Nos. 12, 13, 45, 47, 48.

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VALE, ANTHONY PARSONS

By Victor Colby

Speculation has been rife for a considerable time as to the whereabouts of that noted Sexton Blake author, Anthony Parsons. It is with grief that I have to reveal to all who admired his outstanding work, that he has passed away.

The circumstances which gave rise to my knowledge of this sad fact are set out hereunder.

In August 1962, I chanced to see on a Sydney bookstall, a current issue of Woman's World Library No. 502 "The Long Road" by Anthony Parsons. It occurred to me that it might have been a reprint, and consequently the editor of that publication might have long since been out of touch with Anthony Parsons. On the other hand, if this was a recent effort, then manifestly (as Anthony Parsons would say), the editor would have Anthony's address.

Well, hoping for the best, I wrote a letter to Anthony Parsons, care of the editor of Woman's World Library. As the months passed by, and no reply was received, I shrugged my shoulders and said "Well, at least I tried."

Imagine my amazement and excitement when, in August 1963, a whole year after my letter had been sent, I received an air letter from a Miss Nona Parsons in reply to my letter, giving me news of her brother, Anthony!

Miss Parsons' letter read as follows:

Hove, 2. Sussex.

Dear Mr. Colby,

27.7.63.

This letter is in answer to one you wrote to my brother, Anthony Parsons, dated 14.8.62. Your letter was duly forwarded to him by Miss Shales, the editor of Woman's World Library. Unfortunately he was a sick man when he received it, and shortly afterwards he went into hospital for a test. This revealed that he was suffering from cancer of the lungs, and I grieve to tell you that he died at home here - on

June 8th.

He was very pleased to have your letter, and intended to answer it himself, but I do not think that he did this. In any case I thought that you would like to hear from me about him. He was my beloved, and only brother, and he had lived with me here for the past five years. His untimely death is a great grief to me.

The tragedy of it is that he was a man of unusual physique - he was 6 ft. 3 inches in height, broad in proportion, and very handsome. In addition, he had a charming personality, and everyone loved him.

After the Blake Library changed its tone - the Editor retired - he left them (about December 1956), and since then he has only written stories for the Women's papers, such as the one you saw. I know he wrote some of these stories under the pseudonym of Frances Nicholls and Rachel Storm, and possibly others. Some of the magazines for which he wrote ended after the printers strike in 1959, and after this his output was considerably smaller, especially since he was obviously failing in health, though he refused to admit this.

If it is any consolation to you after your efforts to get in touch with him, I can assure you that your letter gave him great pleasure, and of all the many letters he received during the course of his writing career, none pleased him more. I, too, am delighted to know that his work gave you pleasure.

With kind regards and many thanks on his behalf for your appreciative letter,

I am,

Yours sincerely, NONA PARSONS.

I replied immediately to this moving letter, and since then have received three more from Miss Parsons, which I treasure, and from which I have selected the following information for publication in this article. I have, incidentally, sought and received permission from Miss Parsons to do this.

Anthony Parsons was born on June 21st 1893, in the small country town of Nuneaton, in Warwickshire. Had he lived another few weeks he would have been 70, and curiously enough he always hated the thought of attaining that age! Until the last eighteen months of his life he did not look his age, partly because he had a thick thatch of hair, and except that in the last year of his life he lost weight, he kept to the end his good looks and distinguished appearance.

He was educated at the Nuneaton (Warwickshire) Grammar School. He enlisted in the First World War, was given a Commission, and drafted to India. While there, he transferred to the old R.F.C. and had a

marvellous time in India and Arabia. He appeared to have a charmed life, for many of his brother officers lost their lives.

He came home in 1920 completely spoilt for the humdrum life in England, and definitely sure that he did not want to work in an office - if work at all for that matter!

In December 1920 Miss Parsons saw him off at Tilbury when he departed with a friend for Africa, where they had a riotous time hunting for ivory - Anthony Parsons was a first-class shot! After four years of this he returned home practically penniless.

With Miss Parsons' help (she is a University Graduate) he began to write - his first stories being accepted for Blackwood's Magazine. These short stories were based on his experiences in Africa, and were later published in a book which he called "Black Gypsies."

After the Blackwood Magazine stories, he contributed regularly to the Royal and Strand magazines and eventually to the Sexton Blake Library. When his work for the last-named publication had ended, he wrote long complete stories for the Women's libraries, Oracle, Miracle etc.

Miss Parsons cannot remember how he came to write his first Blake, and does not think he was a reader of Blake stories until he began to write them.

Anthony Parsons was a fervent admirer of Rider Haggard's novels, and to the end of his life he read and re-read "SHE." This story seemed to fascinate him more than anything else - he loved it! He did not like towns, and if there was a niche in life he would have filled it to perfection; it was that of a country squire! He loved History, and was known to read a history school text book for pleasure. He would read any historical romance, and he was particularly fascinated by Egyptian History.

When he had money he was very generous, but like many authors he was improvident - it was either the champagne or ginger beer period for him always!

He was a great conversationalist, and would talk by the hour when once he started. He wrote very much as he spoke. He would write most of the day when he was on a story, and then in the evening he would go round to the "local" where he was always the centre of a little gathering.

I am greatly indebted to Miss Parsons for the above information which has added immeasurably to our knowledge of the colourful life of her beloved brother, the man who contributed so much to our enjoyment with his stirring Sexton Blake stories.

How we have gloried in his tales of India and Egypt, and how greatly we have applauded those with an English background, and prominently featuring his own special creations - elegant Superintendent Claudius Venner together with his handmaiden, that long, lean slab of cheerful untidiness, Detective Sergeant Belford.

Another fine character of Anthony's was the lovely Lady Emily Westomholme, whose love for, and devotion to, the great Sexton Blake endeared her strongly to his many admirers.

The Sexton Blake stories of Anthony Parsons were always bright and breezy, intensely interesting, full of the vim and vigour of adventure, and of the breathlessness of suspense. Characterisation was really superb.

I, personally, am not prone to reading stories twice, but I have read and re-read those of Anthony Parsons many times, and will read them yet again in the days to come, knowing that in so doing I can never fail to derive further considerable enjoyment and pleasure.

Anthony Parsons is no longer in our midst, but he has left to us a legacy of tremendous work within the pages of the Sexton Blake Library, and has earned for himself in the process our undying approbation and appreciation.

* * * * *

TWO OPPOSING TECHNIQUES

By S. Gordon Swan

Though primarily known as the creator of Nelson Lee, Maxwell Scott was also a Sexton Blake author on the strength of his "Scorpion" tales in the UNION JACK and a serial in the BOYS' HERALD, "The Winged Terror," which introduced both Blake and Lee. Maxwell Scott, in private life a surgeon practising on the east coast of Yorkshire, was a painstaking, methodical writer. He had every story planned out from start to finish, so that errors of timing or name were rarely, if ever, to be found in his stories.

A visitor to his home (see Boys' Herald No. 173, 10.11.1906) found that he had a chart on the wall of his study. This chart was full of dates and data, and the words "Nelson Lee" recurred again and again. The diagram represented the whole action in the new serial he was writing, "Nelson Lee in the Navy." Every day of the period covered by the story was carefully mapped out, so that the author could see at a glance where every character was and what he was doing on that particular day.

Scott thus knew exactly what would happen to certain characters and what they would do at any given hour or any given day during the

period covered by the action of the story. This meticulous attention to timing is observable in his tales. "Three days elapsed. It was the evening of Wednesday, September 21st." "It was the night of the seventeenth of October." "By ten o'clock he was on his way to Dover, and by four o'clock that afternoon he was at Ostend."

This author apparently had train and shipping timetables at his elbow all the time. He could quote train connections at home and abroad in elaborate detail, and he was just as specific in his references to boat arrivals and departures all round the world. I don't know whether he ever allowed for the possibility of a train or a vessel being late! The result of all this method was an admirable accuracy in detail, but there was a suggestion that everything was too cut and dried. The absence of any mystery in his tales is also a criticism that may be levelled at them; the reader was always in the know as to what the villain was doing; and missing heirs and wills were rather too prevalent. However, the stories still make good reading, and probably the best is "Birds of Prey," a 144-page B.F.L. which carries on the excitement right to the last line.

Robert Murray, on his own admission, adopted a technique diametrically opposed to Maxwell Scott's - he allowed a story to write itself. This came to light when he was asked to write a "Proud Tram" story for the UNION JACK. In the event he did not write the story; Edwy Searles Brooks ably filled the breach. Sickness was given as the excuse for Murray's defection, but I have often wondered if the true reason was that he was unable to write to a set formula.

There was plenty of mystery in his yarns, and his style of writing was more spontaneous than Maxwell Scott's. Nevertheless, it had its drawbacks. Inconsistencies and errors were apt to appear. This was more noticeable in his long stories for the S.B.L. - only five in all, but mistakes occur in most of them. In "The Masked Marauder," one of the characters opens the door to a masked man who knocks him out. The masked man, in describing this episode later, states that he came through the window! And an eminent K.C., Sir Garton Langley, for no accountable reason becomes Lord Langley later in the same story. The best of authors are liable to make these mistakes, but the subsequent editing appears to have been sadly lacking in thoroughness. And one feels that Maxwell Scott's method would not have permitted such errors in the first place.

All the same, Robert Murray at his best was an enthralling writer, holding one's interest throughout, but one wishes that he had paid as much attention to detail as the creator of Nelson Lee.

DANNY'S DIARY

AUGUST 1914:

It has been a very exciting month. England declared war on Germany on Tuesday, August 4th. I never thought it would happen, though any amount of my papers have been printing stories about war with Germany for as long as I can remember.

Of course, it won't last long. Dad says it will be over by Christmas, but Doug thinks it will only last a week or two. He says that as soon as the Huns see that the British Empire means business they will give up. The newspapers are full of pictures showing amazing long cues at the recruiting offices. All the young chaps want to get into Lord Kitchener's army before the war packs up.

The Home Secretary says there is some uneasiness at the number of Germans living in this country. Thousands of them are trying to get home, and they are clamouring at the United States embassy in London because they can only get home through the actions of a neutral country.

It was a coincidence that the first story in the Gem this month was about a German, Herr Schneider. It was called "Monty Lowther's Mistake," and it was illustrated by Mr. Briscoe. Lowther gave an impersonation of a German, modelling it on Herr Schneider, and it upset the Herr's pretty niece with whom Lowther had become smitten.

All the rest of the Gem tales were holiday ones, and they were grand. In "The Outsider's Choice," Tom Merry & Co were on holiday at Eastwood House. Nearby, Lumley-Lumley was staying at a riverside bungalow with Cutts & Co and a man named Captain Punter. But Lumley-Lumley exposed Punter as a villain, and Tom Merry & Co helped him at the end.

Next week came "Gussy's House Party" in which Chungum's Circus pitched near Eastwood House, and the members of the circus played a cricket match with a team Tom Merry got up and which included Cousin Ethel. I never knew circus folk played cricket. Billy Bunter of Greyfriars came into this tale.

In "Held by the Enemy," Monty Lowther thought up a wheeze so that the chums could prolong their holiday, but when they eventually got back to St. Jim's they found that Levison & Co had bagged Study No. 6.

The last story of the month was "The St. Jim's Caravanners" in which Tom Merry & Co hired a caravan for a week-end holiday. It seemed odd that there should be a story of this sort after school had started for the new term, but it was a fine one, and I wish it had gone on for several weeks. All the Gem tales were fine this month.

We went to Rhyl in North Wales for our summer holiday. It was a lovely train ride from Euston. Doug bought the summer double number of the Union Jack at Euston station. It had a very long tale called "The Crimson Pearl" which was a Sexton Blake story introducing Yvonne. Doug is very fond of Yvonne. He says she reminds him of his friend, Freda, which is absurd, for Freda has no pluck at all. She screamed her head off when I put a dead mouse in her muff last Easter.

I had the Boy's Journal to read on the train. This is the paper which used to be called Cheer, Boys, Cheer. It had three serials and three complete stories. Two of the serials were "The Outlaw of the Shell" by John Finnemore, and "The Terrible Three," a story of the Nuts of St. Olave's, by Jack Lewis.

Rhyl is a very quiet little place, and the tide goes out an awful long way. When the tide is coming in, it is very dangerous, and coastguards on horses keep riding along and yelling to people to come away from the sea.

On the beach there are very large and high basket chairs, painted in many colours. They are very comfortable, and Mum had one most days. By putting two chairs facing one another close together, you can change inside for swimming, which you are now allowed to

do, but I did.

There was a lovely troop of pierrots and we went to see the concert twice. The pianist was a young chap called Jack Hylton, who was a good entertainer. There was a good comedian called Freddie Forbes, and a lovely young lady singer named Hilda Munday. I wouldn't mind marrying her when I grow up. Hilda sang a patriotic song called "There's a place upon the map called England" and another one called "We don't want to lose you but we think you ought to go."

One day we went on an excursion train to Colwyn Bay (1/3 return). That is a nice little seaside village, and we got on a toast-rack tram and rode many miles over to Llandudno. It is a lovely tram ride, chiefly on reserved tracks through fields and high up over the cliff sides. Apart from the toast-racks, there were a lot of single-decker trams, like those you see on the American films.

Rhyl has two picture palaces, but we only visited the Cinema Royal in the High St. We saw a very black actress named Theda Bara in a picture called "The Vixen" and it was silly, though I liked the way she snapped her eyes and wriggled. When I wrote black, I meant wicked. There was also the Pathe Gazette with some very old news, and a Keystone comic featuring Charlie Chaplin which made me split my sides. Before the programme began they put up slides of all the war leaders like Lord Kitchener, Field-Marshal French, and Admiral Jellicoe. We all cheered. Then they put up one of the Kaiser of Germany upside down, and we all booed.

On the journey home, Doug had the Marvel which contained "Fouled by his Seconds," a boxing story about Tom Sayers, by A. S. Hardy. This was illustrated by Ernest Ibbotson. There was also a story called "The Hidden City" by S. Clarke-Hook, all about Jack, Sam, and Pete finding a terrible underground town in the catacombs. Finally there was a mystery serial called "The Black House" by Maxwell Scott, about Nelson Lee and Nipper. I should like more of this one.

Doug bought me the Boy's Friend to read on the train. He is a good sole in his way. This had a new serial called "Sent to Coventry" or "The Mystery of the Manor House," by the author of "Tinker's School-days." (I wonder what his name is). There was a long instalment of the war serial "The Legions of the Kaiser." "Sold Up" was a complete story about Reggie Ryle, the scholarship boy of Nunthorpe College. Also an instalment of the Nelson Lee serial "The Film Detective." A complete school tale called "The Artist's Model" by Will Hope. And an instalment of the serial "The Speed King" by Henry St. John. Quite a lot of reading matter, but, of course, the Boy's Friend costs a penny.

I was sorry to get home, especially as Doug went off almost at once with his friend Wobbly Defrayne for a week at the Kingscliffe Holiday Camp at Scarborough. He says this is a lovely spot overlooking Filey Brigg and Flamborough Head. Good job Doug has so much money to throw about. It is quite expensive - 27/6 a week - but, as Doug says, they throw in all sorts of amusements at the Holiday Camps. I said I was willing to go with him if he liked, but he touched his eye and said "See any green?" After that I wouldn't have gone if he had begged me to. At least, it made me feel all right to say so.

The Magnet has been pretty fair to middling this month. "The Match with St. Jim's" was a cricket tale, in which Temple and Co tried to steal the Remove fixture by kidnapping the Remove team in a car. Some car! It was a long time before Vernon-Smith was able to make the driver stop by sticking a pen-knife in his neck. A new serial, "The Unconquerable" by Sidney Drew, started in this Magnet.

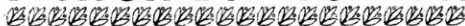
Then came "Self-Condemed," a fine story of the serious type with Frank Nugent in the lead. Frank was eventually saved from disgrace by Wun Lung.

After this, the Magnet Summer Double Number. They have a lot more double numbers in the Magnet than in the Gem. This had a coloured cover, showing a seaside scene, by P. J. Hayward. The main story was "Harry Wharton & Co's Holiday" and it was all about Hazeldene and Vernon-Smith. There was also an adventure story called "The Redskin's Debt" by Harry Dorrian, and another one called "King of the Island" by Frank Witty.

Then came "Wild Women at Greyfriars" about the military suffragettes who dug up the Greyfriars cricket pitches. Finally "Coker's Conquests" where Coker advertised in the

paper that he would like to meet the pretty girl with blue eyes and a parasol whom he had seen on the banks of the Sark. All kinds of odd females turned up in answer to his advertisement, and he had an exciting time.

Nelson Lee Column



CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD

RARE LEE

By L. S. Elliott

So much has been written about "St. Franks" that there seems little to say.

One aspect has not been given the attention it deserves, however - the 'originals' and reprints from such papers as "Pluck" 2nd series, in the "Schoolboys' Own Library" and the "Boys' Friend (4d) Library".

There were not more than a dozen of these but, I have 9 still, and it is about these and one long complete story in the old "Boys Realm," 2nd series, that I propose to write.

I will take the "S.O. Lib." first, Nos. 4 and 27.

There was another No. 120 "The Rebels of St. Frank" but I have not got that, so will have to ignore it.

No. 4 "The Fighting Form of St. Franks" featured Willy Handforth and his feud, through illtreatment of his pet monkey, Marmaduke, with a temporary new master, Mr. Marmaduke Muggles. After many misadventure with Willy as the central figure, justice was done, through minor detective work by Nelson Lee.

Next came "The River House Rivals" No. 27, S.O.L. This was unique in that the story was about Hal Brewster & Co. and the River House School. Featuring the downfall, through misunderstandings, of Hal, and the rise of his enemy, the Hon. Aubrey Wellborne, the story reminds us of similar happenings at "St. Frank's" with Nipper in the central role, but, in itself, it was a very good story, and the only occasion E.S.B. starred another school, other than in his "R. W. Comrade" days.

Next came four "B.F. 4d Lib." books of the 1st series.

"Pots of Money," No. 704 was an E.C. Handforth story, in which he

is given £500 he must spend without divulging where he got it. Although he does not know it, he is the innocent bait, to catch a crook for "Nelson Lee," and the police, but the trials and tribulations he suffers make a good and unusual story. This story was reprinted later.

Then came No. 708, "The Kidnapped School," which had originally appeared in "Pluck" the only story by E. S. B. to appear in that paper, illustrated by E. E. Briscoe. It was followed by 709 "Phantom Island," (also, later reprinted) the sequel, an original story. This should have appeared in "Pluck," also, but, never did for some reason. The two stories centred round the kidnapping of part of the school, their stranding on an island, and also featured Lord Dorrimore, the "Wanderer," and "Nelson Lee." A fine pair of stories.

The last of these 4, No. 713 "B.F.L. (4d) Lib." was the "New York Mystery," which featured the kidnapping of Justin B. Farrum, the American junior, and his father and the trip to New York, of "Nelson Lee" and "Nipper," "Handforth" and a select band of juniors. Mystery and adventure, not a school story, this; but one of the best. Also reprinted as the others, some, more than once.

We now come to two serials in the "Boys' Realm," which preceded, and also were connected with, one of the Holiday series in the "Nelson Lee Library" (South Seas) No. 105 (New Series) "B.F. (4d) Lib.," "St. Frank's on the Rocks," known in the "Boys' Realm" as the "Crusoe Scouts". This was a Scouting adventure, involving the boys on Surf Island, and their adventures with a gang of crooks. Well up to standard.

This was followed by No. 110 (New Series) B.F. (4d) Lib. "The Schoolboy Republic". This story involved the St. Frank's boys in a revolution in the tiny republic of Costa Bella, in Central America, with "Lord Dorrimore," "Umloosi," the "Wanderer" etc. The St. Frank's contingent were on their way to one of their holiday adventures, currently running in the "N.L.L." and this story was an interlude, featured in the "Boys' Realm," only. As usual, Handforth was well to his bull-headed fore, and the story was a good one.

The last of these stories was "Boys' Friend" 4d Lib. No. 435 "The Schmeer of St. Frank," an original, featuring Vivian Travers and his blackmail by Bernard Forrest. Involving Travers' love of speed on his motor-cycle, his father's veto, and Irene Manners, this was a rattling good yarn and away from the usual school trend.

Finally, I come to a story that appeared in the Boys' Realm No. 331 "Handforth's Holiday Hoax." This was sandwiched between the "Crusoe Scouts" and the "Schoolboy Republic" and was the last complete

St. Frank's yarn to appear in the large size "Realm." In fact, it was the first complete yarn to appear for a long time, as all the preceding yarns, up to No. 45, were either not by E.S.B. or suspect, as has since been generally admitted. It was a typical E.S.B. yarn, in lighter mood. Handforth receives a 'dud' note, thinks it is genuine, and invites a party of boys out for the day. His misadventures and accidents made one of the funniest Handforth's ever.

I would have liked to have quoted a little from each of these stories, but this is impossible, within the scope of such an article as this. However, the reason for "Handforth's Holiday Hoax," was the passing off of a Bank of Engravius £50 note on Handy, by Willy, and the trouble ensuing when Handy attempted to spend it. Quoting from the story, says Willy:

"I'll tell you what! The way you fellows jumped at the note, has given me an idea. If you accepted it as genuine, what would old Ted do? I feel like doing him a good turn, too!"

"A good turn?" repeated Juicy gloomily. "Why, half an hour ago you told us you owed him one. Didn't he lock you in the bath-room this morning and turn the water off at the main?"

"He did!" said Willy grimly. "I was locked in there, and couldn't even wash. In the end I had to crawl out of the window in my pyjamas, and creep along a ledge. The Pater nearly had a fit when he saw me." he added, tenderly rubbing a certain portion of his anatomy at the recollection.

And there began Willy's revenge, and the enjoyment of E.S.B. in lighter mood.

* * * * *

LET CREDIT GO WHERE CREDIT'S DUE

By Ross Story

According to the dictionary, the definition of the word 'gate-crasher' is "one who enters a meeting uninvited." In the sense that Mr. Jenkins was certainly not asked by the Lee supporters to air his view in the Nelson Lee column, one must concede that James Cook's word was applicable.

It has always puzzled me why the critics of Edwy Searles Brooks are so vitriolic towards him. It is easy to seize upon the faults of someone you dislike and hold them up as an example; and it is admitted by even the staunchest Lee fans that towards the end of the Nelson Lee, the stories had deteriorated to a tragic extent. But to apportion the blame directly to the writer is, I feel, more than unjust. It is no secret that during the last months of the Nelson Lee the stories were 'written to order' - and what true writer can justify himself under such circumstances? Certainly not such a writer as Edwy Searles Brooks.

The very fact that he obviously made no attempt at all to maintain his brilliantly high standard only goes to prove, I feel, that he himself realised how farcical the stories and characters were. It was not that he had lost his magic touch - merely, perhaps, his patience with those editors who were so successfully undermining it.

Edwy Searles Brooks wrote about St. Franks for sixteen years. He wrote every story himself and that is a remarkable achievement. What is even more remarkable is the fact that up until the closing days of the Nelson Lee, every single story was a masterpiece of plotting, characterisation and writing of the highest possible standard. Brooks was writing then as he wanted to write. It was only when editorial policy dictated the kind of stories he must write - and around the kind of characters they themselves apparently stipulated - that he lost interest. And who could blame him?

I feel, as many Lee supporters feel, that it was a terrible pity that Brooks' record for magnificent stories should have been spoiled towards the end by the obviously poor stories which then appeared. But a sub-writer would not have been the answer, for presumably a sub-writer would have been asked to do exactly what Edwy himself was asked to do. And with, perhaps, even worse results!

No one disputes the fact that the closing years of the Nelson Lee were the 'bad' years. But to those of us who remember the magnificent stories Brooks gave us over a period of many, many years, the quality of these later stories is a matter for regret, not censure. It is very easy indeed for Brooks' critics to pick on stories which he himself must have been the first to admit were 'trash' (but who argues with the hand which writes the cheque?) - if they wish to be fair they should also read the best of his work as well. They would discover that the few months of poor stories and mediocre writing were grandly and gloriously compensated for by the years of writing which preceded them. Years in which no single story ever fell below the standard Brooks himself had set.

Without being unfair to readers of the Magnet I must point out that Charles Hamilton had several substitute writers and that many of his 'fans' are sometimes hard put to it to state which stories were written by Hamilton and which were written by other authors. But there has never been a substitute for Brooks, which I think speaks for itself.

He was a writer who wrote with his heart as well as his pen. And on that score alone it is a great tragedy that the Nelson Lee should have gone out with a whimper instead of a bang.

Before closing I must really express my disapproval (and surprise!) at Frank Unwin's quite unwarranted reference to Jim Cook's 'arrogance.' If it is arrogant to defend one's beliefs - and one's friends - then we must all at some time have been guilty of arrogance. Jim Cook, in my opinion, is the greatest authority I know on the Nelson Lee and on that count only I think he is privileged to 'visit' St. Franks whenever he feels like doing so. It is a pity the privilege cannot be extended to Brooks' critics - they might return a little humbler, if no wiser, from the journey!

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COME-BACK

By Roger M. Jenkins

Norman Pragnell's springing to the defence of a St. Frank's story he has never even read is a fine example of loyalty, not logic. Making two adverse criticisms is, I should think, hardly "pouring out my dislike." If I had wanted merely to pick holes, I could have had a field day: I could have referred to the curious sequence in "The Schemer of St. Franks" where Mr. Pycraft tries to cadge a ride in Travers' new motor launch, or the doubtful humour of an episode when a cricket match ends in a fight and a middle-aged woman gets her hat and wig knocked off. But I was trying to obtain a balanced view, to analyse the good and bad parts and make a fair summing-up. Of course, if you believe there are no bad parts in a St. Frank's story - even in one you have never read - then you are not likely to accept the ordinary rules of literary criticism. Unkind people might even say you were prejudiced.

I apply these rules when I analyse Charles Hamilton's work as well. In No. 209 of C.D., for example, I expressed my reasons for disliking the Bunter books, and in the last Annual I devoted a whole article to Charles Hamilton's faults. There were no heartfelt cries of anguish from Hamilton fans as a result (could it be that they are not so touchy

as some?) but a breath of criticism of a St. Frank's story seems to be considered equivalent to blasphemy in some quarters. I am accused by Norman Pragnell of lacking good taste and being a party to an error of judgement, and my crime is that I used only six words of praise in summing up, when I said that Travers was an attractive character and the story was very readable. Ye God! Do the Lee-ites want nothing but articles dripping with fulsome praise? Perhaps one of the many self-appointed Fuhrers of the Nelson Lee column will lay down a minimum number of words of praise. Perhaps one of these Fuhrers might even write a critical article himself for a change, instead of nagging at those who do.

Curiously enough, although the Nelson Lee column wants nothing but unstinting admiration for Brooks, it has a different set of standards for dealing with Hamilton: here there is no minimum number of words of praise - only a maximum number of disparaging remarks. I have noticed the following comments in recent Nelson Lee Columns:-

- C.D. 198 - Nelson Lee preferable to Magnet and Gem for mystery stories (Cliff Lettley)
- C.D. 199 - Brooks in some respects superior to Hamilton (Alex Parsons)
- C.D. 200 - Brooks altogether a better writer than Hamilton (Ross Story)
- C.D. 203 - Brooks's stories about impersonations better than Hamilton's (H. Chapman)
- C.D. 204 - Billy Bunter, the world's biggest bore (Norman Pragnell)
- C.D. 210 - Bunter never convincing as a ventriloquist (H. Chapman)

These assertions may or may not be true. What is undeniably true is that the Nelson Lee column is full of "knocking copy" disparaging Hamilton, and at the same time any hint of criticism of St. Frank's brings a howl of protest but rarely a reasoned argument in refutation. The Lee fans really cannot have it both ways. Either they accept criticism for both authors on the same terms, or else they give up "knocking" Hamilton altogether. I fancy that the censorious Fuhrers are anxious to fit blinkers on all the writers for the Nelson Lee column, so that in the end it will sink into a cosy glow of euphoria, and the column can be re-named "Let's NOT Be Controversial." I hope for the sake of the Lee fans that this never happens, for then the Column will be as full as ditchwater.

Finally, before anyone else repeats the mistake of Norman Pragnell and Arthur Holland, let me make it clear that I never said that pupils at my school could write Nelson Lee stories. What I did say was that they could write a few paragraphs as good as those quoted by Ross Story when she attempted to prove Brooks was a better writer than Hamilton. Incidentally, I must thank Mrs. Story for her challenging articles. It was her forthright attack which made me think once again about the merits and demerits of St. Frank's and the Nelson Lee.

WHO'S WHO of BOYS' WRITERS
and ILLUSTRATORS

REVIEW

Brian Doyle 15/-

Here, surely, we have the Who's Who to end all Who's Whos. It is a massive piece of work, and excellent. Every well-known name among boys' authors and artists seems to be included, and, so far as we can see, every not-so-well known name as well.

The amount of information given is enormous, and the big charm of the opus is that competence is allied with simplicity. It is easy to read; fully detailed without being complex; the cross references are the last word in efficiency. One can only sit back and wonder at the infinite patience of the compiler, Brian Doyle, who must have put countless hours into the preparation of so giant a Who's Who.

Its only drawback could be that once a collector owns it, the mystery of the men behind the juvenile writing world is a mystery no longer. There is nothing more for which to look. No more should our editorial office be swamped with letters from readers who want to know who, when, and what. But we expect (and hope) that readers will still find something to write about.

Beautifully produced and admirably compiled, this Who's Who is the answer to the prayer of those who like to look behind the printed names of the authors and artists who entertained us as we grew up. It contains hours of pleasant entertainment to go back to again and again.

News from the Clubs

MIDLAND and NORTHERN MEETING

Chesterfield, Sunday, 21st June:

We were favoured with excellent weather for this long-anticipated meeting at the Portland Hotel, Chesterfield, and the attendance of 24 was gratifying, fairly evenly divided between the Midland and Northern Clubs - not forgetting Bill Lofts, who made the long journey from London.

Geoffrey Wilde took the chair, and he had a special word of welcome for Councillor and Mrs. Adams, who had come along as guests of Tom Porter, himself a Councillor. Councillor Adams, who has just completed a year in office as Mayor, spoke of the pleasure he had derived from the old boys books in the days of his youth, and frankly admitted that, although he had met a great many people during his term of office, he had not been aware of the existence of the Old Boys Book Clubs, and was very pleased to learn about us and our aims.

After the speeches and introductions we got down to business with a quiz of 24 questions by Frank Hancock, and this was won by Jack Wood, the prize being a Boys' Friend Library, 'Carden of Cardenshire,' - one of Pentelow's cricketing yarns. Geoffrey Wilde gave a talk about that doughty North-country member of the Famous Five, Johnny Bull. Geoff. took us briefly through Johnny's career at Greyfriars, and concluded with readings from two Magnets - 'Johnny Bull on the Run,' and 'Six Boys in a Boat,' one of the Water Lily series, which appeared in 1939 - the last of the Magnet summers. These illustrated Johnny's qualities of Yorkshire grit and obstinacy, and his reluctance to admit defeat. A most interesting item.

This concluded the set part of the programme, as we had decided to leave plenty of time for discussion, and give members the chance to air their views about various topics. Cecil Ponsobly of Highcliffe proved to be a favourite subject with several people, and the general opinion seemed to be that Pon was a very useful character, as whenever the plot required some more-than-usual dirty work to be done, for which a Greyfriars man would be expelled, Pon, who of course, belonged to that very slack school, Highcliffe, was brought in to do it. Bill Lofts remarked that so far nobody seems to have written an article about Pon.

Harry Broster had a few words about the writings of Brooks and Hamilton, and the adequacy, or otherwise, of Hamilton's descriptions of football and cricket matches; for instance, do we know who is the Remove wicket-keeper? This sparked off an interesting discussion, and it was pointed out that in view of C. H.'s tremendous output of stories about many schools it was not surprising if some inconsistencies crept in. So they do in the works of other authors; Conan Doyle among them.

Ivan Webster than asked, how many expulsions have there been from Greyfriars and St. Jim's? and this produced a bit of head-scratching all round. Jack Corbett remarked that, although all the Hamilton Headmasters were married, the rest of the masters seem to have been bachelors, which was surely an unlikely state of affairs. All this sparked off more discussion and friendly controversy.

There were interesting views from Tom Porter, Geoffrey Wilde, Molly Allison, Jack Bellfield, Harry Broster, Bill Lofts, Jack Corbett, and others, and this took us along very pleasantly to five o'clock, which arrived all too soon. We ended our very enjoyable meeting with a query - who is writing the Bunter books at the moment?

M I D L A N D

Meeting held Tuesday, 30th June '64:

With Tom Porter doing duty as chairman for the first time this year a party of ten enjoyed a happy meeting despite the fact that the first item inflicted on them was a ten question quiz. This was set by myself and was reasonably easy (so I thought) but only George Chatham did any good and he with but two correct. There was better results with the missing letter game arranged by Jack Bellfield. There was a doubt as to who was the most successful so the prize put aside by Jack was transferred to the Raffle run by the Librarian-Chairman. I won this second prize (a B.F.L. by Alfred Edgar) whilst Madge Corbett won the first prize (two B.F.L.) Jack Corbett's item was to be a talk but instead he had selected a few "Gems of Hamiltonia" and these were read for him by his wife. Collectors Item was No. 1 of the Story Paper Collector. Anniversary Number was Magnet No. 490 "The Bounder's Way" - 47 years old. There was a reading from Ted Davey and a discussion introduced by Norman Gregory. During the night there were a few remarks passed about the Chesterfield re-union of the previous week. Generally it was agreed this would have been a highly successful affair had the meals and service by the Portland Hotel staff been of a higher standard. The discussion presided over by Geoff Wilde was very enjoyable and to everyone's taste but the food and service - least said the better. One thing as far as Midland Club was concerned, we had the pleasure of meeting John Mann for the first time. With John Tomlinson putting in an appearance also this helped to make up for the other minor disappointments.

HARRY BROSTER

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N O R T H E R N

Meeting held Saturday, 11th June '64:

Our July meeting attracted an attendance of seventeen, which is very satisfactory indeed for a holiday month, and chairman Geoffrey Wilde expressed pleasure at seeing such a good turn-out for what promised to be a very entertaining evening.

First item in the programme was a piece of prose, set by Frank Hancock, with 45 omissions, all the missing words being names from the old boys books and comics. Molly Allison won this with 31 correct, Gerry being second with 30, and Geoff, third with 28. An interval for refreshments followed, rather shorter than usual as we still had two items to come.

The first of these was the Hamilton Character of the Month, which was the one and only William George Bunter, the choice of Elsie Taylor. As Elsie remarked, it is difficult to say anything about Bunter that has not already been said, but he is certainly the most celebrated character created by Charles Hamilton; his name is a household word the world over, and the name, too, is so exactly right. His faults are legion, but two things at least may be said in his favour; he is not generally malicious, and when he has plenty he likes other fellows to share in the good things. Elsie read extracts from two Magnet stories, one from the 'Black Rock Island' series which told how Tom Redwing and his father rescued Bunter from an open boat, and how Bunter expressed his gratitude in his usual charming manner. The other was from the 'Bunter's Easter Cruise' series, telling how Wibley, at Bunter's request, made him up as a middle-aged Frenchman so that he could go and have a flutter in the casino! This was an excellent example of the depths of Bunter's fatuousness. Altogether a very diverting half-hour.

Jack Allison provided the last item, which was rather out of the ordinary. Jack is something of a Latin scholar, and he remarked that Latin appears to figure very prominently in the curriculum at Greyfriars. We often find Mr. Quelch taking the Remove in Latin, and the author is almost always Virgil. His talk was entitled 'Take Twenty Lines,' the twenty lines being *Aenid XII, 81-100*. Jack took us through them as Mr. Quelch might have done, but with various entertaining asides, and finished with Dryden's translation of the same passage. Unusual and interesting. This took us on nicely to home-time, and, after a brief free-for-all about various topics we departed.

Next Meeting, Saturday, 8th August.

F. HANCOCK, Hon. Sec.

L O N D O N

The August meeting was held at Greyfriars, set amidst the pine trees near Wokingham, Berks. The hosts, Eric and Betty Lawrence, ably assisted by Christine, saw to it that everyone felt at home, and they put on a nice study feed.

Excellent reports were given by both the Hamiltonian and Nelson Lee librarians. Roger Jenkins stated that there were 900 books in circulation, and of these 600 were Magnets. Bob Blythe reported that good progress has been maintained by his section, and that further batches of Nelson Lee catalogues are for sale at 4/- plus 1/- postage. Good progress was indicated by Len Packman in the preparation of the Sexton Blake catalogue.

Brian Doyle had brought along copies of his Who's Who of Authors and Illustrators. At 15/-, post free, this is a must for all collectors. Brian told me that Edinburgh's Museum of Childhood had ordered a copy.

The outing to Margate and Kingsgate on Sept. 13th was discussed and suitable arrangements made.

Our Old Hill member, Tom Porter, had made the long journey to be present and talked on the zest of collecting. He also took part in the discussion on the respective merits of Hamiltonian and Nelson Lee. Roger Jenkins and almost everyone present had their say, and this discussion was voted unanimously as an excellent feature. Between this debate and tea Roger conducted one of his letter quizzes, and Eric Lawrence read 3 chapters from Magnet No. 1087.

Tom Porter proposed a vote of thanks to the hosts for an excellent meeting. With Roger giving lifts to the station for the train travellers, and the other cars driving away, our thoughts were on the prospects of meeting once again at Hume House, East Dulwich, on Sunday, August 16th.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

M E R S E Y S I D EMeeting held Sunday, July 12th:

It was a fine sunny day, the sort of day when we would like to laze on the beach or roam in the country. Certainly not the day for attending a meeting indoors. This must have been how some of our members felt as again the attendance was small. I am not complaining, however, as fine sunny days are so infrequent in this country that I suppose we should make the most of one when it arrives.

Norman gave us the financial report and then dealt with the correspondence. We discussed the new Edgar Wallace monthly which is to be published some time this month and the general feeling was that such a publication was welcome especially after the demise of the S.B.L.

The business part of this meeting was recorded, but owing to the small attendance we decided not to use the second half of the tape until next month when we hope to have a discussion.

After tea I presented a K.O. quiz which was won by Walter Frichard who defeated Pat Laffey in the final.

Norman Pragnell then asked us to name one boys' paper and one comic for every letter of the alphabet. This was won by Bert Hamblett who was able to give 29 names out of a possible (we think) 52. Can anybody think of any boys' books and comics beginning with the letter O, Q and X.

Please note that the next meeting is on Sunday, August 2nd.

BILL WINDSOR

W A N T E D: Magnets No. 829, 873, 875, 882, 884, 888. S.O.L. No. 60.

DR. R. WILSON, 100, BROOMFIELD ROAD, GLASGOW, N.1.

REVIEWEDGAR WALLACE MYSTERY MAGAZINEMicron Publications 2/6

No. 1 of this new monthly magazine is attractive. The format is tip-top, and the plain numbering of the issue will please every collector. Print type is excellent and the paper is of just the right quality and thickness.

Top of the bill is a novelette written by Edgar Wallace way back in the roaring twenties. Less sexy and less violent than the run of modern tales of the class - and none the worse for that - it is made all the more interesting by the breath of nostalgia which it carries.

Arthur Kent's story of smuggling is good and unusual. It would have been even more unusual and no less good if Clark hadn't spent some time beneath one sheet with Janice, the touch of whose lips was a soft, tingling electric shock. Martin Thomas contributes a short, straightforward thriller which will please readers, and Vern Hansen's story has so many characters that it is a mystery indeed. A neat little item by Rex Dolphin is welcome, and Arthur Kent also presents a feature in which he re-tells a real-life crime story, in this case one from America. We hope he remembers that there are some English real-life crimes which are worth the re-telling. The public never tires of them.

Altogether, EMM is a palatable meal for the casual purchaser. A good "resident" detective, not ultra-modern, would be an obvious asset so far as older readers are concerned.

We welcome this new periodical. It has started well. We wish it long life and every success.

*The
Postman
called*

(Interesting Items from The
Editor's Letter-bag)

TOM DOBSON (Australia): Tom Dutton was a brilliant ice skater. He beat Dick Trumper in a long-distance race on the Sark. Get out your old Red Magnets and read No. 369.

CHARLES BAKER (Caernarvon): I enjoyed the July issue as much as ever, although I would like to have read again about Mr. Buddle. However, I can understand that it is not possible for you to give us a Buddle treat every month.

VICTOR J. GONZALEZ (Barcelona): It might seem strange that a foreigner should show interest in the Magnet. The fact is that my education was strongly marked by things British and for sentimental reasons I like to have in my study a token of what, to me, was a very dear and wholesome period.

REG SANDERSON (Sheffield): I believe the story referred to by M. Hall of Penryn was entitled "Coming of Doom." I do not know the author, but the illustrations showed creatures like skeletons with wings. It was in the days that the Boy's Mag featured Falcon Swift, the monocled man-hunter, and a greatly protracted "blood-dripping" serial by John Hunter entitled "The Unseen Terror," where Harker, the Blackguard King of Heuston "lolloped and lifted" round the town, terrifying everybody.

JOHN TOMLINSON (Burton-on-Trent): Is it wise, as some seem to do, to limit one's reading

to only Old Boys' Books? Surely to mix in with them more adult reading adds enjoyment to the hobby. My own other forms of reading are Sherlock Holmes, solving Dickens "Mystery of Edwin Drood," and modern translations of the scriptures. A strange medley, did you say?

DEREK SMITH (Clapham Park): I was interested to read in C.D. about Raffles. I remember reading the Key Man stories in the first Sexton Blake Annual and "The A.R.P. Mystery" in the S.B. Library, though I must have missed "Sexton Blake versus Raffles" and "Raffles' Crime in Gibraltar." I have never seen the Raffles series in the Thriller, which incidentally, was one of my favourite papers, mainly due to Norman Conquest.

R.F. ACRAMAN (Harrow): I really mean it when I say that C.D. and C.D. Annual are even better than the Gem and Magnet, for they take off where those papers stop, and wander through the lanes of memory recalling so many cherished items long forgotten. I refer to Chips, Casey Court, Bottles & Co, the office boys, the Funny Wonder, Comic Cuts, not to mention the more serious stories in the S.O.L., B.F.L., Bullseye, Ranger, Pilot, Champion, and so on. What a nostalgic merry-go-round!

HARRY DOWLER (Stockport): I should like to add my voice to Laurice Sutton's in question of the authenticity of Bill Lofts' official records. In July C.D. Bill Lofts states that official records give Gordon Carr and W. J. Bayfield as being two distinct individuals.

It was I who gave to Herbert Leckenby, many many years ago, the information that they were one and the same person. Moreover, it happens to be correct, no matter what "official records" say. I think I may, without unduly inflating my chest, say that I know the writing of W. J. Bayfield, who wrote chiefly under the name of Allen Blair. I have been reading him all my life, ever since I was a boy of 12, and I know his plots, styles of writing, mannerisms, etc., as well as anybody could be expected to know a writer. To make doubly sure, however, I have read very carefully "Behind Prison Walls" by Gordon Carr, and "Sentenced for Life" by Allan Blair, and if these two stories are not written by the same author, then all I can say is I must be getting very weak in the head in my old age.

KENNETH KIRBY (Untata): I should like to go on record as finding Reg Sanderson's "Flashback" one of the best things to appear in the Nelson Lee Column since I have been reading the Digest.

 Annuals: Boys Own, Scout, Chums, Champion, Radio Fun, Greyfriars Holiday, Tom Brown's Schooldays,
 My Friend Smith (T. B. Reid), Champion Libraries, Boys Friend Libraries, Buffalo Bill, Boys Realm Football Library, Dick Turpin, Silver Jacket, Boys Magazine, Scout, Boys of England (1874), Young Britain, The Boys Journal, The Marvel, Vanguard, Popular, Modern Boy (featuring Captain Justice stories), Detective Weekly, Thriller, Pluck, Dreadnought, The Sports Library, True Blue, The Captain, Chums, Greyfriars Herald, Australian Comics, Boys Fun Paper, Modern Wonder, Express, Boys Friend, Champion, Boys Realm, Boys Best, Scoop, Modern World, The Startler, Rover and Adventure, Lion, Valiant & Knockout, Fantastic Adventure, Weird Tales, American Detectives, American Startling Detective, American True Police, American Old Time Western, Do It Yourself (Hobbyists), Homemaker (Hobbyists), Donald Duck, Pix, People, Post, Readers Digest, Condensed Books, Boys World, Look & Learn, Knowledge, Hotspur, Knockout, Eagle, Scout. (200 card) Cigarette Album, Parade & Blighty, 2 to 300 paper backs, etc. FOR EXCHANGE ONLY: Advertiser, in order of preference seeks: Monster Libraries, Magnets, S.B.O.L., Bullseyes, English Comics, etc.

FRANK L. KNOTT, 62, BRITANNIA STREET, PETONE, WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND.

SORRY, AUSTRALIA! Owing to the postal dispute, we did not receive the Australian meeting report in time for inclusion in this issue.