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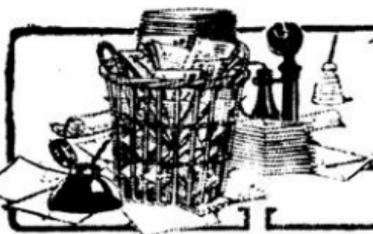
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A Word from the SKIPPER

On the Subject of Facts—and Fiction.

SEX - AND THE SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY

During June I received from Mr. Stanley Smith of Ipswich a long letter which contained a strong attack upon the policy of the new Sexton Blake Library. The following are a few extracts, taken out of context, from Mr. Smith's letter:

"I was so sure that the June issue of C.D. would contain - in the correspondence columns, in Blakiana, and in the Editorial - severe condemnation of the excesses of the Sexton Blake Library. I even had an idea that there might be an announcement that C.D. was going to cease publishing reviews or giving further publicity to the Sexton Blake Library.... As I have said, I was so very certain that others would feel the same as I do and that 'The Witches of Notting Hill' would prove to be the last straw.... The accent on sex and the latent sadism of so many of the stories has been a disturbing feature.... Only a few years ago, 'The Witches of Notting Hill' would have been banned, I am sure, and rightly so."

Mr. Smith has been a good friend of mine for a long time, he has been a keen supporter of Collectors' Digest since its very early days, and he is a knowledgeable member of our clan. His opinions are valuable, and carry weight. On the other hand, a large number of our readers buy the S.B.L. every month, and take a big interest in its future. To sweep the modern Blake from our pages would be something we could not do unless the majority of our Blake readers felt that

such a thing was justified.

Mr. Smith's guns were trained mainly on "The Witches of Notting Hill." Our reviewer, Mr. Walter Webb, considered this story in our April issue. His comments were not exactly favourable to it, but he clearly did not regard it as objectionable. I asked Mr. Webb for his further views, in the light of Mr. Smith's criticism, and his answer will be found in our "The Postman Called" column.

Mr. Smith criticised the story for the use of certain strong expressions. He says: "This is, to the best of my knowledge, the first time that such words have been used in the S.B.L." Though it may be unrealistic to expect denizens of the underworld to be very choice in the expressions they use, the fact remains that the S.B.L. has got along very well in the past without swearing.

I had not read the story myself, although a good many copies passed through my hands on their way to readers. After receiving Mr. Smith's letter, I obtained a copy and have now read it.

The story itself was not my cup of tea, but it struck me as innocuous. I, personally, found it inoffensive, and I do not understand Mr. Smith's view that it would have been banned a few years ago. It may be that some of my readers will agree with Mr. Smith and not with me. Certainly a number have criticised the new S.B.L. for sexiness, and there is clearly some disappointment that the promises of the advance publicity do not seem to have been carried out entirely.

I have read about half a dozen of the new series, and each of them contains some sexy element. I do not like sexy reading, but my view is that there has been nothing very heinous. One important point which I think we should bear in mind is that the new S.B.L. never glorifies immorality - something which, unhappily, is done in so many modern tales. Blake is kept on his pedestal, as he should be, and Tinker, despite a yearning for redheads which has become rather a stale joke, is still the loyal, plucky fellow upon whom any youngster can model himself without going far wrong.

The authors clearly introduce a certain sexiness because they know that this age of ours tends to like that sort of thing.

Our age is not declining because it likes tough, sex stories, but it likes tough, sex stories because it is declining. The Bond affairs have had enormous sales, and people are hypnotised into believing that what is successful must be good.

Despite the success of tough, shuddery tales, I still believe that good, clean stories will always sell well. A dirty play will draw large numbers of people to a theatre admittedly. But an Agatha Christie play has been running in London for 13 years, so there must

still be plenty of folk who prefer something apart from smut.

I regard the sexy items in the new S.B.L. as mild, but whether there is wisdom in including them in most stories is a question. Those who get a kick out of tough, sexy tales will be unlikely to buy Sexton Blake in any case. And for any who do, the sex element in the S.B.L. is not strong enough to titillate the addicts. Yet there is the risk that it may be too strong for the many who remember and love the old Blake. The S.B.L. has to be careful that it does not slip between two stools.

I suggest to my readers that we be not too hasty to condemn. We were all happy and grateful to Mr. Howard Baker for working to bring about the return of an old paper which we loved. His task is no easy one in these days when the market is glutted with an ever-increasing stream of paperbacks. I am certain that he is trying to please the old brigade within the limits of a hard market. Pedro has come back with a bang. Tinker is starting to address Blake as "guv'nor" now and then. These things all show a trend in what we think the right direction.

After all, only ten stories have been issued so far. Early days, I think, to be too critical. I believe that Mr. Howard Baker will not let the sex element get out of hand and that as time goes on we shall find plenty of Blake stories in which it is missing entirely.

ANOTHER ANNUAL:

Preparations are now in hand for Collectors' Digest Annual, 1965 edition. Each of our gallant band of contributors is asked to don his or her thinking cap to give us a nice flood of articles in our usual profuse variety. Even now our printers are getting to work setting up some of the finest articles we have ever presented from our star writers.

While I think of it, our monthly Blakiana and Nelson Lee columns are getting starved for material. We rely on YOU.

It is not possible this month to give further details of the forthcoming C.D. Who's Who, but we promise you that it will be in hand within a month or two.

THE EDITOR.

Books and magazines beautifully bound in leather or buckram by expert craftsmen, at reasonable prices. Repairs also carried out.

A. WESSELY, 22 MONMOUTH ROAD, LONDON, W.2. ENGLAND.

HAMILTONIANA

DO YOU REMEMBER?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 54 - The Rookwood Caravanning Series

Rookwood was very often used by Charles Hamilton as a testing ground for themes that were later put into effect at St. Jim's and Greyfriars. The idea of a long holiday series was certainly a novel one in 1918, but its highly successful reception must have had a great deal to do with the 1919 series in the Gem and the 1921 series in the Magnet.

It is difficult to say just how out of date a horse and caravan holiday was in 1918, though such a thing would have been common enough a decade earlier. One has a sneaking suspicion, however, that Charles Hamilton's descriptions of country ways (such as farm labourers working in smocks) were always a little old-fashioned, always looking back nostalgically towards a happier past. But even if such a caravan holiday was not out of date in 1918, it certainly seems a little strange that such a holiday should have been taken at all towards the end of a long and bitter war.

There is no trace of war-weariness in the story, however, for it bubbles over with high spirits and humorous situations. The Fistical Four and Tubby Muffin set off in one caravan, whilst the three Tommies and Sergeant Kettle set off in another. Their paths crossed more than once, and they even joined forces for a while. An amusing addition to their number was Clarence Cuffy, going from one caravan to another, and causing untold mischief from the very best of motives. Another chance companion was Billy Bunter, sly and detestable as he was at this time, but still capable of entertaining the readers with his outrageous habits and customs.

The series was reprinted in No. 202 of the Schoolboys' Own Library, appropriately entitled "The Rookwood Gipsies." Most of the war situations were omitted, though an incident referring to spies in a prohibited coastal area was retained, as was a mention of war bread. But if these references puzzled any of the readers in 1933, it is unlikely that they would have spoiled the story, which still retains the freshness and charm it possessed when it was first written nearly half a century ago.

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIALNO. 89. WHEN IN DOUBT ---

It has been said that a precept of the author or the editor, or maybe both, was "When in doubt, run a barring-out!" I am not quite sure who said it. It may even have been that I myself made the suggestion. Whether there is any truth in it I do not know, but I think it likely. Barrings-out were always popular.

I do not recall ever being particularly keen myself on barring-out series, even when I was a lad. The risk of tales of this type was that the author might lose control of the story. Restraint was necessary if the plot was not to develop into slapstick. To my way of thinking, it was only in his barring-out series that Charles Hamilton tended, now and then, to let the rein go a trifle too slack.

The barring-out theme became hackneyed with the passing of time. Looking back on the many Hamilton barring-out series it becomes obvious that one may stand above the other chiefly if there was some novel twist somewhere. Most of them followed very much a set pattern.

For many years the Magnet's most famous story was "Bob Cherry's Barring-Out" and even now it is probably the most famous of all the red cover stories. It could hardly fail to be popular in its day. It was the last tale of a series in which the Bounder determined to rid Greyfriars of Mark Linley and all the Famous Five in turn. He was successful till he came to Bob Cherry - and Bob refused to go. The result was "Bob Cherry's Barring-Out." The actual barring-out only took up a few chapters of the tale, though it introduced a number of the familiar features, even unto P.C. Tozer on a ladder.

This barring-out was a terrific climax. The barring-out had never been obvious throughout the series. The course of events had never been predictable over many weeks during which the heroes of the stories got the worst of things and the reader got more and more worked up and the excitement grew. Then, out of the blue, came the barring-out.

This sort of thing was on very different lines from the Brander Barring-Out of two decades later. Few would question that this was the greatest barring-out series of them all. For one thing, it was quite a long time since Greyfriars had seen a barring-out. But most important of all, it was written when the author was at the peak of his powers. It was a contrived series. Right from the start it was obvious that a barring-out was coming. Yet it was a smashing success simply because it was so magnificently written.

Some 13 years before Brander, there had been the Judge Jeffreys series, and that, in my view, set the Magnet on its path to being the world's greatest school story paper. Here we had a series with many striking side-shows - the sort of thing which set a series apart from being run-of-the-mill. There was the new Head whose name alone linked him in the minds of the boys with a tyrant of history. There was his German henchman. Before the barring-out started we saw the exciting and fascinating Greyfriars Inquisition, a gem of a secret society. But the Head had the ace of trumps - the power of expulsion - and it was that power which finally brought about the barring-out. As in the case of Bob Cherry's barring-out, the barring-out was the climax and not the main plot. It was all the better for it.

Only a few years after Brander came the rebellion which resulted in a barring-out on Popper's Island. This was in defence of, of all people, Bunter. It was made notable by the fact that Mr. Quelch sympathised with the rebels. His clashes with Prout were a delight to read. It was Quelch alone who made this a fairly memorable series.

Later came the Hacker barring-out. And this, so far as I was concerned, was a failure though the opening story was excellent. As the barring-out theme grew more hackneyed with repetition, so restraint on the part of the author seemed to grow less.

There was one other barring-out in the Magnet. In a 3-story series in 1922, Sir Hilton Popper persuaded Dr Locke to resign, and a Dr. Carnforth was appointed in his place. The novelty of this series was that it was the seniors who rebelled, but it was unremarkable and is seldom referred to to-day.

The first Hamilton barring-out in any of the three famous schools occurred in the Gem: "The Great Barring-Out at St. Jim's." This was a first-class story. Whether it would have been improved if extended to a series, as it certainly would have been years later, is a question.

The only big barring-out at St. Jim's took place over Christmas 1922. Charles Hamilton was writing splendid stories for the Gem at that time, and this one was no exception. Tom Merry was expelled for theft - and the barring-out resulted. I guess that readers of the time may have felt that Christmas was no time for barrings-out. Roger Jenkins has suggested that the plot was marred by the fact that the thief was an outsider - someone who happened along to commit the theft and who happened, eventually, to be caught in contrived circumstances. Roger is right, of course. My own objection to the series is the mammoth scale on which it was staged, with hundreds of boys joining in. The novel twist was provided by Bunter, who joined the rebels, and

then tried to sell them to Dr. Holmes.

Rookwood provided the first barring-out series. Mr. Manders took charge of Rookwood under heavily contrived circumstances, and the juniors barred-out in the tuckshop. Early in 1922 another barring-out occurred, once more owing to Mr. Manders taking charge. Here we had another marred Christmas. Quite unbelievably, the boys had to stay at school over Christmas, owing to an epidemic, and before the school re-opened for the new term, the barring-out took place.

A third Rookwood barring-out took place in the Spring of 1924 when the boys barred-out on the river island in protest against the dismissal of Mr. Dalton. But there was nothing exceptional in any barring-out at Rookwood.

It is interesting to examine the causes of the various rebellions. Bob Cherry barred out to prevent himself being expelled. The Jeffries, Carnforth, and Brander series told of rebellions against new Headmasters with over-strict tendencies. Injustice to Tom Merry, Billy Bunter, and Mr. Dalton, respectively, was the reason for three more. I, personally, am least happy about rebellions against permanent masters given additional authority. Presumably these masters were first-class men in their own sphere, or they would never have held permanent posts in the schools. True, a man like Hacker might be a good form-master and still make a bad Head. But it is unlikely that he would have carried on quite as he did, bringing the school into revolt. Which, of course, is carping criticism. Without this kind of contrivance there might have been no story. All the same, I think I would prefer the type of barring-out which resulted from some form of injustice and in which both sides thought themselves to be in the right.

Into the latter category would come the High Oaks series, which, though not strictly speaking a barring-out, was certainly a rebellion. This one, like Brander, came in the high summer of Hamilton's powers, and it could not fail to be a success. The weakness of the story was that it seemed improbable that the Head would have sacked Quelch without telling him the reason, but the reader, enjoying a magnificent-ly-written series, overlooked any basic improbabilities. With part of this story, the author set out to entertain his younger readers. The more discriminating reader would have dispensed with Ponsonby's disguise as a bogus Head, and preferred another couple of stories with Mr. Quelch settled in as monarch of High Oaks.

Which was the best of them? My own choice would be Brander, Jeffries, and Tom Merry, without any doubt, and in that order, but if

High Oaks was included as coming under the barring-out heading, that would certainly figure in the first three.

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CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 87. THE BLOT

ROGER JENKINS:

I am not so sure that I agree with you about the carbon copy characters being a blot at St. Jim's. Grundy, yes: he was, as I said some time ago, nothing but an unmitigated nuisance, without any redeeming features that made Coker so likeable. As for Trimble, I have mixed feelings. Charles Hamilton told me that he tried to give Trimble characteristics that differentiated him from Bunter, and that most of the differences turned out badly for him. But don't forget that Bunter was quite detestable until the late nineteen-twenties, too, and so I don't think there was really very much to choose between them until then. Furthermore, Trimble appeared in some very funny stories, like Truthful Trimble, Trimble's Leaving Sale, and the second Trimble Tries it on. He was often useful in furthering the plot of some quite dramatic series, like the one about Cousin Ethel's banknote. So I think, on the whole, my vote would be in favour of Bagley Trimble.

I should disagree with you most strongly, however, on the point of Cardew, whom you do not mention, but who was, after all, a carbon copy of the Caterpillar, with some of the blackguardly traits of Vernon-Smith. In my opinion, the Gem's cast of characters was never greater than it was after his arrival. The finest period of stories was undoubtedly in the time of the Blue Gem, but the most mature and promising era was the early and middle twenties when Charles Hamilton had assembled his finest cast of characters for the Sussex school.

GEORGE SELLARS: I agree with you. The transfer of characterisation was a blot on the fair name of the Gem whose pride and dignity suffered down the years from such characters as Grundy, Trimble, Manners Minor, and Racke. Racke, who took over from Levison, was not a success.

ERIC FAYNE adds: The question of Cardew never occurred to me in connection with "The Blot." Mr. Jenkins is certainly right. Cardew was based on the Caterpillar. But surely he was hardly a carbon copy. It seems likely that Charles Hamilton saw in the Caterpillar possibilities which could never be exploited owing to his infrequent appearances and so decided to develop the character at St. Jim's. But the Caterpillar always struck me as far more gentle, kindlier, and more lovable

than Cardew, which is probably why I did not link the two together in my mind.

The fact that Bunter and Trimble were each detestable in their day is rather beside the point. But I would certainly agree that the stories quoted were first-class, and Trimble may well have been worthwhile for these alone.

GEMS OF HAMILTONIA No. 21 (New Series)

"I leave this morning, sir," said Mr. Quelch with bitter sarcasm. "I have already telephoned for a car. I presume that you did not expect me to be gone already," His voice was bitterness itself.

"The Remove are in a state of rebellion, sir!" rapped the Head.

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed!"

"That does not concern me, sir, as I am no longer master of that form!" said Mr. Quelch icily.

"It does concern you, sir," said the Head. "I do not suggest that you have intentionally disseminated trouble in your late form --" Mr. Quelch's eyes flamed.

"Sir!"

"I repeat, I make no such suggestion," said the Head. "Nevertheless, it is a fact that the Remove are utterly out of hand on the morning of your departure, sir."

"And I repeat that does not concern me, Dr. Locke!"

"No doubt you are unaware of the cause assigned by your boys - your late boys, I should say - for their outrageous conduct this morning."

"I am quite unaware of anything that may have happened in the Remove, or any other form at Greyfriars."

"Then I will tell you, sir!" rapped out the Head.

"I am not interested, sir," retorted Mr. Quelch.

"The Remove," pursued the Head, unheeding, "have ejected a prefect from their Form-room, and locked the door against me!"

Mr. Quelch smiled satirically.

Certainly he did not approve of indiscipline. It was against all his principles.

At the same time it was not wholly displeasing to him to learn that his dismissal had been followed by trouble.

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

27, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22

IN AND AROUND BAKER STREET (7)

by Walter Webb

BEST OF A DECADE

The Sexton Blake stories have been published over a period of seven decades, and for one who has had the interest, the time, and the necessary patience to have read through the stories of each era, it is a most relaxing experience to select and write down which author in the opinion of the writer was the most accomplished chronicler of the Blake stories in each given decade.

1893 - 1900 inclusive. The field was sparse in this period, and of the nine authors who compiled Blake's adventures, the two best known were Harry Blyth, the originator of the character, and William Shaw Rae, who took over Blake immediately Blyth sold the copyright. I suppose that in the views of those who remember them Blyth and Shaw Rae would jointly head the list of first favourites in such a poll; but, although they would certainly figure in my first three, neither would qualify for first place. My particular favourite Blake author for this era was JULIAN ROCHEFORT, who wrote some really good yarns, but of whom, unfortunately, far too little was heard. He disappeared before the penny numbers came out in 1903, and was lost to the Blake papers for ever more.

Few authors set their stories in Birmingham, but Rochefort wrote a good one, which, starting in the Bull Ring, moved across the city, down Snow Hill, up Constitution Hill, and thence into Staffordshire. Those were the days when the old electric trams used to go clanging and swaying from side to side down the cobbled decline of Snow Hill, with the driver struggling manfully at the controls as he sought to bring the heaving juggernaut to a stop at the junction of Snow Hill and Constitution Hill. This was invariably achieved with a screaming of brakes hastily applied, and, no doubt, to feminine screams from the more nervously disposed passengers as added accompaniment. Transport in those days was conspicuous only by its lack of comfort to all and by its abundance of terror to the aged.

The author is probably dead now, but in the unlikely event of his

still being alive and being persuaded to visit the setting of his story, he would doubtless stand in awe at what has taken place in the Bull Ring and Snow Hill, neither of which are recognisable from pre-war days. The old Bull Ring, which Allan Blair and one or two other old-timers mentioned on occasion in their yarns, has totally disappeared, whilst Snow Hill has been entirely transformed. The treacherous, cobbled decline of Mr. Rochefort's day has disappeared, to be replaced by a broader, leveller surface, and gone too are the row of shops which stretched from one end of the Hill to the other. In the modern Y.M.C.A. building at the foot of the hill on the left-hand side, the author would recognise nothing at all of the old Metropole Theatre which once stood on the same site and which projected a number of the first ever Sexton Blake silent films. A matter of no little sadness is occasioned to this particular contributor in that a little theatrical costumiers situated only a few yards from the old picture palace has disappeared too in the redevelopment of the area. This tiny establishment, with its assortment of costume-pieces, its tubes of various greasepaints, masks, and all the accoutrements essential to the professional actor, always reminded me of Lewis Jackson's famous character, Leon Kestrel, the Master-mummer, when, during the 1920's, I used to pass it regularly and not once without pausing to gaze fascinated at the grotesque contents in the window.

1901 - 1910 inclusive. Many new authors were enrolled during this period, the record books showing such names as Graydon, Goddard, Gannon, Home-Gall, Hayter, Lomax, Pearson, Hardy, Treeton, Bridges, Alais, and several others. But the best work of this decade came, in my opinion, from Michael Storm, Cicely Hamilton, W. J. Bayfield, and a writer we know as G. Carr. Michael Storm, either under that name or Ernest Sempill, still very much the mystery man of the Blake saga, came along with some really outstanding yarns, such as "The Man From Scotland Yard," "The Mervyn Mystery," and - above all - "The Master Anarchist," and on the strength of these, he was, to my mind, the top Blake writer of the period. The latter story, a most remarkable narrative, was certainly among the best ever published in the U.J., and featured at least four members of the Royal Family, a practice that was frowned heavily upon in certain circles and soon to be discouraged altogether as the inclination by other writers to introduce other well-known public figures into their stories grew to a pitch where protests were made, and quite rightly so.

1911 - 1920 inclusive. In this period many of the better known old favourites were introduced for the first time - Brooks, Murray

(Andrew and Robert), Bobin, Teed, Staniforth, Lewis, Drew, Skene, Poole, Quiroule, Hill, etc., and of the series running during this era, none were so popular as those which featured Yvonne, Kestrel, and the Criminals' Confederation. In fact, my choice of author for this period rested between Murray, Teed, and Lewis. Although a Teed fan, I was never particularly impressed by his early work during the process of his development as a writer. On the other hand, although Murray was writing the Confederation stories with vigour and enthusiasm (which was soon to leave him altogether and never be recovered), I found the Kestrel stories by far the better written, the more solidly constructed and original of them all.

1921 - 1930 inclusive. Some scintillating yarns by Gwyn Evans were a feature of this decade, which was marked also by some fine work by Gilbert Chester, another newcomer; but, undoubtedly, the author of this period in the history of the Blake Saga was G. H. Teed. It was during the 20's that Teed reached his zenith, and many of his stories for the U.J. at that time, superbly illustrated by E. R. Parker and brilliantly cover-designed by editor, Harold Twyman, were memorable efforts in an era notable for some very fine series of stories. And the characters? Who can forget them - Mr. Mist, Dr. Satira, Paul Cynos, Zenith the Albino, The Three Musketeers, Hanssen the Moonslayer, Granite Grant, Nirvana, Wu Ling, Gunga Dass, Prince Menes, and many others. Teed was faced with strong competition here, but such was the quality of his penmanship then that he was, in my view, the top Blake writer of what became to be referred to as the roarin' twenties.

1931 - 1940 inclusive. With the shutting down of the U.J. and a substantial decrease in the number of Blake stories published as a result, there was a noticeable decline in the quality of the contents of the S.B.L. G. H. Teed came toppling from his high pedestal with a crash following some uninspired stories, due, no doubt, to failing health, and with nearly all the old hands falling like nine-pins at the wayside, it was left to the newcomers to keep Blake's flag flying. Of them the more accomplished were John G. Brandon, Rex Hardinge, Gerald Verner, Warwick Jardine, and Anthony Parsons. I liked Parsons' work at this juncture, and considered him the most promising of the bunch, though Chester, despite the shortcomings of his old colleagues, was still writing extremely well, and was, in my opinion, presenting Blake stories of a consistently higher level than anyone else, and so, for my money, was top writer of the 1931-40 period.

1941 - 1950 inclusive. In numbers the Blake author was diminished to a mere handful by now. John Hunter, Anthony Parsons, John

Drummond, Gilbert Chester, Rex Hardinge, Lewis Jackson, and Walter Tyrer were the seven men responsible for the yearly output of 24 novels then being published. Hunter, but a pale shadow of his THRILLER days, was often disappointing, as was Drummond, though, on the whole, the average novel in this decade was of a somewhat higher level than in the previous one, due largely to the first-rate work of Anthony Parsons, who, in contrast to John Hunter, improved on his THRILLER assignments. The author from the Midlands was responsible for a number of really well thought out brain-teasers, or who-dun-its, - by no means the easiest sort of story to write, - and the quality of his work generally was such that I have no hesitation in naming him my favourite author of the era.

1951 - 1960 inclusive. Midway through this period the S.B.L. underwent a completely new look. It was a purge from which neither Blake nor his authors emerged unscathed. The old hands almost to a man were made redundant, and a completely new team of writers took over. Narration, often uninspired, took on a new lease of life, was more forceful, more dynamic. Not always with the best results either, for individuality went by the board, and, in most instances, one author's style tended to become very much like another's. One felt that a brake was needed occasionally to slow down proceedings a little. Martin Thomas supplied this curb with a more casual approach to prove that speed was not so much the essence of a good story as a flair for the slow dramatic build-up, which, in fact, is the sort of climax Mr. Thomas is so much a pastmaster in the art of.

Selecting the author of this decade was the hardest job of the lot - there were so many really good stories by the different members of the team, and I cannot decide between the dynamic Mr. Howard Baker and the more sedate Mr. Thomas as to which of the two presented the more consistently good stories, so, perforce, must settle for a draw and bracket their names together as being, in my opinion, the best joint authors of Sexton Blake in this decade.

Sexton Blake in TIT-BITS

It was in May 1940 that the run of Blake's weekly appearances ended with the closing down of DETECTIVE WEEKLY. Now, to the very month exactly 25 years later he resumes, if briefly, his weekly run. The absorbing of the longest running detective character in the history of publishing into the pages of one of Britain's most popular and widely read family papers, which goes even farther back into the past than Blake himself, was an excellent idea. The choice of story

serialised may give rise to criticism, but was an obvious one since it conforms to the general run of TIT-BITS serials which for many years past have had the emphasis on glamour, with real life models posing for the illustrations. Incidents in the story, "The Girl Who Saw Too Much," reprinted from S.B.L. No. 524, published in May 1963, certainly give ample opportunity for photographs of the type set out on the front cover of TIT-BITS heralding the opening instalment of the serial.

Of late Blake has enjoyed some good publicity. There are signs that his sponsors are really bucking up their ideas in the way of advertising his existence. They have really run riot in splashing his name in bold headlines in such close proximity to an eye-catching teen-ager fetchingly attired in baby doll pyjamas, but all credit to them for their enterprise. If they want Blake to be read by the youth of today, then these are the methods to use to attract them.

(continued)

DIGEST CONTRIBUTOR FEATURED IN SAINT MAGAZINE

The July issue of The Saint Mystery Magazine (3/-) will be of particular interest to Collectors' Digest readers owing to the fact that it features a lengthy article, "The Real Robin Hood," by our famous research specialist, W. O. G. Lofts. Mr. Lofts' article looks at every facet of the famous outlaw, and it makes fascinating reading for everyone. The amount of study and research which has gone into the article is breathtakingly clear.

In support of Bill Lofts' article are stories by Leslie Charteris, Norman Daniels, R. Austin Freeman, Louis Vance, and one-time Blake writer, Barry Perowne. Indeed a dainty dish to set before a king.

FOR SALE: Comics - Chips, Comic Cuts, Comic Life, and others (1915-19, - 38).

GEOFFREY HARRISON, 20 HOWARD ROAD, TARADALE, HAWKE BAY, NEW ZEALAND

WANTED: "Magnets" 1555, 1577-1582, 1246, 1255-1259. Fit for binding.

MOOR HOUSE, LANGLEY AVENUE, BINGLEY, YORKS.

~ NELSON LEE COLUMN

CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD

A LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S

* * *

BY JIM COOK

I have decided this month to take time off and send you the following report which appeared in the Bannington Gazette.

"ST. FRANK'S GOES TO LONDON"

"Today, the great college of St. Frank's stands silent and empty. The famous Triangle where the boys gathered daily to let off steam is as quiet as a grave. No sound disturbs the cathedral calm that hovers over the various Houses for even the domestic quarters are without the tinkling and clatter of dishes being prepared for meals. The big main gates are closed and a sleeping stillness hangs over the entire school.

The whole of the scholastic staff and every domestic have forsaken St. Frank's for the bright lights of London Town. The great exodus left Bellton yesterday, June 15th, in special trains for the great city where they will be attending the Golden Jubilee celebrations held in honour of Mr. Nelson Lee, the famous schoolmaster-detective.

The boys had left the school the previous day on their journey to London thus alleviating the position at Bellton station.

Lord Dorrimore, an old boy of St. Frank's, together with many other famous names associated with the world famous college, are mainly responsible for this huge party gathering. Lord Dorrimore's friendship with Nelson Lee began just fifty years ago and the famous sporting peer has made one mighty invitation to all those people whom Mr. Lee chooses to call his friends.

It was a gigantic task to absorb into one party all friends and associates of Mr. Lee but Dorrie - as he is known to his closest friends - was equal to it. And yesterday London was invaded by about six hundred people who made their way to the Albert Hall to see the beginning of the celebrations. There speeches will be read, songs will be sung and titles conferred today by various famous heads of departments.

The people of Bannington and surrounding districts are honoured to be associated with Mr. Nelson Lee and St. Frank's. Eminent towns-

people of Bannington are conspiring together to give as good if not as powerful a celebration as that held in London when our own Jubilee arrives in just over two years' time. Meanwhile we greatly enjoy the reflected glory that is being bestowed upon this great man. For although London may claim Nelson Lee today we shall claim him tomorrow for he really belongs here. It was here that he found refuge and friends at a time of danger.

After leaving the Albert Hall at the end of the various ceremonies the party will split up and depart for the many ancestral homes that have been thrown open to them by Lord Dorrimore and his friends.

While it is commonplace to see such crowds descend on London this must surely rank as the biggest party connected with one movement to be held at the Albert Hall since the war. But behind the jollification an element of danger was observed by the appearance at every point in the great Hall of plain clothes police.

Our London correspondent reports that shortly before it was announced in the press that this large gathering was being held at the Albert Hall to commemorate Nelson Lee's fifty years association with Lord Dorrimore in June, a piece of metal in the form of a green triangle had been received by Nelson Lee at St. Frank's College. Similar green triangles had been sent to the assistant commissioner at Scotland Yard, Lord Dorrimore and the office of the World Press Association. A note had been wrapped in each which stated that Nelson Lee would take his final bow at the Albert Hall. And the note was signed Professor Zingrave."

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Since it would take up too much valuable space continuing this press report I will try and give you a full account of that wonderful week when we celebrated Nelson Lee's Golden Jubilee of friendship with Dorrie. But it may take some time to write it up, and so I've decided to set down in full detail from beginning to end the full story which I hope to be published at the end of the year.

The threat of Professor Zingrave was no idle one for he really did try and kill Lee in the Albert Hall. But it was mainly the actions of six seniors and six juniors who had been detailed to guard the famous detective from St. Frank's to London that Lee is safe to return to St. Frank's.

* * * * *

A SUBTLE DIFFERENCE

By R. J. Godsave

A constant reader of the Nelson Lee Library could hardly be unaware of a subtle difference in the character of the Handforth of the old series, and the Handforth of the new.

Whereas Bunter mellowed with the passing years in the Magnet, so the reverse happened to Handforth in the Nelson Lee.

The lovable, reckless and obstinate junior developed a streak of arrogance when he came to dominate the Nelson Lee, which was not one of his characteristics in the old series.

The relationship between Handforth and his chums was not so closely knit as in the past. With Handforth being brought to the foreground, so Church and McClure receded into the background. Although they appeared with Handforth in the new series stories they were shadows of their former selves.

This streak of arrogance overrode the stirring qualities of Handforth's nature which were allowed to emerge as they did in the Death of Walter Church series.

If Handforth could not see anything with his own eyes it did not exist. This explains his loyalty and blind faith in the innocence of any of his friends who were unfortunate to fall into disgrace through the machination of others.

With Handforth becoming more and more a dominant character in the new series, it was perhaps inevitable that such a change must follow.

WANTED: Good loose copies or bound volumes containing any of the following: MAGNETS 52; 131 to 149 inclusive; 195; 205; 237; 238; 239; 277; 318; 319; 353; 386 to 400; 417; 422; 435; 752; 753; 762; 763; 809. Most issues between 821 and 890; 900; 921; 924; 925; 936; 938; 940; 942; 943; 946; 951; 965; 967; 988; 996. GEMS: 493; Some issues between 801 and 832. Also Nos. 935; 953; 954; 956; 975; 980; 984; 985; 989; 990; 992; 993; 998. POPULARS: 183; 190; 452; 455; 466; 474. Early Penny Populars: Nos. 12, 13, 45, 47, 58.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE RD., SURBITON, SURREY.

WANTED: C.D. Annual, 1948; Monster Libraries; School stories by Wodehouse etc., Holiday Annuals; Populars.

H. MACHIN, 38 ST. THOMAS ROAD, PRESTON.

* danny's diary *

July 1915:

It's all very intracoot. Very intracoot, indeed. During this year I have been coming to the conclusion that the Gem and the Magnet stories are written by the same man. But I am now quite sure that the man who used to write the stories in the Gem and the Magnet is not writing all the stories now. I think that he has probably joined the army and may only have the time to write stories between battles. So somebody else has to write them for him. And that somebody else is pretty rotten.

The Gem's programme has been quite third-rate this month for the most part. "Finding His Level" was about a new boy named Harry Mayne, and Levison, Crooke, Gore & Co look down on him because his father is only a sergeant in the army. This was quite odd, for Levison has been kind of reforming of late. It gave me a pain to read this tale, and I am sure there was a change of author.

"Tom Merry & Co's Ally" was better and much more like the old style. A new boy called Contarini (there have been an awful lot of new boys at St. Jim's lately) whom they all call "Jackeymo" for short was the son of an Italian minister of state, so the Germans try to capture Contarini so they can make Signor Contarini, the father, do what they want. Quite fairish, this one.

But then, oh dear. "The Four Conspirators" was terrible. Levison, Crooke, Gore, and Mellish tried to put Tom Merry & Co at loggerheads with the Grammar School. The tale introduced Lumley-Lumley and a boy I haven't heard of since I was a tot - Blenkinsop. I believe I could write a better story than this one. I couldn't do much worse.

Then, better again. All ups and downs like a thermometer when you've got measles. "An Affair of State" was a good laugh. Gussy discovered that Heligoland once belonged to the British, so he wrote to the Prime Minister, Mr. Asquith, about it. This was as funny and as good as plenty of the earlier tales.

The fifth tale was "The Rival Weekly." Grundy started "Grundy's Weekly" in opposition to "Tom Merry's Weekly," and Levison wrote an acrostic with a hidden insult to Tom Merry. This was a fairly good tale if you like Grundy, but I don't.

It's quite mysterious. Some stories obviously by other people yet they make out they're all by Martin Clifford. After all, no man switches his talent on and off like electric light.

But the same thing is happening in the Magnet, too. The first story was good. In "Mauly's Flirtation," Lord Mauleverer fell in love with Bella Bunbury whose father is the proprietor of Bunbury's stores and restaurant. But it turned out she was engaged to a soldier, so Mauly got his heart back whole.

Then an awful tale, "The Schoolboy Lawyer," a silly affair. Bunter got up a fund to help Mrs. Chirpy, the plumber's wife, whose husband was in the army. Peter Todd was the lawyer when Bunter decided to keep the money.

"The Mystery of the Gables" was grim. Ponsonby caused Nugent to be badly injured in a spill from his bike, and Wharton went for assistance to a house called the Gables. Something about a man who had oil in his garden or hadn't got oil in his garden. I dunno. Proper grim.

Then came "The Mysterious Mr. Mobbs" and this was easily the best tale of the month in the Magnet or Gem. Mr. Mobbs got the Greyfriars chums into trouble, so Wibley went to Highcliffe disguised as Mr. Mobbs and gave Pon and Co a high old time. I loved this story.

Finally, a horrid affair - "Sportsmen All." Lord Eastwood presented a cup, and Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Rookwood, and Highcliffe competed for it in all the sports under the sun. Bob Cherry knocked out Tom Merry, and somebody out-shot somebody else. In the end they all gathered in Study Number One - some study! I would rather read one of my father's old cricket encyclopaedias.

There have been quite a number of Charlie Chaplin films in our cinemas this month. I saw a picture called "Three Weeks" from a story by Elinor Glyn, and in the same programme was "Charlie's Elopement." Another time I saw Mabel Van Buren in "Girl of the Music Hall," and also in this programme was Charlie Chaplin in "A Gentleman of Nerve." This was a Keystone picture, so it must be an older one of Charlie's, for he is now with the Essanay Co.

With Alice Joyce in "Girl of the Golden West" there was "Charlie, the Tramp." We also saw Mary Pickford's latest picture, "Fanchon the Cricket," and with this one was "Charlie By The Sea."

The picture palaces are always crowded when a Chaplin film is showing.

The Boys' Friend, which Doug buys me every week, is a very good paper. It has 3 complete stories and 2 serials, plus a whole page

Editor's Chat which is rather too much from him. The complete stories are boxing tales of Tom Belcher; thrilling tales of Harvey Keene, detective, by Murray Graydon; and, of course, Rookwood.

The first Rookwood story this month was "Parted Chums" in which everybody sent Jimmy Silver to Coventry because he supported the new boy, Dick Oswald. Eventually, the rest of the end study backed up Jimmy, and then they sent the rest of the form to Coventry in their turn. Next week came "The Outcast of the Fourth," and in this one it was proved that Oswald had taken the blame for something done by the son of the Headmaster of his old school. Oswald was invited to return to Minhurst, but decided to stay on at Rookwood.

In "The Bogus Eleven," there had been an epidemic of influenza at Bagshot, so twelve of the Bagshot boys were accommodated at Rookwood. Pankley & Co provided a car which was supposed to take Tommy Dodd's eleven to St. Jim's for cricket, but it was a trick to get the eleven out of the way. And Pankley & Co went to St. Jim's and played the game.

In the next story, Jimmy Silver & Co had their revenge by raiding "Pankley's Picnic," which was the title of the tale. Lastly came "Turning the Tables" in which Pankley & Co decided to put on a concert to celebrate the end of their stay at Rookwood. But Jimmy and his friends took over the concert, and the Bagshot fellows were made to look very silly.

The King and Queen this month have celebrated the 22nd Anniversary of their wedding. The King has been out to the Front Line in France, and has also toured in Wales.

There was a hydrogen explosion at Wormwood Scrubbs airship shed. Two men were killed and nine injured.

Doug is very friendly again with Freda. He says she is such a wonderful girl that he cannot think of words to describe her. I can think of some.

SALE OR EXCHANGE: GEMS Nos. 304, 316, 662, 663, 677, 678, 683, 723, 809, 822, 830, 832, 856, 857, 897, 898, 1311, 1312, 1314, 1315, 1316, 1499, 1452, 1504, 1505, 1506, 1507, 1520, 1530, 1536, 1556.

HOLIDAY ANNUALS 1930 - 1937.

EXCHANGE ONLY: S.O.Ls. 75, 109, 134, 212, 216, 220, 294, 301, 319, 332, 342, 345. MAGNETS (Minus covers) Nos. 305, 320, 354, 366, 368, 374, 394, 396, 399, 405, 415, 848, 849, 858.

WANTED: MAGNETS, DIXON HAWKE LIB.

Offers to:-

McMAHON, 54 HOZIER CRES., TANNOCHSIDE, UDDINGSTON.

NEWS FROM THE CLUBS

AUSTRALIA

A cordial welcome was extended by Mr. and Mrs. Stan Nicholls when members arrived at their home, 7 Rome Street, Canterbury, for their meeting on Thursday, May 20th. The loss of the club's congenial rendezvous at the Book Bargain Bazaar is greatly lamented by all but **the** most comfortable substitute offered by Mr. Nicholls was greatly appreciated.

Chairman Syd Smyth opened the meeting by introducing Mr. John Ryan, paying his first visit to the club. Mr. Ryan provided an entertaining and informative beginning to the evening's proceedings by taking members into a realm of collecting, allied to their interests but a new field to those present. He is a "Fan - ed" and produces a "Fanzine" entitled "Down Under," an extremely well produced and cleverly illustrated publication of approximately 60 pages, dealing with contemporary "Comic Books." Quite a good collection of books and "Fanzines" had been brought along by John, including "Fantasy Illustrated" an amateur Comic Book, one of the top Fanzines "Alter Ego" and "Pocket Blast Comic Collector" which gave a similar coverage to these collectors as does the C.D. There was also a "Who's Who in Comic Fandom" so there was plenty of absorbing material for the members to browse through and discuss, reviving happy memories of Flash Gordon, Captain Marvel, The Phantom, etc. Due to the gesture of goodwill and the friendly welcome extended to John by postal member Arthur Holland, his entry into our hobby circle was a particularly happy occasion and John has specially requested that his thanks be recorded as he appreciated this rare example of generosity to a stranger.

Letters from our wide circle of friends were then passed around and discussed. These included news and views from Ron Hodgson, Harry Broster, Bill Gander, Jim Cook, Gordon Swan, Geoffrey Harrison, Arthur Holland, Tom Dobson and Harry Curtis, providing a stimulating cross section of opinions.

The secretary was pleased to announce that there are prospects of another O.B.B.C. being established in Australia. Following publication of an article in the Melbourne "Sun" featuring the hobby and the Sydney club enquiries had been received from three Victorian folk. One of these, Mr. Alan Cooke of Mordialloc is keen to establish a

group in Melbourne and the other two chaps, Mr. Northausen and Mr. Osborne have been contacted as prospective members as a result of their enquiries. And using the invaluable C.Ds. "Who's Who" it has been possible to provide Mr. Cooke with a list of Victorian collectors and to wish him well in his endeavours.

From Frank Hancock came a generous and helpful gift of an entertaining selection of quizzes - sincere thanks Frank, for this supply of brain teasers... we'll dust off the cobwebs next month!

At the conclusion of the meeting Mr. Ryan presented each member with a copy of his magazine and expressed his pleasure at being given the opportunity to discuss his hobby interests with congenial listeners.

A very tasty supper was served by Mrs. Nicholls and greatly enjoyed by all.

B. PATE. (Secretary)

NORTHERN

Meeting held on Saturday, 12th June, 1965:

Elsie Taylor took the chair for our June meeting, Geoffrey Wilde being away on holiday. Elsie expressed the regret we all felt at the absence of Gerry Allison, and Myra, because of Gerry's recent illness, but was happy to say that he was making good progress, although we shall not be seeing him at the meetings for a month or two yet. Several other regulars were also absent for various reasons and the attendance was much lower than usual.

Molly Allison gave the treasurer/librarian's report, and announced that Fred Cockroft had made a donation of £5 to the club - a most generous gesture.

The B.B.C. programme, 'The World of Wooster,' was discussed, and the general verdict was that it was very good. Some members who had had their doubts about Dennis Price playing the part of Jeeves remarked how well he took the part. There was also an interesting letter from Bette Pate. Our Australian friends are going through a difficult time just now, having lost their meeting-place, and we hope they are soon successful in finding another. Incidentally, Bette tells us there is a prospect of another O.B.B. club being formed in Australia, some people in Melbourne showing considerable interest in the hobby and making tentative moves in that direction.

Then Jack Wood took the stage, and provided the chief item of the meeting - a talk on the Nelson Lee Library, No. 1 of which appeared 50 years ago this month. Jack took us through the history of the paper, from the beginning when it featured detective stories, on to the introduction of St. Frank's (all provided by E. S. Brooks) and how, from

1917 onwards for many years, it became the St. Franks' paper. Jack touched on the many fine series which appeared chronicling the amazing adventures of Nelson Lee, Nipper & Co., Handforth, Lord Dorrimore, Umlosi, and the rest, both at home and abroad, and so on to the end of the old series, the first and second new series, and the end of the grand old paper with the short-lived third new series. But St. Franks lived on, for a while at least, in the pages of the Gem, and many O.B.B.C. members prefer Brooks' stories to any other.

After a break for refreshments we had an ingenious form of cross-word puzzle devised and sent along by Gerry Allison, a very teasing little problem from John Jarman which baffled us all, and finally a St. Frank's quiz by Jack Wood - all very enjoyable, and this took us along nicely to 9.30 when the meeting ended.

Our next meeting is on July 10th, but on the previous Sunday, July 4th, we shall of course be meeting our Merseyside colleagues, and, maybe, one or two from the other clubs, in Manchester. Considerable interest has been aroused, and we are assured of a very good attendance.

F. HANCOCK Hon. Sec.

MERSEYSIDE

Meeting held Sunday, 13th June:

A pleasant summer evening and quite a reasonable attendance under the circumstances. We were particularly pleased to welcome Frank Case who paid one of his too infrequent visits to Liverpool.

Norman Pragnell was able to report that some recent sales of books, which were surplus in our library, had helped towards restoring our healthy bank balance after the heavier expenditure of the previous month.

Among the correspondence were letters from George Riley and Frank Hancock. George stated that he would like to attend the Manchester meeting and we will certainly be delighted to meet him again. The Manchester meeting was discussed, and it is unfortunate that the date selected for the meeting, July 4th, should clash with the holidays of so many of our members. It is for that same reason that our next meeting has been altered from the 2nd to the 3rd Sunday of July, i.e. July 18th.

Frank Unwin, John Farrell, and I will be attending, however, and together with our two exiles, George and Frank, Merseyside will not be too badly off.

After tea we discussed a controversial echo from the June 1957

issue of the C.D. It dealt with the Birchemall stories and it was suggested by the writer that these were crude and lowered the standard of the Magnet. Authorship was apparently doubtful, but, the writer concluded that in spite of all, he enjoyed reading them.

Most of our members felt that to label them as being crude was unfair. These stories were, after all, supposed to be the work of Dicky Nugent, a third former, and the sort of thing one might expect from a boy of his age. As for lowering the tone of the Magnet, the Greyfriars Herald became a supplement of the paper and was supposed to be only the Junior School "rag". The general feeling was that Bunter himself, as a character, did more to lower the standard of the Magnet stories than anything "Dicky Nugent" ever did.

Norman followed with a competition based on the alphabet and names of contributors to the Old Boys' books. This was won by Bert Hamblett with Pat Laffey as runner up.

Pat also won the draw for the July quiz.

Please note next meeting is SUNDAY, JULY 18th.

BILL WINDSOR

LONDON

PRESENT: R. Jenkins, Don Webster, E. Lawrence, W. Lofts, C. Wright, Ray Hopkins, L. Sutton and N. Bennett. Roger Jenkins acted as Chairman.

It was very pleasant to pay another visit to "Greyfriars" the home of the Lawrence family. The day was perfect - and so was the delightful woodland scenery. Don Webster acted as Secretary and Treasurer in the absence of Uncle Ben, and he read the minutes of the previous meeting and read out a satisfactory financial report. This was followed by the Hamilton Library Report and Roger Jenkins announced that owing to G.C.E. marking and his own holidays, it was unlikely that he would be able to deal with any more library parcels before August 2nd. Any parcels arriving during July will be put on one side.

We then had a Quiz from Don Webster (surprising how much cleverer than Frank Richards we thought we were). This was won by Laurie Sutton, young Nicholas was 2nd and Charlie Wright 3rd.

We then enjoyed an excellent tea and our hosts saw that we were well catered for.

After the interval Bill Lofts gave us an insight in the proposed issue of "Prospectus" (off the record, of course).

This was followed by Roger conducting a quiz (cont'd on page 30).

EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

By L. S. Elliott

Since the article by Mr. W. J. A. Hubbard in the "C.D. Annual," and both his, and my, further articles in "C.D.," I have received a number of letters and enquiries from all over the place, proving interest in this remarkable author is very much alive still.

Although, apart from the "At the Earth's Core" serial in "Pluck" and the "Boy's Cinema" reprints, he was not exactly a boys' author, he still had that quality of adventure, which appealed, and still appeals, to "boys" of all ages.

Incidentally, I possess the serial of "Tarzan and the Lion Man," and the rare two "Venus" stories serialised in "Passing Show," and illustrated by Fortunino Matania.

Both pre-war, of course. Interest now, however, is more for the "new" stories, published for the first time, by Canaveral Press, after recent discovery, through research through the manuscripts and papers left behind by E.R.B.

Of these the book, "John Carter of Mars," at first, incorrectly published as "John Carter and the Giant of Mars," is one.

This volume contains the "Giant of Mars," and the "Skeleton Men of Jupiter," the latter being a yarn published in "Amazing Mag." in 1943 and probably the first of a series, which was never completed.

"The Giant of Mars" however has a different history. The first version, was written in collaboration with his son, John Coleman Burroughs for a children's "Big Little Book," of 15,000 words.

Later E.R.B. lengthened the story, and adapted it for adult readership, and this is the story now published in book form, for the first time and Mr. J. C. Burroughs is not, as stated by Mr. Hubbard completely responsible for it.

Apart from "Tales of Three Planets," "Tarzan and the Madman," and "Savage Pellucidar" the last book published is "Tarzan and the Castaways."

This consists of three stories, " --- the Champion," and " --- the Jungle Murders," and "Tarzan and the Castaways," this story is not quite the reprint of "The Quest of Tarzan," as stated by Mr. Hubbard.

The original "Quest of Tarzan," was given that title, and revised by the Editor, when appearing in magazine form, in 1941.

The story now published, is Edgar Rice Burrough's original story, with the original title.

This revising of author's copy by magazine editors, and other

factors, accounts for the difference in the British and U.S. version of "Tarzan and the Ant-Men," which appears to puzzle Mr. Hubbard extremely. When Burroughs wrote a yarn for a magazine, the Editor often revised it, even changing the title.

When Burroughs later revised his own yarn for book publication, he often practically rewrote it, so that two versions were left of the same yarn, the magazine version, and the "hard-cover" Burroughs revision. The British "Ant-Men" is the magazine version.

Now, to add to this, "Ace Books" are republishing Burroughs yarns in the original versions, as they first appeared, so they are different from the hard-cover editions British readers have been used to reading.

Another very interesting item given to me by Mr. Richard A. Lupoff, is about a completed novel left by Burroughs, never published, and now not likely to be as Canaveral Press have suspended publishing Burroughs books.

It is "I am a Barbarian," in the possession of Mr. Lupoff, and is the only European historical story - apart from the "Outlaw of Torn" written by E.R.B.

The subject is the time of the emperor Caligula in ancient Rome, and is a biographical novel, narrated by Caligula's slave, the hero.

Getting back to the other books, "Savage Pellucidar" part of "Tales of three Planets," and "Tarzan and the Madman" (an original novel), are now all available as paper-backs in Ace books.

"Tarzan," "John Carter of Barsoom," "David Innes," "Carson Napier," and all the other larger than life characters deserve to rank with "Billy Bunter," "Jimmy Silver," "Sexton Blake" and Co., together with "Robin Hood," "Dick Turpin" and all the other heroes of our boyhood.

WANTED, EXCHANGE OR BUY: COMICS - 1928, 1951 Jester, Funny Wonder, Jolly, Chips, Crackers, Merry and Bright, Beano's, Dandys, Radio Funs, Butterfly, etc. Also later Knockouts, Girls, Mickey Mouses, T.V. Fun, All Dandy '55.

H. A. STRATTON, SPRINGFIELDS, MOORS RD., GOLDEN COMMON, WINCHESTER

FOR SALE: Volumes of "Girls Own Paper" also one of "Chums" 1935-36. What offers?

HARRIS, CAYNTON, LLANRHOS ROAD, LLANDUDNO.

THE LATER LOT-O'-FUN

- - -

By D. A. LIDDELL

My strongest nostalgic feeling is for the old comic paper Lot O' Fun, which I came to long after its hey-day.

For me the high water mark of Lot O' Fun under A.P. ownership will always be the period 1925/26. After that it seemed to cater rather more for younger readers and had changed very much in character even before it was transformed into Crackers in 1929.

In 1925/26 Lot O' Fun carried an exceptionally good collection of stories. There was a passable juvenile imitation of a "Saunders of the River" story called "Jim of the Jungle." There was a very good school serial concerned with the doings of a certain Clifford Clavering, quite in the Hamiltonian tradition and an "open road" type of story called "Rovers' Luck." Page 3 however contained what was for me the centre piece of the whole ensemble. This was a serial entitled "The Adventures of Bob, Pip, and Nobby" retitled "Treasure Isle" in its final series of episodes.

As the original title suggests these stories were in the pattern of the once popular tales of Jack, Sam, and Pete but if anything were in even lighter vein. This type of story is not much sought after today and more often than not they are dismissed as mere slapstick. There is no question, however, that the Jack, Sam & Pete formula was a real moneymaker for the A.P. over a period of years, and quite a few writers, including Walter Shute and Percy Clark, tried their hand at this type of story at one time or another.

I always felt that of all the trios in the Jack, Sam, & Pete mould the Bob, Pip, and Nobby series in Lot O' Fun excelled in contrivance and charm and I would dearly like to have any information or speculation as to their authorship. A certain H. C. Richmond, one of the few named authors who was writing for Lot O' Fun just prior to this series is a possible candidate but any one able to scrutinise the editorial chat in the weeks just prior to the start of the series which I think was on February 28th, 1925, could probably get some clue.

I remember trying to winkle the information out of the editor of the day (whoever he was) but as can be imagined my boyish efforts made little impact on the hard kernel of Fleetway House.

Curiosity as to the authorship of these stories has been with me off and on over the intervening years so for me at any rate they must have had some singular lasting quality. I was reading the Indian series in the Magnet about the same time in the summer of 1926 and while I still have a recollection of their excellence the memory of

them today is less vivid than of these more juvenile tales in Lot O' Fun.

They were distinguished I think in containing a wealth of background detail which I have rarely come across except perhaps in the stories of the much travelled W. E. Stanton Hope.

SEXTON BLAKE REVIEWS

BEAT ON AN ORANGE DRUM

Desmond Reid (2/6)

Set mainly in Belfast, this story is up to the minute. The old hatred which has so long bedevilled relations between Ulster and Southern Ireland is slowly dying away. There are still extremists and fanatics who will move heaven and earth to keep that hatred alive. This tale is about a few of them.

Sexton Blake discovers that a time-bomb is to be exploded among the crowds of spectators who gather to watch the Orangemen march on the Twelfth of July. By some bits of detective work which are pleasantly nostalgic, for they are all too rare these days, Blake decides that the bomb will be hidden in one of the vast number of drums which will be carried in the parade.

How Tinker eventually gets possession of the drum, with the bomb inside, is an original piece of writing and wildly exciting, even though you suspend belief as you read. It would make a superb film in glorious technicolor.

There is some clever underworld characterisation, and the story should satisfy all who like a swift-moving yarn of the thriller sort. Set in a largish type, it is also easy on the eyesight.

I find irritating the constant switch from Tinker to Edward Carter and back. Don't ask me why it is done. I don't know. The author tells us that "Edward Carter, who had once been known as Tinker, now regarded that nickname as rather childish." Goodness only knows why.

E. F.

THE SAVAGE SQUEEZE

ARTHUR MACLEAN

A story of unusual merit is always worthy of a second airing, for it gives readers who were either too young or, who, for some reason or other were not able to procure it at its first printing, the opportunity of dipping into the better material of the Blake Saga.

A story which slipped smoothly into this groove was that of Rilla

Kirby's ordeal, when her baby was stolen from its pram outside a Birmingham store, and the kidnapers threatened to kill the child if she - Rilla - informed the police or refused to pay the ransom demanded. It was obvious what course proceedings were going to take when her famous brother-in-law, Splash Kirby, enlisted the aid of Sexton Blake. Blake soon discovered that it was not just a case of kidnapping he had to deal with. Grave political issues were also involved.

This novel was originally published way back in February, 1957, under the title of MASK OF FURY. The re-issue is a little longer than the original, and has been brought up to date by certain alterations, not the least welcome being the introduction of Tinker who did not feature in the original. Also, for reasons which will be immediately obvious, the kidnapping takes place in the district of Smethwick instead of Erdington.

Well, if the editorial department are going to make such a good job of the reprints as this, I am all for the innovation - but what about going a little further back and shaking the dust from such excellent volumes as were written by those masters of the political intrigue - Parsons, Teed and Sayer?

Walter Webb

LONDON REPORT (cont'd from page 25).. received from Gerry Allison (who we hope is making progress) and Eric Lawrence and Charlie Wright (with 15 out of 18) tied for 1st place. Nicholas Bennett was 3rd.

We then wended our way homeward and said goodbye to Berkshire for another year.

Next meeting is at Cricklewood - July 18th.

D.B.W.

E. S. BROOKS INTERVIEWED ON RADIO

Marjorie Bilbrow is to be congratulated for persuading famous E. S. Brooks to be interviewed in her radio programme in mid-June, though the result was not altogether satisfactory for Lee fans. Mr. Brooks commented that Nelson Lee was an imitation of Sexton Blake, and recalled the near-drudgery at times of having to turn out a new story each week. An announcer called Lee's assistant "Tinker," and the error was not rectified. Mr. Brooks indicated that he wrote Magnet and Gem stories during his late teens, and referred to his post-war stories, written under the pen-names of Victor Gunn and Berkeley Gray.

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THE POSTMAN CALLED

(Interlocking items from
Editor's Letter-Box)



GEOFFREY WILDE (Leeds): The real difficulty, I suppose, is in giving Blake the authentic glamour he once possessed in an age when everything is invested with the same glossy mass-production synthetic flavour. Personally I feel the answer is an all-out investment in the lasting quality of some of the greatest old-timers, by reprinting them virtually as they stand with the words "A Sexton Blake Classic" boldly splashed across the cover. If the reading public is too far gone in indifference the venture will fail anyway; but I feel there is a real chance that they can be drawn into the allure of Blake's past achievement. Blake history is something that should be played up, not down. All those little salutes from well-known authors and retired Scotland Yard men keep hinting that there is a history - why not put readers fully in touch with it?

GEORGE SELLARS (Sheffield): I have always thought that Jimmy Silver was elected as captain a few weeks after arriving at Rookwood, and not Tommy Dodd. Maybe Danny is a bit mixed up. What do you think? (Danny was right. Tommy Dodd became captain. No doubt Danny will be putting us wise when Jimmy eventually attains that lofty position. It is, of course, possible that if those stories were reprinted in the S.O.L. (or in the Popular), some changes may have been made by the editor. But many of the stories of Rookwood were never reprinted. - ED.)

H. MACHIN (Preston): Collectors' Digest for June - a most delightful feast of reading.

STAN KNIGHT (Cheltenham): It was nice to be greeted by the reproduction of the Nelson Lee cover "Nipper at St. Franks." I have never seen this number although I have the reprint of the story in the N.L. 3rd series. It was nice also to be reminded of the 50th anniversary, and I enjoyed the write-up in the centre pages of C.D.

WALTER WEBB (Birmingham): The old controversy of sex in the S.B.L., which really set Blakiana alight some years ago, has fanned into flame again - and with a vengeance where the story "Witches of Notting Hill" is concerned. Having read this novel for review

purposes, I must strongly condemn as gross exaggeration any suggestion that certain passages were of a dirty nature. Candidly, I did not care for this story very much - witchcraft does not appeal to me, though I would not condemn a story on personal dislike of its theme alone. However, it was quite well written, and Dinker and Pedro were prominently featured, which compensated me somewhat for the lack of those ingredients I like to savour in my Blake men. It contained, like all the other novels in the new series so far, a sex element, and the language on occasion was strong. Strong - not necessarily bad - language is offensive whether uttered on radio or television or seen in print. A lot of it is unnecessary, and I do not care for it in my Blake reading, but there was no epithet in the story deserving the label "dirty."

In an age where Blake must stand or fall by the standards it has set, I feel the publishers are justified in combining first-class novels with an element of sex, and that criticism be applied only when the sex element increases to the detriment of the story. At the present I consider the balance reasonable and that every support should be extended to editor and publishers to keep such a worthwhile institution as Sexton Blake & Co going for as long as they possibly can.

Miss E.J. PATE (Sydney): Has anything further been decided about a club emblem? Too good an idea to let pass.

(The idea is being kept in mind, and we hope that in due course it may be possible to put it into practice. -ED.)

J. A. WARK (Dunoon): Can you settle a little argument? My friend would not agree with me when I maintained that Mr. Railton returned to his post minus one arm after his service in the first World War. He says that all modern yarns and pictures show the Housemaster as having two arms. I think that my memory is correct and that maybe a sub-writer deprived Railton of an arm, and the old maestro restored it.

(Mr. Railton was wounded, but we have no recollection of his ever having lost an arm. "The Housemaster's Homecoming" will no doubt be mentioned in Danny's Diary soon. -ED.)

H. MACHIN (Preston): I recall my delight when, one evening in 1931, I bought a Gem on spec. I'd practically given up hope of ever seeing a genuine Gem again. Then I read the thrilling announcement that the early stories were to be reprinted. Another thrill was in 1921 when I bought a copy of the paper "School & Sport" and before I had finished one chapter I knew without doubt that the story came from the master pen.

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