

Collectors' Digest

THE NELSON LEE

LIBRARY OF
SCHOOL
STORIES

2¢



No.
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Collectors' Digest

FOUNDED in 1946 by HERBERT LEUCKENBY

Vol. 20

No. 230

FEBRUARY 1966

Price 2s. Od.



SEXTON BLAKE

A year ago we were sounding the trumpets to welcome the return of the Sexton Blake Library. Now, twelve months on, there must be mixed feelings as

we look back.

On the credit side is the fact that Sexton Blake came back at all, and that he came back as Sexton Blake of Baker Street - an environment which most of us think he should never have left. The promise of the occasional reprint of a pre-war classic has never materialised, which is a disappointment to many.

The immediate news is not particularly cheering. In 1966 the number of issues per month of the S.B.L. is to be reduced from two to one. According to Mr. Howard Baker, this reduction in the number of issues per month will make more distant the publication of any pre-war classic. It is not entirely easy to see why this should be so.

One thing is certain. If the S.B.L. is failing, such failure is due to the appalling distribution which we have criticised many times before. Sexton Blake can be bought from the bookstalls at the London rail termini and from some of the larger shops, but it is almost impossible to obtain him by order from the run-of-the-mill newsagents and bookshops. The old, loyal supporters have been tossed overboard.

The cinematograph trade papers are now announcing a series of one-hour Sexton Blake films in colour. This is good news to some

extent, but the impact is deadened by the information that the film is to present a tarted-up Sexton Blake. There is a theme song, "Meet Sexton Blake," recorded on harmonica, and there are to be tie-ups with clothing, cosmetics, food, and smoking. The first story is announced as "Sexton Blake and the Double Five," specially written by Donald Stuart.

According to report, we shall have an entirely new presentation of Sexton Blake, Tinker, and the "new look" characters, and "Blake, very much 1966-with-it has moved his H.Q. from Baker Street to fashionable Berkeley Square."

Sexton Blake clearly does not know whether he is coming or going - and he's not the only one. It is our view that Sexton Blake, like Sherlock Holmes or Dr. Finlay, should be kept more or less in period. But what on earth was the point of returning him to Baker Street a year ago if the films are to sweep him away again? Is there no co-ordination at all in the Sexton Blake world?

DANNY, WHERE WERT THOU?

I received scores of letters from readers who had kindly things to say about the recent issue of the C.D. Annual, but two out of three of all those kindly folk who wrote had one wail in common: "I missed Danny's Christmas." Some were reproachful; some verged on crossness; some, darkly, saw the omission of Danny as a grave mistake which would bring about the early demise of the Annual.

Danny had featured in the Annual for several years past. About this time last year, one reader wrote me with the criticism that Danny's Christmas extracts were all alike. I did not regard that as a particularly valid criticism, and, candidly, I do not believe that the Danny fans would have bothered even if it had been.

All the same, I did think it a good idea to give Danny a rest in the Annual this year. A change is as good as a holiday, and if we had found accommodation for Danny, then something else would have had to be dropped. To compensate the fans we gave an extra-long extract from his Diary in our recent C.D. Christmas Number.

If he remains popular, and if the extracts from his Diary are still available to us, Danny might be back in the next edition of the Annual.

THE EDITOR

A REMINDER: Have you yet secured your copy of the Sexton Blake Catalogue? This Wisden of Sexton Blake lore is still available, but you should order your copy before stocks run out. Write, with P.O. for 15/-, to L. Packman, 27 Archdale Rd., East Dulwich, S.E.22.

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

TRIBUTES

IN MEMORIAM

LEONARD PACKMAN: On Sunday December 4th I received a telephone call from Mr. E. S. Brooks's daughter-in-law to say that he had passed away on December 2nd.

This sad news was all the more upsetting because whenever I had the pleasure of being with him I always found him full of vigour and zest for work upon his then current 'Berkeley Gray' or 'Victor Gunn' novel.

One of my most cherished memories is of an evening some two years ago spent at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Brooks. Bob Blythe was with me, and we were a very happy foursome!

Like Bob, my 'first love' was the Nelson Lee Library, and the work of the man who gave us "Jim The Penman," "Eileen Dare," "The Green Triangle," "The Circle of Terror" and St. Frank's School and all the fine characters associated with it will always be remembered, as also will his works under the names of "Berkeley Gray" and "Victor Gunn."

Mrs. Packman joins me in expressing sincere condolences to Mrs. E. S. Brooks and family in their sad bereavement.

C. H. CHURCHILL: It was with great regret that I heard of the recent death of Mr. E. S. Brooks. I don't think there is any doubt that not only was he one of the leading writers of boys fiction, but was also in the forefront as a writer of adult "thrillers" as well.

I preferred his "Victor Gunn" stories to those of the "Berkeley Gray" series but this is just a personal opinion. Both series were well written and made very interesting reading in the same way as his earlier St. Frank's stories.

When looking through the Nelson Lee catalogue one's mind boggles at the thought of one man writing all these hundreds of different stories over the years, the vast majority of which were first class.

It is a sad thought that we shall read of no more new "Ironsides" or "Conquest" adventures nor read again of Nelson Lee, Nipper, Handforth, Archie and the host of characters created by this imaginative and clever writer, although we have been resigned to the latter for some years now.

Thank you, Mr. Brooks, for all the hundreds of hours of very enjoyable reading you have given to myself and thousands of other readers.

C. L. FARROW: He gave me so many happy hours with his stories of St. Frank's. May God grant to him eternal rest.

E. C. CARTER: A great loss to our hobby. For more than fifty years he thrilled and entertained us with his school and detective stories. His Victor Gunn and Berkeley Gray books will be sadly missed.

With the late Charles Hamilton E. S. Brooks was probably one of the greatest school story writers that ever lived. He had magic in his school and detective stories.

Edwy Searles Brooks will always be remembered as a great contributor to the O.B.B.C. saga.

JIM COOK: It was not until I had returned from my Christmas holidays that I learned of the death of Edwy Searles Brooks.

It was, nevertheless, a very sad moment, coming after the Yuletide festivities, that I had a feeling of guilt knowing that my very dear friend had passed away while I was celebrating.

But I shall be seeing him again at St. Frank's, I will look for him in the Ancient House, in the Remove form-room and perhaps in Nelson Lee's study.

In fact, I might meet him at Bellton station and walk with him through the village on our way to St. Frank's. We have such a lot to talk about.

R. J. GODSAVE: One might say of Edwy Searles Brooks that he was born with a pen in his hand. He was only in his teens when he commenced his successful career as an author.

The fact that for a number of years the readers of the Nelson Lee Library were kept in ignorance of the author's name speaks volumes for the high quality of the stories, which alone captured and held their interest. In later years when this anonymity was dropped Brooks went to great lengths to keep up a personal touch with his readers.

The detective element was invariably present in his writing and his analytical ability and literary skill was always in evidence. Under the names of Victor Gunn and Berkeley Gray, his novels command world-wide interest.

Edwy Searles Brooks has gained himself a place in the affections of all who read and enjoy his works. His passing will be mourned by many.

CHAS H. MATTHEWS: "The Great Barring-Out Series of 1927 initiated me into the new world of St. Frank's. I was nearly 13 and till then had been a keen reader of the Magnet and the Gem. After the more ordinary 'Frank' and 'Martin' I couldn't quite believe in the name 'Edwy Searles Brooks' although in that section of the Old Paper devoted to "Between

Ourselves" which always interested me, the author frequently averred that this was his real name.

I avidly devoured each week's story in that wonderful Barring Out Series, learning incidentally too, in "The Phantom of the Modern House" a new word - Clavichord - which I used to roll around my tongue with glee. At the end of the series which I remember thinking came far too soon, I put the whole lot away to read again at some future date - and despite seven moves, a war and the passing of nearly thirty years, I have them still. From this date I looked forward with impatience to each issue of the Nelson Lee Library, and in my imagination accompanied my heroes on their various escapades, and exciting journeys to other countries, both real and imaginary.

Through my youth I continued to read the 'Nelson Lee' and remember to this day, hating those times when the heroes of St. Frank's were pushed to the back of the book, and was still a regular reader when, at eighteen, the old paper merged with the Gem, and my dismay at finally losing the long stories of St. Frank's was very real. Now with the co-operation of Bob Blythe and the good-natured derision of my wife and twenty-year-old daughter, I am re-reading all those magnificent yarns of Edwy Searles Brooks with the old enjoyment. I never had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Brooks and did not know in fact, until I became a member of the Old Boys' Book Club a few weeks ago, that he was still alive.

Now I hear with the greatest of regret that the Old Maestro has passed away. I did not see anything in the paper to mark his passing. How is it I wonder, that he never achieved anything of the fame of Frank Richards?

He wrote some rattling good yarns fit for boys of any age. What a wonderful writer he must have been to write tales interesting enough for men, such as myself, to recapture all the enthusiasm of a boyhood now nearly 40 years away."

DEREK SMITH: I was inexpressibly shocked and saddened to read of the death of our own Edwy Searles Brooks.

Norman Conquest was my boyhood hero and I have always thought of both the Gay Desperado and his creator as somehow immortal; as indeed in the truest sense they are.

There is perhaps some comfort in these lines by Robert Graves:

"To bring the dead to life,
Is no great magic
Few are wholly dead:
Blow on a dead man's embers

And a live flame will start."

How true this is of an author whose books were loved and whose stories will be read so long as there are men and women whose memories are warm and whose hearts are young.

ARTHUR HOLLAND: I was saddened by the news of Edwy Searles Brooks' passing. One by one the well beloved writers revered in our hobby are departing from this earthly scene.

It can be truly stated that Edwy has justified his existence by giving countless hours of clean wholesome pleasure to many hundreds of thousands of grateful readers of all ages.

Edwy Searles Brooks will live on through the characters he created.

May his soul rest in peace.

STANLEY SMITH: The death of Edwy Searles Brooks leaves another great gap. He was, I felt, a most provoking writer. At his best, he was capable of producing stories that rank with the best school yarns ever written. But, at his worst, he was guilty of writing tales that are best forgotten - stories of cheap sensationalism, bathos and fifth-rate slapstick. But, at his best, he was so good that he must be ranked with the masters of this type of yarn. It is inevitable that one compares his work with that of Charles Hamilton - but I really feel that such a comparison is impossible. They are so different. I know that I am on dangerous ground, but I believe that Edwy Searles Brooks wrote some stories that were greater than any from the pen of Charles Hamilton. These, alas, were the exceptions. He could reach the heights, but he could go right down into the depths - and I felt that some of his tales were among the worst that ever appeared in the papers to which he contributed. It was so different with Hamilton. I do not think that he ever reached the heights of Brooks at his superb best - but, on the other hand, I don't think that he ever wrote a really bad tale. Some were better than others, of course, but there was a standard - a thing that Brooks never seemed to manage.

JACK COOK: It was sad to learn of the passing of Edwy Searles Brooks. For some years he and I wrote to each other, and many interesting points on writing and the old papers came out. We shall always remember him as a master of his art.

STANLEY KNIGHT: I was saddened to hear the news of the passing of Edwy Searles Brooks. Farewell to another great friend of one's youthful memories. He was a part of each of the main branches of C.D. interests - the Lee section, Blakiana, and, to a lesser extend, as a sub-writer to the Hamiltoniana section too.

ROBERT BLYTHE: With the death of Edwy Searles Brooks, another major link with the past of Old Boys' Books has been broken. It is true that from 1935 onwards, he devoted himself to the adult market with his Thriller & Detective novels, nevertheless for 23 years prior to this he wrote school and adventure yarns that, for me, and thousands of others, provided a weekly treat that will never be forgotten, and we are indeed grateful for these years.

I first met E.S.B. in 1933, and during the years that followed corresponded with him many times. We met for the last time when Len Packman and I had the pleasure of presenting him, on behalf of all St. Frank's lovers, a copy of the Nelson Lee Catalogue. On all these occasions, as those who met him at the various club meetings will testify, he was unfailingly pleasant and courteous.

In the past there has been much discussion upon the merits or demerits of Brooks as a writer, and doubtless much will be written in the future, but to me, at any rate, he provided a rattling good yarn every week from the tender age of 11, and gave me a love for his St. Frank's characters that I have never lost.

As a man E.S.B. was shy and retiring and shunned publicity. Because of this he was practically unknown to the world at large, and though we may feel disappointed that he did not receive the recognition he richly deserved, I feel that this is what he would have preferred.

With our own circle however, this must not be allowed to happen. Within the pages of C.D. he must never be allowed to be forgotten. He gave so much pleasure to so many of us, that it would be ungrateful indeed if he were allowed to fade into obscurity.

ERNEST HUBBARD: I was very sad to hear the news of E.S.B.'s. death especially so soon after my renewed acquaintance with his works. To me, both in my youth and today he was great. His marvellous descriptions, of a tropical storm for instance, were real masterpieces. I am glad that I was of his generation and that I read his stories, even the memory of them is a treasure that I will never lose.

WALTER FLEMING: I was extremely shocked to hear of the death of Edwy Searles Brooks. He has been with us for such a long time that to think of him no longer writing seems hardly possible. He has been my favourite writer since 1927, and I have not missed much of his work since then. I always found his writing so bright and breezy, and always interesting. Like Charles Hamilton, he passes from us but leaves behind a legacy of untold wealth in his work.

H. CHAPMAN: It is with much sorrow that I learn of the death of my favourite writer of boys' fiction, Edwy Searles Brooks, whose work I

have enjoyed for about 47 years.

Starting with "Rainbow," "Puck," then on to "Gem" and "Magnet," all of which I took in my stride, I was then introduced to the St. Frank's stories in the Nelson Lee Library. I must admit that I did not like the first one I read becoming 'stuck' in the 2 or 3 pages of recapitulation of previous events. I was assured, however, that, "when you get into it the 'Lee' beats the 'Gem' and 'Magnet' hollow." And so I persevered and found this to be true, in my opinion.

I took the paper for a number of years before being enticed away by free gifts, photos, etc., and a desire for a change. It was not until the stories were reprinted in the "Monster" in 1926 that I learned the name of the author, Edwy Searles Brooks, and my interest re-awakened, never to be lost.

There are of course many opinions of the St. Frank's stories, but no one can deny that they had variety, interest, and moved along at an exhilarating pace.

The stories were obviously written for Council School boys and thus contained no Latin or classical quotations etc. They did, however describe various parts of the world and in that way were very educative.

They must have been very popular for a number of years when one considers the handicap under which the Lee suffered. Launched in the Great War during a paper shortage, it was almost insignificant in size compared with other papers; the print was very, very small, and for a number of years there was only one illustration, this being very crude indeed.

They were re-printed several times in the Boys' Friend, S.O.L., Monster, Gem, Nugget, etc., and one wonders what arrangement there was between author and publisher about payment for these reprints. If E. S. Brooks did not receive substantial payment for them there is no wonder he lost interest in the work and turned his talents elsewhere.

The "Conquest" and "Ironside" stories which he has worked on since are good of their kind but contain very little that is original, although they seem to have a good, regular sale.

I feel that E. S. Brooks will be remembered for his St. Frank's stories long after his other more ambitious work is forgotten. I feel that while the quality of the stories varied the majority were very good indeed and featured an amazing variety of subjects.

All St. Frank's fans will be very unhappy at the death of Edwy Searles Brooks, although the blow would have been felt even more than it is if he had been writing St. Frank's stories until his death, and

the supply had been suddenly cut off.

And finally:

A TRIBUTE FROM LORD HARDINGE OF PENSURST

I have been asked to write briefly about Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks's long association with William Collins Sons, who published his crime stories for many years.

In fact Mr. Brooks was a prolific and successful Collins author long before I myself started work for the company so I can only write about comparatively recent times. During these years my acquaintance with Mr. Brooks was really based on his formal visits to Collins's office when he had completed a new typescript. Under the names of Berkeley Gray and Victor Gunn he would write three or four new books a year for the Collins crime list, and this meant three or four very agreeable visits. Date and time would be fixed and Mr. Brooks would come in punctually with two very clean and immaculate typescripts, one for the editor and the printer, the other for the wrapper artist. He used also to provide copy for the wrapper blurb, a contribution for which any working editor will always be extremely grateful.

On these occasions Mr. Brooks would spend sometime in the office gossiping about his own work and contemporary crime publishing generally. He would tell stories of his continental trips and of various editions of his own books he had seen by chance in foreign paperback editions abroad. Part of this little ritual was to provide Mr. Brooks with a few current crime publications to take away with him - he was always particularly keen to have the latest Rex Stout.

Though I only knew him in this slight capacity in his later years, his visits to the office and our talks always gave me a lot of pleasure and I hope they gave him some. He was a very considerate and professional author to deal with and a most agreeable and friendly man.

Lord Hardinge of Penshurst

16th December 1965

Collins.

WANTED: Good loose copies or volumes containing any one or more of the following: MAGNETS: 32; 39; 40; 41; 42; 44; 45; 131 to 149 inclusive, 205; 238; 239; 309; 328; 337; 351 to 359 inclusive; 435; 752; 753; 762; 763; 773; 850; 858; 862; 863; 864; 865; 868; 921; 940; 942; 951; 985; 988. GEMS: 493; some issues between 801 and 832; 953; 954; 956; 975; 980; 984; 985; 989; 990; 992; 993; 998. POPULARS: 452; 455; 466; 472. ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE RD., SURBITON, SURREY.

DANNY'S DIARY

February 1916.

The other night I was lying in bed reading the latest Sexton Blake Library called "The Red Spider" when there was a terrific banging on our front door. It was a Special Constable. I had forgotten to draw my bedroom curtains, and my light was streaming across the golf-links. Doug went all snooty-puss, and gave me a ticking-off, but none of us are inflammable.

In any case, it is several weeks since we had a Zepp raid with all the street lights going out. February has been windy and wet, and the zepps only come on very dark, still nights.

It has been a poor month in the Gem. At the beginning of February a new serial "Pride of the Film" started, but I fancy it is a re-printed one. I feel sure I've seen it before somewhere, ~~though~~ I can't remember where. The illustrations to it look rather old-fashioned.

The first St. Jim's tale "Trouble for Trimble," the best of a poor bunch, told of thefts taking place in the School House, and Tom Merry got blamed for it and was on the verge of expulsion.

"The Grammar School Mascot" was weak, decidedly weak. Some rivalry with the Grammar School which had a new character called Mumford who owned a parrot which had been trained to say "Gott strafe St. Jim's."

"The Study Wreckers" was a bit better, though I didn't bust with enthusiasm. Two more new characters turned up - a third-former named Piggott, who was part of the Levison, Mellish clan, and a second-former named Robinson, who went gambling with Piggott & Co.

The final tale "Sportsmen of St. Jim's" was utter bilge. Exactly the same plot, if you can call it a plot, was used in the Magnet before Christmas. The Head arranged for Tom Merry & Co, under the charge of Kildare, to tour the South Coast playing football matches in aid of the Red Cross. Surely, if any school made such an arrangement it would send its First Eleven to play the games, and not the juniors. In a stupid final chapter, Tom Merry & Co played a match against a Masters' Eleven, including Mr. Ratcliff, Mr. Selby, and the rest.

I mentioned to Doug that a tale like that let down the standard of the Gem, and his friend, Wobbly Defrayne, said "Write to Mr. Lloyd George about it, kid!"

But Wobbly, though he is all teeth and hindquarters, has his heart in the right place, and he gave me two February issues of the

Union Jack. I wasn't so very keen on the first one "In Darkest London," which was rather novelettish, but it had some very nice illustrations, particularly the front cover which showed the trams on the Embankment, drawn by Arthur Lane. The inside pictures were drawn by G. M. Dodshon.

But the other U.J. contained "The Case of the Missing Airman" which was a thrilling and grand tale. It got some wonderful atmosphere when Blake and Tinker visited a large old house in East Anglia. The villain of the piece turned out to be Leon Kestrel, a clever actor and master of disguises who, so Wobbly says, has appeared in two previous Union Jack tales. It seems that Blake owns a little Moth aeroplane which he calls "The Grey Panther." It came into this story.

We have been to the pictures quite a few times this month, but it has really been a month for females, though "The Four Feathers" was exciting.

We had to cue up to get in to see "Nurse Cavell, Martyr," but it really wasn't all that good, though the Germans looked awful scoundrels. Mum said the picture was obviously made very quickly to cash in on the execution of Nurse Cavell, late last year. The script of the film was written by a young newspaper reporter named Edgar Wallace.

Another time we saw Pauline Frederick in "Sold," but it bored me. This was the first film put out by Adolf Zukor's new company, Famous Players in Famous Plays. We have also seen Mary Miles Minter in "Emmy of Stork's Nest;" Marguerite Clark in "Seven Sisters;" Laura Hope Crews in "The Fighting Hope;" and Hazel Dawn in "The Masqueraders." Marguerite Clark is a great favourite of mine, and Laura Hope Crews is a pretty little thing.

At the cinemas they put up slides about the forthcoming attractions, and I noted that next month we shall have a new Chaplin film called "Charlie at Work," and also Pauline Frederick in "Zaza," in four parts. I don't care much for Pauline Frederick. She shows too much neck.

Jessie, our old maid, came to see us. She is now very wealthy, working in a munitions factory at Erith, and she gave me a penny. I wasted it on a copy of Pluck, which contained the story, with pictures, of the Billy Merson film "The Terrible Tec" or "Sherlock Blake, Detective." There was also a story of Dr. Huxton Rymer, and another one about Nelson Lee and Nipper.

The Boys' Friend has been as good as usual. In the first issue of the month they gave away another free art plate. This time it was

a scouting picture called "His Deed for the Day," drawn by J. Louis Smythe.

The first Rookwood tale was "In Honour Bound" in which Dolly Chisholm, the Head's daughter, made Jimmy Silver promise not to fight for a week. Jimmy had an awful time keeping his promise, and then found out that Dolly had forgotten all about it, and didn't like boys in any case.

Then came two Rookwood stories about a new boy named Dickinson Minor, who got his mind twisted by reading American blood and thunder papers. These two tales were named "The Duffer of the Fourth" and "Curing the Duffer."

Last Rookwood tale of the month was "Caught Napping" in which Jimmy Silver was expecting a visit from a cousin. Tommy Dodd thought it was a boy, and planned to play tricks, but it turned out to be a lovely maiden named Phyllis. But before Tommy learned the truth, Jimmy disguised himself as Cousin Phyllis, visited the three Tommies, and gave them a high old time.

The Magnet has been quite good, except for the first story "Foes of the Sixth" which was a shocker. Wingate's worthless brother Bob asked for money, and Wingate was accused of stealing £5 from the Sports Fund box. The thief was really Loder. If you can believe these authors, public schools must be thieves' kitchings. In this tale the author told us that the Punishment Room at Greyfriars was usually known as "Nobody's Study." Where ignorance is bliss!

Next week was better. "Shielding a Scapegrace" re-introduced Snaith, who was expelled some time ago, and Smithy was suspected of going back to his old wicked ways. In this issue the editor gave the first results of the Story Writing Competition. The first prize of £15 was won by Robert Langley of Lynton Rd., Bermondsey. There was also a long list of consolation prize winners, and the editor has continued to name the consolation prize winners in each issue of the Magnet since. He says the competition was so successful that he will soon run another one like it. When I told Doug I might have a shot at it, he laughed fit to burst a blood vessel.

The next tale was "Coker's Engagement" which introduced Phyllis Howell. I didn't like the other Phyllis Howell tales, but this one was great. Coker fell in love with Phyllis, and wrote to her, proposing marriage. But another Phyllis - a terrifying one - turned up and claimed Coker, and then threatened him with a breach of promise suit. A real laugh, this one. A new serial "The Golden Key" by T.C. Bridges started this week.

Finally came "Flooring Fishy" in which Mr. Quelch was receiving anonymous letters. It was very amusing in parts. Ferrers Locke, the detective, solved the mystery of the anonymous letter writer.

The editor says that the circulation of the Greyfriars Herald is gradually slipping away. He says that the Dreadnought was his only big failure, and he doesn't want the Herald to go the same way. It sounds ominous.

MEMORY LANE - and ASTA NEILSEN

Our reproduction of the very old cinema playbill in Collectors' Digest Annual is rousing considerable interest among the readers of that illustrious volume. Mr. T. A. Johnson of Neston, Cheshire, writes us as follows:

"I was delighted to see the article about Pearl White and the Elaine song. I can also help with regard to Asta Neilsen and that old programme presenting 'Gypsy Blood.' There is a long article about her in one of my volumes of "Pictures" for 1914.

Before the first world war she was probably the screen's most popular actress, and her films were well-known in Britain and the U.S.A. With black eyes and black hair, she was born in Copenhagen in 1883, the daughter of a laundress. Asta started work in a baker's shop, but her contralto voice secured her an engagement in the chorus at Copenhagen Opera House. Eventually she became the leading dramatic actress at the New Theatre, Copenhagen.

She made her film debut in 1909, for the Danish Nordisk Film Co. and later married the producer. Made a great many 2-reel dramas and comedies, including "Dance of Death," "Heart of a Pierrot," "Gypsy Blood," "Up to her Tricks." The last-named was made in 1914.

During the war, her films were banned from allied screens, when it was learned that the Nordisk Co. was producing anti-ally films for Germany. This really finished her career so far as British cinemas were concerned. Lubitsch produced some of the films in which she starred, and she once caused a sensation by her performance in the title role in a film version of 'Hamlet.' "

WANTED: LEEDS 359, 391, 424, 425, 427, 428, 432, 434, 435, 437, 438, 538. 2nd NEW, 78, 81, 141-146. 3rd. 1-8. 10/- each for Schoolboys' Own 170, 198, 206.

53, WALLASEY PARK, BELFAST 14.

BLAKIANA

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



The above picture was taken about a year ago when the new Sexton Blake Library was launched. Our Blakiana expert, Leonard Packman, is second from the left, and TV fans will recognize the famous detective holding the statuette of Sexton Blake. The statuette is the property of Mrs. Josie Packman.

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THOSE MYTHICAL SEXTON BLAKE AUTHORS

* * *

By W. O. G. Lofts

"Leslie Charteris, Peter Cheyney, Edgar Wallace, and John Creasey all wrote Sexton Blake yarns in the early days of their careers."

Occasionally you may have seen comments similar to that above printed in the national press and elsewhere. Usually, of course, when the ever-interesting topic of the Man of Baker Street hits the

headlines for some reason or other. If you have ever read such a comment in the press you may wonder why only John Creasey's, of the names mentioned, appears in the Sexton Blake Catalogue.

Unfortunately, when inaccurate reports appear in the press, they come to be accepted as facts with the passing of time. It does our favourite detective no harm in the least. In fact, it may do his reputation some good. But it is galling to the ardent research worker to see these myths accepted as truth.

The editor of the Sexton Blake Library from 1921 till 1957 was Len Pratt, who was also editor of "The Thriller" when that famous weekly started in 1928. The new periodical had for its contributors many of the most famous thriller writers of the day. The opening story was by Edgar Wallace, who, I understand, was paid ten times more for his work than that received by the ordinary regular contributors to the periodicals. Such was the price of his prestige and pull over readers. Other, later, writers, were Leslie Charteris and Peter Cheyney.

It became common knowledge in Fleet Street that these three authors wrote for Len Pratt of the Amalgamated Press. When "The Thriller" closed down in 1940 owing to the paper shortage, reporters wrongly assumed that as Len Pratt was the editor of the Sexton Blake Library, these three authors must have written Sexton Blake tales.

Mr. Charteris has told me that when he wrote of "The Saint" in The Thriller, his ambition was to build his own creation into a world-famous character, and it would not have been possible had he written about Sexton Blake.

Tit-Bits, which recently ran Sexton Blake serials, had the audacity to quote words which he was supposed to have used to the effect that he had written Sexton Blake stories. A correction was published in due course.

Miss Penelope Wallace, the daughter of Edgar Wallace, told me that she was almost certain that her father never wrote about Sexton Blake. Official records show no sign of his name in connection with any Blake tale. A son, Brian Edgar Wallace, however, did write a one-man playette on Sexton Blake in the Detective Weekly. This may have been confused with the work of his famous father.

Technically, Peter Cheyney, that lovable writer of best-sellers who died at St. John's Wood leaving £70,000, did write a Sexton Blake story, but had the humiliation of it being rejected. This was according to a Biography entitled "Prince of Hokem."

This has always been a sore point with Mr. H. W. Twyman, editor

of the Union Jack, to whom the story was submitted. Mr. Twyman could not remember Peter Cheyney submitting a story, and claimed that he never rejected a manuscript without giving it a careful reading and a fair appraisal.

John Creasey wrote about half-a-dozen Sexton Blake stories for the S.B.L., and he told me there would probably have been many more if the editor had liked them as much as the readers did.

So far as world renown goes, John Creasey is easily the most famous of Blake writers, followed by Berkeley Gray (the late E.S. Brooks). None of the 200 other odd authors, with due respect to them, would be classed in the same category as Messrs. Charteris, Wallace, and Cheyney.

Perhaps the mythical assumption that the three last-named authors wrote of Sexton Blake will never be killed. It does the reputation of Blake no harm. Perhaps, if they had written off Blake, we would now have some classical stories, in the Pierre Quiroule mould, to look back on. Who can tell?

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HAMILTONIANA

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 96 THE ROSE

A reader, quoted in this month's "The Postman Called," has written: "Enjoyed the Annual very much, particularly the Buddle story, with one small complaint. The strange names of some of the characters somewhat spoil the story for me - Antrobus, Irony, Restarick; most unusual."

The question arises whether the reader is reasonable or whether his complaint is a trifle pedantic. Names, of course, do make a difference. A maiden whose name was Gladys Smith decided that she would stand more chance as a film-star if she called herself Mary Pickford. Personally, I think that the lady's charm and personality would have carried her to fame whatever she called herself. On the other hand, it must be admitted that Tom Merry, had he been named Fred Snarler, would probably never have gone down into history as one of the most famous schoolboy characters in the world.

As soon as a writer conceives a character, he finds a name for him. After a very short time, the character really lives for the writer and the chosen name becomes part and parcel of that character.

It has been suggested that Charles Hamilton obtained most of the names for his characters from Burke's Peerage, and the rest from Happy Families. Probably he did, but nobody has really said that he was wrong to do this. The source of the names was unimportant. What mattered was the way he handled the characters after the names were selected!

Broadly speaking, one could say that if a story is well written it must be a success, whatever the names of the characters. But one would probably be wrong. I have already passed the opinion that Fred Snarler, the hero of the Shell, would have been doomed from the start. Equally unattractive were such actual Hamilton characters as Snoop, Scrope, and Racke. They struck a false note in every tale in which they appeared. Merely unpleasant names for unpleasant people.

So names do count. Perhaps our reader was not so pedantic, after all.

Among the very first pupils of my teaching career were the 3 brothers Poppmacher. At least two of those brothers have now changed their name to Morris, obviously believing that in England, at least, fate will be kinder to a Morris than to a Poppmacher.

Way back in the days of the yo-yo craze, the advertisers of the

yo-yo struck on the idea of a weird character who was driven potty by constantly playing yo-yo. They thought they were safe in naming this character Blennerhassett, and the adventures of the yo-yo playing Blennerhassett appeared in the Evening Standard. Unfortunately, there was a real Mr. Blennerhassett, and this touchy gentleman made a court case out of it. He lost his case.

If the captain of Slade had been named Snoop, Scrope, Racke, Piggott, Chowle, or even Poppmacher or Blennerhassett, would he have appealed more? He did, in fact, become Antrobus, which is not all that unusual and is fairly euphonious. Would it have made a scrap of difference if instead of Alan Antrobus we had had Harry Hooter, captain of Slade? For one name is as good as another. But is it?

The famous Sexton Blake writer, Pierre Quiroule, created a fine character study - Bertrand Charon, chief of the French Surete. Rapidly Bertrand Charon became part and parcel of the Quiroule Sexton Blake story. But for some unfathomable reason, in one Blake tale - a very good one named "The Five Dummy Books" - Bertrand Charon became Bertram Charon. It irked me keenly when I read the tale for the first time, and I kept wondering whether the author had forgotten, whether he had had a change of mind, or whether it was a printer's error.

One felt much the same when Mr. Woose, of the Magnet of the middle thirties, became Mr. Woosey with the passing of time. I am still undecided whether it was a slip of memory on the part of Charles Hamilton, whether he might have intended Mr. Woosey as an entirely different character from Mr. Woose, or whether the printers were at fault. A similar occurrence was when Bunter's home town became the fictitious Redgate instead of the real Reigate. In this case I always felt that the editor took a hand. He may even have been influenced by the capers of Mr. Blennerhassett.

Personally, I always prefer stories which are set in genuine surroundings, though fictitious places like Wayland, Courtfield, and Huckleberry Heath came to seem very real with the passing of time.

A similarity between names of characters would seem to be a mistake in any story, and it is rather surprising to find an experienced writer like Agatha Christie, in her "The Mirror Cracked From Side to Side," featuring among her leading players such a jumble as Badcock, Haydock, Allcock, and Craddock. Not a case of "Box and Cox" but of "Cocks and Docks."

As we all know, Charles Hamilton's weakness in earlier times was a duplication of names. Redferns and Lagdens and Talbots were

scattered indiscriminately, and even Quelches and Wingates appeared in duplicate. Whether this was due to mere carelessness or to an affection for certain names we do not know.

In a way, I have a soft spot for our reader who did not find that Antrobus and Irony touched pleasantly on his ear-drums or slipped happily from his tongue. I always loathe stories which feature characters with Russian-sounding names like Fusspoff or Ivanavitch. Which is odd, for Pierre Quiroule had rather a weakness for using names of that type, and he is by far my favourite Blake author.

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, let's sum up. Was our Antrobus-hater pedantic, or not guilty? My own contentions are that names should be fairly euphonious, they should be consistent where a series is concerned, they should not merely be rather nice for a nice character and rather nasty for a nasty character, and they should not be similar one to the other. You will now retire and consider your verdict.

In any case, whatever your verdict, it seems likely that, should we have any further stories of Slade, Alan Antrobus will still be captain of that select establishment. Unless Irony, by a printer's error or by a threat of a libel action from a real Irony, becomes Crony and understudies Loder to the extent of bringing about the expulsion of Antrobus with his consequent replacement by Harry Hooter.

* * * * *

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 95. THE ECHO LINGERS ON

ROGER JENKINS: I should agree with you that Charles Hamilton exaggerated at times. For example, after the war, when there were many assertions that the Magnet and Gem were written by a syndicate of writers, he declared that he had written every number of the two papers from beginning to end. This was not true, but it was an understandable boast.

The Magnet story competition was quite a different matter. The indignant letter from which I quoted was written to me out of the blue, after a long gap in our correspondence, and the letter bears the stamp of truth so far as I am concerned. Personally I do not find it unreasonable to assume that Charles Hamilton did not read every editorial. Collectors may hoard Magnets and Gems but the author of the stories had quite a different outlook. He kept a few of the old papers, but remarkably few indeed: and those that he kept were often

defaced or mutilated, since he tore out pages as spills to light his pipe, and in this way both serials and editorials were ripped away. My impression is that he seldom read his work in print.

If you consider his tremendous output in 1915, when he was writing St. Jim's, Greyfriars, and Rookwood stories practically every week, I very much doubt whether he would have time to do much more than glance cursorily at the Gem, Magnet, and Boys' Friend each week. To assume that he must have read three of Hinton's rubbishy editorials all through in each paper each week is, I think, assuming too much.

The key may perhaps lie in the conversation I had with him when I visited him. I kept on asking him about various stories of the 1920's and early 1930's, and in the end he said, "Do you know, I think my best story is always the one I am just about to finish writing. Very occasionally, I re-read an old Magnet series and think how good it was, but my main interest is always in my present writing." Any prolific writer must, of course, have this attitude, and I feel sure he was too busy to read his own work in print, let alone Hinton's puerile editorials.

T. W. WALKER: In your "Let's be Controversial" for the January issue of "Collectors' Digest," a doubt as to whether Charles Hamilton saw his own work in print arises. Perhaps I can shed some light on this. When I visited him on August 12th, 1949, you can imagine that I very much enjoyed having quite a long talk with him - it being quite a 'red letter' day for me. Towards the end of our conversation, I asked him if he had any old copies of the "Gem and Magnet" which he didn't want, and which I would willingly have had.

His reply was that he had had a very big pile of them, but had only a little while back sent them for salvage, and he said I could have had them with pleasure if he still possessed them. You can imagine my feelings!!! My point is that he must have read or looked at his own work in print.

* * * * *

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THE POSTMAN CALLED

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

JOHN McMAHON (Uddingston): I always find it difficult to express my enjoyment of the Annual and the monthly C.D. You see, I don't wish to sound like a gushing old woman, but when I read this year's Annual I got such real pleasure from it that I would excuse anyone for gushing over it. I would not put any article above another, as I enjoyed the whole book from cover to cover.

ARTHUR FENNER (London): Having read the Annual from cover to cover, I write to thank you and all those who make such a treat possible. We who can only read, owe such a lot to those who write.

W. O. G. LOFTS (London): Our editor is quite correct in the C.D. Annual in his assumption that WALLY HAMMOND did not write the "Cloyne" school stories. According to my own information, they were written by a writer named J. T. Bolton. Certainly not by Sidney Horler as once reported. He personally denied it before his death. PATSY HENDREN also did not write the "Test Match Kid" stories in the PENNY POPULAR - they were written by Alfred Edgar. To use a pun - very few famous cricketers could write a yarn off 'their own bat.'

John Hunter told me once that he 'ghosted' for a famous Arsenal footballer in a series of football yarns in a boys paper.

J. C. DOYLE (Acton): Having read all of the Annual that is of interest to me, I regret to say that I did not find it up to the standard of the 1964 issue. The omission of Danny was a great mistake, and the Annual suffers accordingly. A Slade story is always very welcome to me, and many thanks for same, but I still think "Christmas With Meredith" the best yet. Frank Vernon Lay's Appreciation of J. W. Wheway was most enjoyable and informative, and in my opinion the best of the many interesting articles.

R. J. GODSAVE (Leytonstone): There is something in the Annual for all tastes. "Mr. Buddle Meets the Magnet" was a delight to read.

C. LESLIE FARROW (Boston): Just my little meed of praise for the Annual. Only one word for it - superb. What would Christmas be now without the Annual? Like bread without butter. I enjoyed "Demon Within Him" by R. J. Godsave, and the Mr. Buddle story was excellent. I have grown to like Mr. Buddle very much. I also greatly enjoyed C. H. Churchill's item "You May Not remember."

Only one small complaint. What happened to Danny's Diary this year? I am afraid I did miss it.

NORMAN WRIGHT (Pinner): The feature in the Annual concerning the Billy Bunter tales in the Vanguard made me think of a similar case. In P. G. Wodehouse's school novel "Head of Kay's," the chief character is Jimmy Silver, and he is portrayed as very similar to Jimmy Silver of Rookwood.

("Head of Kay's" was first published in 1905. Rookwood not till 10 years later. - ED.)

BOB GRAY (Church Stretton): One can read the Mr. Buddle stories over and over again, and enjoy them better each time.

ALAN STEWART (London): Enjoyed the Annual very much, particularly the Buddle story, with one small complaint. The strange names of some of the characters somewhat spoilt the story for me - Antrobus, Irony, Restarick; most unusual.

STAN KNIGHT (Cheltenham): The Christmas C.D. had just the right flavour for the season, and the January issue has started off 1966 on a trail of never-ceasing anticipation and delight. As for the Annual, what can I add to all that has already been said. I certainly have no criticism to make; nothing but praise from start to finish. I honestly think the latest Buddle story the best yet. As a Lee fan, I was delighted with the St. Frank's items by R. Godsave, C. Churchill, and Bob Blythe. Also of great interest to me was Derek Smith's article on Wally Hammond, even if he did not write "Cloyne of Claverhouse." Henry Webb's covers were delights in themselves.

L. PACKMAN (London): Your contributor to the postbag, F. STURDY (Middlesbrough), is quite correct in stating that the title 'The Hooded Terror' was actually the serial 'The House of Hate,' but he is wrong in accrediting Ruth Roland as the featured feminine character. It was in fact PEARL WHITE, the male lead being Antonio Moreno. Through the courtesy of John Robyns of Brighton I have a very fine shot from this film - with P.W., A.M. and The Hooded Terror all together. The film LIBERTY featured Marie Walcamp.

TOM JOHNSON (Neston): Re the Cinema Stars booklet, sold for 2d in 1915, and referred to by Danny, I have a copy of this in my collection.

BILL GANDER (Canada): The last copy of Vanguard I have was number 134, November 1909, so it ran rather longer than you thought. Somewhere between No. 68 and 84 the green cover was dropped, and the

paper became pink. I seem to remember Tom Hopperton stating somewhere that before Vanguard ended it became the same size as Boys' Friend, and featured sports, thus coming in competition with Boys' Realm. The first story of Greylands was in Pluck No. 541, dated March 1915, and the author was given as Lewis Carlton.

(Mr. W. O. G. Lofts informs us that Carlton was actually editor of the paper, and also of Union Jack. Later, he went on the stage, where, because of his youthful appearance, he played the part of Tinker in a Sexton Blake play. - ED.)

STANLEY SMITH (Ipswich): The note on Box & Cox interested me. There was a musical version by Sullivan which is still sometimes performed along with "Trial by Jury." But it brings up the question of dating. To me, one of the faults of Charles Hamilton was his use of dated idiom long after it had passed from general use. The term "Box & Cox" was in general use when I was a boy, but I doubt if many people even know it to-day.

HOLIDAY ANNUALS and MAGNETS for EXCHANGE ONLY: I offer one Holiday Annual or six Magnets for one Boys' Friend Library containing King of the Island or certain Rio Kid stories. Please state exactly what you have available in first letter. Would consider Modern Boys containing these stories if a complete series can be offered.

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PROFESSOR CHALLENGER

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By Norman Wright

Of all the professors in schoolboy fiction probably the most vivid, vicious, and versatile of them all was Conan Doyle's PROFESSOR CHALLENGER. Challenger is first met in "THE LOST WORLD" (1912), the first, and probably the best of Doyle's science fiction novels. "THE LOST WORLD" was the blue print on which many similar tales were based. Even very popular writers 'lifted' this theme. A good example of this is Edgar Rice Burroughs in his novel "THE LAND THAT TIME FORGOT" (1924). (Also in many of his "Tarzan" stories.) Another popular author who used this theme on more than one occasion was E. S. Brooks in his two famous "NORTHESTRIA" series in the NELSON LEE LIBRARY. The "Lost World" theme was so successful that it became the plot for many cinema films, the most famous of which were "THE LOST WORLD" made in 1925, and "KING KONG" made in 1933.

In 1913 the second Challenger story was published. This story was titled "THE POISON BELT" and told of how a cloud of poisonous gas covered the world putting all of its inhabitants into a death like sleep. Challenger who had foreseen the disaster summoned his friends to his house telling them to bring oxygen with them. As the earth is covered with the gas so everyone seems to die, everyone that is who hadn't got a supply of oxygen. When the cloud had passed Challenger and his companions set out to see what affects the gas had had upon the world. They find that everything is dead, they are alone in a "dead world." While they were pondering upon their fate everything wakes from the sleep and the world goes on as if nothing had happened. Although this plot is rather like a "Then I woke up" type of story it does not deteriorate the interest of the story.

The third and last of the Challenger novels was "THE LAND OF MIST" (1926). This story has a very strong spiritualistic flavour running through it and for this reason it could really be categorised as a boys book.

Apart from the three long novels Doyle also wrote several short stories dealing with Challenger, of these the most interesting was titled "WHEN THE WORLD SCREAMED" and was included in the volume titled "THE MARACOT DEEP AND OTHERS." (All of the Professor Challenger stories have been put into an omnibus edition issued by John Murray.)

Like most of Doyle's characters Challenger's image was magnified. He has an enormous head, a beard like an Assyrian bull, blue grey eyes under great tufts, and shoulders and chest like a barrel.

Although Challenger is something of a freak Doyle had modelled

him on himself. This is obvious from the frontispiece to the first edition of "THE LOST WORLD" that is in the form of a photograph of Challenger and his companions who accompanied him to the lost world. A careful scrutiny of the photograph reveals that the man who is supposed to be Challenger is in fact Doyle himself!

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

MIDLAND

Meeting held 14th December, 1965

Our December meeting took the form of a Christmas party and 12 people gathered to celebrate the festive season in a manner which would have met with the whole-hearted approval of William, George Bunter.

Included in our number were two distinguished visitors, parents of our youngest member, Mervyn Adams still at Lichfield Grammar School. Alderman Joseph Adams and his wife, Dorothy, formerly Mayor and Mayoress of Rowley Regis attended a joint meeting of the clubs at Chesterfield two years ago and were not strangers to us.

Even on this festive occasion we did not forget to honour one who loved the old books like ourselves. Frank Hancock, secretary of the Northern Section O.B.B.C. died suddenly on November 25th at the early age of 54 and we stood in silence as a mark of respect for the passing of one of the stalwarts of our hobby.

The collectors' item for the month was Gem No. 93, 20th Nov. 1909, a double Christmas number concerning Tom Merry and Co. visiting a haunted French chateau, and the anniversary number was Magnet No. 1452 for Dec. 14th, 1935. This was the first of the famous Polpelly series.

A St. Sam's story "The St. Sam's Skaters," was read in humorous vein by Madge Corbett, and then followed a game of 'Greyfriars Bingo,' an original game created by Tom Porter. This was thoroughly enjoyed and Tom is to be complimented on such a clever idea.

The rest of the evening was given over to what Billy Bunter would have termed the really important part of our Christmas programme, 'the study supper.'

There is always a touch of relish in the way Frank Richards details the items of food when a 'spread' is taking place. He would

have delighted in this. There was a massive pork pie brought by Ivan Webster; mince pies, fancy cakes, sausage rolls, sugared fruits, three kinds of wine, red, white and sherry, and lemonade for those who preferred it that way. The excellent provender and light-hearted, jolly conversation that prevailed made it a Christmas party we shall all remember with pleasure.

The happy party broke up at 9.45 p.m. and because we had met earlier than usual this month there will be a long break before our next meeting which is on January 25th at the Arden Hotel, Birmingham.

J. F. BELLFIELD
Correspondent.

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NORTHERN

Meeting held Saturday, 8th January, 1966.

It was a bitterly cold, foggy night when twelve members assembled for the opening meeting of 1966. The Chairman, Geoffrey Wilde, welcomed back amongst us Norman Smith who has returned to live in Leeds. Geoffrey then spoke of the tragedy that was in all our minds, the death of Frank Hancock, the Secretary. "Now is when I ask for the minutes, but there is this empty chair beside me....." Kind condolence and remembrances have come from all the Clubs, for many knew Frank, cheerful and genial. Geoffrey called for the Treasurer's report and correspondence, and Gerald, after giving the satisfactory financial statement, read more letters expressing sympathy for the family of Frank in their sorrow, and for the loss to the Northern Section.

Then it was felt we should record a tribute to our caretaker, Mr. Watkins, and his wife, whose work and decorations helped to make the Christmas Party last month so outstanding.

The star item on the programme was the "Floreat Greyfriars" record, and it was listened to in a rapt silence. For most of the Northern Club it was the first time we had heard the voice of Frank Richards, and it was enthralling as he explained his craft - so informal and friendly and fluent. The extracts were thought excellent, too. How the exuberant American voice brought Fishy remarkably to life! After we had clapped the record, Gerald related an enquiry in the "Story Paper Collector" regarding the identity of "The Two Flakeys" - names and an address in Leeds (now demolished) stamped on a copy of the "Boys' Friend" of the 1890's in the possession of Bill Gander. The final opinion of the meeting was that they were probably music-

hall artistes at one of the city's (then) many halls and theatres.

An item from the "Yorkshire Post" was then read by Gerald. 'Northerner II' quoted a short 'horror' story written by a boy in a Hull Secondary School concerning a Henry Wharton (no relation, 'Northerner II' reassured us, to Harry Wharton, Captain of the Greyfriars Remove). A good thing too, as Henry seemed likely to come to a sticky end in the toils of a Thing from a Swamp!

Library business then followed with refreshments and chat.

During the meeting, after nomination and election, the position of Hon. Sec. was accepted by

MOLLIE ALLISON

Next meeting, Saturday, 12th February, 1966.

LONDON

The first meeting of 1966 took place at the Richmond Community Centre on Sunday, 16th, the host being Don Webster, who had charge of all the arrangements. A bout of 'flu prevented Brian Doyle from attending. Thus Bob Blythe took the chair.

Welcoming all to the new venue, Bob Blythe gave a good report in his capacity of Nelson Lee Librarian. Roger Jenkins gave a good report of the progress of the Hamiltonian library. Roger had some coloured still photographs of the Margate outing; these were very good and would have pleased Harry Manners immensely. Continuing his remarks, Roger gave particulars of the Frank Richards museum catalogue which our worthy president, John Wernham is compiling. Then the meeting places for the next six months were arranged.

It was nice to see Josie Packman present, Len still unable to make the journey. But it will be nice to see him at 27th, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22. on Sunday, February, 20th, when the eighteenth Annual General Meeting of the club will be held. Two names for chairman for ensuing year were Bill Lofts and Don Webster. Postal members are asked to send in their votes as soon as possible.

An Eliminator Puzzle set by Don Webster resulted in Josie Packman getting the most answers but not having the sole remaining word left.

Ray Hopkins read a couple of chapters from S.O.L. 368, the title Rookwood Calling. This dealt with Tommy Dodd's efforts to get Clarence Cuffy to play goalkeeper against the 'Classicals.' A feature that was enjoyed by those present.

Bill Hubbard had brought along about nine hard backed books and

with the help of these gave a very fine lecture on "Sport in the Hard Cover Books." This was an excellent item and it was regrettable that we did not have time to compete in the questionnaire that Bill had with him on the lecture. However perhaps next month we can have it.

Further copies of the admirable Sexton Blake catalogue were distributed by Josie Packman who stated that they were going very well and all who wanted a copy should get in touch with her or Len at once.

The catering was very good and with a grateful vote of thanks to Don Webster, the meeting terminated.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

AUSTRALIA

With the holiday season prevailing, a depleted attendance was not unexpected when members gathered for the January meeting on Thursday, 20th, at 6.30 p.m. The usual comfortable rendezvous at "The Gaslight Bookshop" however was filled with enthusiasm despite the smaller gathering.

Main reason for this was the preview glimpse of the "Sexton Blake Catalogue" provided by the secretary - our most grateful thanks to Josie Packman for this jet service which put our far-distant club right with the latest. And to be perfectly honest the main part of the evening was spent perusing and enthusing over this magnificent production. As one member remarked "This is something I have dreamed about for years and now the reality far exceeds anything I have ever imagined."

Members asked the secretary to convey a most sincere vote of thanks to the folk in the Sexton Blake Circle who have made this feast of facts possible - thank you one and all for this really grand production which will enhance the interest of all Blake collectors.

As usual there were news and views from friends here and abroad: Arthur Holland, Tom Dobson, Bob Whiter, Jack Murtagh and Jack Hughes. And another welcome arrival was the November issue of Frank Unwin's "Foghorn" which provided a most stimulating topic for discussion with their query concerning the fate of Charles Hamilton and his characters in the year 3000 - great possibilities here also, to name items in the Blake field which would also fill this category.

The remainder of the evening was passed all too quickly in a stimulating discussion on the writings of G. H. Teed during which the catalogue was used for reference with great pleasure and ease.

Altogether a good start to the year and it is hoped the Feb. meeting will be even bigger and better.

B. PATE

WONDERLAND TALES - THE COMIC

By W. O. G. Lofts

I don't in a way blame O. W. Wadham in his very interesting article in the current C.D. Annual for suggesting that No. 27 of WONDERLAND TALES was a misplaced comic.

On the other hand, I do disagree with him for basing his evidence on one single issue only; when a perusal of the complete run of 106 issues leaves no doubt at all in my mind that WONDERLAND TALES on the whole was a comic in every sense of the word.

If I were to ask any reader what type of paper was THE JESTER, the instant reply, would be a comic with maybe nostalgic memories of Constable Cuddlecock coming to mind. Yet it is a fact that for a period THE JESTER was practically a story paper - likewise many others such as WONDER, BIG BUDGET, etc. One has only to see the notes of Derek Adley's and my own at the end of our 1963 C.D. Annual comic article, to appreciate the great difficulty we had in classifying certain papers as comics.

On the other hand, I do agree with Mr. Wadham that WONDERLAND TALES was an unusual publication. Strangely enough only a few months ago I perused the whole files of 106 issues, with a present day comic-paper editor friend of mine. We are still puzzling; as to what age group its former editor was aiming at as its format through two years run was puzzling to say the least!

WONDERLAND TALES commenced on the 19th July 1919 and to start with its size was unusual. It was half the size of a normal comic, but it had double the pages. To get a better idea; double the size of a normal cheque book - and the reader can glean the strange commencement of this comic paper. Whether it was intended to be a rival to YOUNG FOLKS TALES is debatable - yet it was identical to TIGER TIM'S TALES in shape and format. Either a companion or deadly rival.

Its opening fairy story "DICKY IN FAIRYLAND" was by G. R. HEARN, a well known contributor to A.P. comics, and, I believe, a member of the staff. Comic strips were "The Pranks of Jolly Jumbo's," "That Naughty Nigger and his Bunny Bimbo" by Philip Swinnerton - who had for a short while drawn WEARY WILLIE AND TIRED TIM for CHIPS - and who

later became editor of CHICKS OWN and worshipped his own creation RUPERT THE CHICK. More comic strips included "The Adventures of Helpful Horace" and "The Doings of those Darling Ducks." The reader can glean from the very first issue that there was more comic strip material than written work. No. 2. issue had as its main story "Princess Sugarlips" by Peter Cavan - a writer I do not know - plus its usual comic strips. In No. 10 the story got slightly more for the older child - "Harry and Kitty in Africa" by Hilda Brierley - a prolific writer of girls' stories. I do not know her identity. No. 11 contained a school story "No Cash! or hard times at St. Ives" by Jack Lewis - the real name of LEWIS JACKSON of SEXTON BLAKE/LEON KESTREL fame - who was a Billy Bunter figure himself in his last years at Brighton - a very popular writer indeed and greatly loved by all. Whereas before the readership had been aimed at a 5-9 age-group, from this issue it catered for the 7 to 12 group.

Other contributors of tales included such well-known writers as "Basil Baldwin" (Balfoure Ritchie - who was later editor of THE BOYS FRIEND LIBRARY), "Morton Pike" (D. H. Parry of ROBIN HOOD and historical tales fame), Henry T. Johnson, "John Grenfell" (Gilbert Flloyd - or better known as DUNCAN STORM of the BOMBAY CASTLE fame stories, Horace Philips - (MARJORIE STANTON of the Morecove school yarns) and C. Louis Pearce. The reader can easily see the sudden rise of more mature readership by the inclusion of these writers, despite the paper still including quite a few comic strips.

Artists in this period included Leonard Shields, the famous MAGNET illustrator, a Yorkshireman with close cropped hair, who died leaving a fortune from wise investments; and not from illustrating. Philip Hayward, another Greyfriars illustrator, and R. J. MacDonald, the GEM artist, who started out as a Music-hall artist. Willis Reading and that brilliant small Irishman J. Louis Smyth, whose drawings for BULLSEYE/FUN AND FICTION/FIREFLY/BUTTERFLY/FILM FUN/SURPRISE and other papers is still admired by many collectors.

No. 27 of WONDERLAND TALES which Mr. Wadham has, was the first issue to be double size, though they cut the pages down a lot so readers were only getting the same quantity of reading! TIGER TIM'S TALES likewise changed format at this period and for a short time the contents were practically all written material, which would give rise to the opinion that it was not a comic at all.

No. 48 dated June 12th 1920; apart from having in a sense two titles WONDERLAND tales and weekly - started to get very juvenile again in style - with comic strips coming well to the fore - especially on the front page. "The Adventures of Mr. Toots" - the Wonderland Cat

and his little friends Dicky Duck and Georgie Merry Mouse. Another slight plagerism on the famous Bruin boys, which surely were the most used and money-spinning comic characters of all time. At this period it had a total of 9 different comic strips running, with 15 in all by issue No. 77 right until the end. As already mentioned it became a comic for the very juvenile towards its final issue, and I feel sure that even the editor did not know what age group it was really aiming at.

I don't suppose one would call it a failure with two years run, but to echo the words of Gerry Allison, one did get wonderful artists and value for money in those days; and ardent comic enthusiasts could do no better than get hold of some of those 1½d WONDERLAND TALES - which in my humble opinion should be classed as a comic.

LAST FLING? NOT ON YOUR NELLIE!

The December issue of the Canadian magazine SATURDAY NIGHT, which has reached us by the courtesy of Mr. Bill Gander, contains a long article entitled "Billy Bunter's Last Great Gorge," by Dan O'Neill. Possibly your reaction may be a suppressed yawn and an involuntary "What! Another of them!," in view of the flood of these Bunter articles which have been dropping in from all over the world during the past twelvemonth.

Nevertheless, the writer of the article seems better informed than most of the flock of pro writers who have had a nibble at Bunter, even though there is nothing new in the article. Generally Mr. O'Neill seems to be laughing with his subject rather than at it, so he passes the test.

At the end he comments "This must be the end," but, wisely, he recalls an article his magazine published in 1963 which referred to "Curtains for Sexton Blake." But Blake soon came back.

As to Bunter, well, he is not likely to go for many years to come. For the past six months or so we have known that Odham's had in view the issue of BILLY BUNTER'S HOLIDAY ANNUAL. We now learn, by courtesy of Brian Doyle, that this Holiday Annual is to be issued next September at 9/6, and the contents will comprise stories of Greyfriars, St. Jim's, and Rookwood, the main story being entitled "Saving Bunter's Bacon," apparently originating from the Magnet of the early thirties. I wonder whether it may appear mercifully without another great flood of publicity.

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