

# Collectors' Digest

IN THIS ISSUE! **SPLendid** 12,000 WORDS STORY OF THE GIRLS OF MORCOVE SCHOOL!

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**WHY DOES BETTY LOSE  
THE PRIZE?**

(An incident from  
"The Plasterers  
Prize!" the grand school story in  
this issue.)

# Collectors' Digest

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AUGUST 1966

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3 Schoolgirls' Own Library No 52

## A WORD FROM THE SKIPPER

### YOUTH - AND THE OLD PAPERS

Recently at Excelsior House I was privileged to act as host to our London Club. I was impressed to note the presence of a number of young people in their teens, and I was surprised to see how extremely knowledgeable they were concerning the old papers. It is pleasant indeed to find young people taking so keen an interest.

Last month, in Collectors' Digest, one of these young people chastised

those who make large profits on the sales of the old papers, and appealed for prices to be kept within reach of slender pockets. Our young friend's article was, not unnaturally, slightly biased, but most of us will sympathise with what he wrote.

All collecting hobbies are, of course, expensive, for the real kick in collecting comes by acquiring something in short supply, when the competition is not among the sellers but among the purchasers. High prices are not in themselves necessarily exorbitant, nor is the vendor,

of necessity, making a profit.

The youthful writer claimed that "interest in a hobby can only be sustained if one has a collection of one's own to browse through." That is not strictly true of our particular hobby. A large percentage of readers of this magazine own no personal collection at all, yet they still maintain the utmost enthusiasm. The actual collectors are really very small in number, surprising though that may be.

#### DEATH OF TOM HOPPERTON

In early July we learned with very deep regret of the passing of Tom Hopperton at the age of 58. Mr. Hopperton had been associated with Collectors' Digest since the very beginning; he was an authority upon many aspects of old boys' book lore, and some of the most memorable articles ever to appear in the monthly or the Annual came from his pen.

Though he did not engender the warmth which makes for mass reader appeal, he was an accomplished writer, and his scholarly, thoughtful style made each of his many contributions a treat for the intellectuals in our midst.

Entirely fearless in what he wrote, he could, at times, be bitterly satirical, but he was also capable of a kindness which often shone through in his work.

Taken in his prime from the hobby which he graced with his fine articles, he will never be forgotten while the hobby remains - a hobby which is much the poorer for his passing.

#### JUST A REMINDER

Last month we mentioned that preparations are now in hand for our famous Year Book - Collectors' Digest Annual. Articles for same will be warmly welcomed in the next few weeks. Please do not delay. If in your friendly noddles you have the seeds germinating for an article, be sure to let us all reap the benefit. Get out the ball points or the typewriter.

Articles on Sexton Blake, Nelson Lee, or on subjects far from the general run will be warmly welcomed. There is never any dearth of Hamiltonian material.

THE EDITOR

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Wanted GEMS before 1310.

Write: LOFTS, 56, SHERINGHAM HOUSE, LISSON STREET, LONDON, N.W.1.

R E V I E WW. A. Ballinger  
(Mayflower 3/6)"A STARLET FOR A PENNY."

A film studio in Rome; a murder committed in front of thousands of witnesses; a vice-ring laced with blackmail; several more murders; torture; a further killing by members of Mafia; a touch of spice in the form of Adele, Duchess of Derwentwater. Put these all together and you should have a complete thriller.

But everything goes wrong somewhere, and the story fails to grip. I found the dialogue of several of the characters boring with its contemporary phraseology. It is all slickly written but too superficial. Most of the characters are just names; their personalities never emerge.

The gimmick beginning has been used many times before in the S.B.L. and with greater effect. The whole thing has its moments of excitement, but the style of writing is the main drawback so far as I am concerned. In this, it can be compared with "Death in the Top Twenty."

Ray Norton

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THE SEASON OF THE SKYLARK

Ray Norton writes: "It may be of interest to Blake fans to know that the 4-part serial 'The Season of the Skylark' by Jack Trevor Story, to be screened on B.B.C. TV starting July 9th is based on the Sexton Blake book of the same name, published January 1957. At that time Tinker was being pushed into the background in favour of Paula Dane, so the Skylark tale had the distinction of placing Tinker in a star role, while Blake made only a fleeting appearance. Comparing the TV play with the book, a few changes have been made - the names of Blake and Tinker are changed - but the plot seems to be basically the same."

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Starring in "Season of the Skylark" is the young man, David Griffin, who appeared as Johnny Bull in several of the Bunter shows on the London stage.)

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WANTED: MAGNETS No. 10 and 54; 442; 617; 745; 761; 768; 771; 773;  
 774; 782; 784; 800; 806; 818; 835; 838; 841; 846; 847; 852; 854; 856;  
 859. Also GEMS: All years; Your price paid. Write to:-

JIM SWAN, 3 Fifth Avenue, London, W.10

# DISTANT YESTERDAY - - - - -

Being extracts from DANNY'S DIARY for August 1916

It does not seem possible that the war has been on for two years, yet it has. Ever since I was a child, in fact. What a waste of a lifetime.

They say that in these two years the cost of food has risen by 78%. They have now pegged the price of potatoes, which must not be sold at more than 1½d a pound. Butter is getting terribly difficult to get, and it is rather nasty when you get it.

There haven't been many air-raids to speak of this month. The zepps only come when the nights are very dark, and, of course, nights are never very dark at this time of year.

There was no August Bank Holiday this year, and, owing to the war, Dad was only able to take one week's holiday. We went to Felixstowe in the middle of August, travelling from Liverpool Street terminus. We had to change at Ipswich, and from there it was about ten miles further to go on a local train.

In Felixstowe we stayed at a boarding house called Song Susie, which is French for Without Care. It is quite a small seaside resort, and a terrific steep hill goes down to the beach. The beach is all pebbles, which hurt the feet, but once in the water you find yourself on soft sand. There are some nice gardens along the front, and a very tiny amusement park. There is a small switchback ride here; but it is terribly bumpy, and when I was on it I thought every minute I should be hurled into maternity.

Doug had bought a Union Jack to read in the train, and he gave it to me afterwards. It was called "The Bogus Confession" and it introduced a criminaless named Kathleen Maitland. They call her Chicago Kate, and she is the daughter of a lawbreaker named Ezra Q. Maitland. The story started in Brazil, and went on in London. It was about a Stock Exchange swindle, and was quite good.

There is a small cinema, the Victoria, in Felixstowe, and we went one evening and saw Maurice Costello in "The Man Who Couldn't Kill Conscience." I didn't like it much, and the only music came from a plump lady playing a piano.

The weather was good during our holiday. We spent one whole day in Ipswich, which is a big town. There are some nice shops, and all the streets go at right angles, like a game of noughts and crosses.

There are some very nice big open-topped trams, very much like ours at home. I had a ride on one from a place called Cornhill to a country place named Whitton. Late in the afternoon we went to a cinema in Fore Street, and saw Bessie Barriscale in "The Golden Claw" and Charlie Chaplin in "Champion Charlie." It was all very good, and they had a nice orchestra here.

It is really very extravagant for me to spend a penny on the Boys' Friend every week, for I very seldom read anything in it except Rookwood. But Rookwood, though the tales are rather short, is always first-class. The first story this month was "The Rascal's Repentance" and it was the last of the Mornington series. The classical juniors had planned a dorm feast, but their tuck was confiscated by Beaumont, the prefect. Mornington goaded Jimmy into going into the village for more tuck after lights out, but Morny had already arranged that Jimmy should be attacked and mauled by toughs, on the way. However, Mornington thought better of it, went after Jimmy, and helped him against the ruffians. A good tale.

Next week, "Fagging for Beaumont" was amusing. Beaumont, the prefect, was expecting a visit from his uncle, so, without providing any money, he ordered Jones Minor to prepare a big feast in his study. Jones took his troubles to Jimmy, who placed telephone orders with tradesmen all over the place in Beaumont's name. Really funny, this one.

"The Uninvited Guest" of the third story was Billy Bunter, and this was quite good, though very much the same as Bunter's previous visit to Rookwood. Finally, "The Rookwood Players" was a light tale about the Classical Dramatic Society putting on a play about a wooden-legged sailor named Admiral Corker. A real wooden-legged sailor, Admiral Topcastle, came along, and there was a mix-up. This tale took a bit of swallowing.

The Magnet has been excellent this month. "His Own Fault" told of Hazeldene buying cigarettes and tobacco for Mrs. Chirpey, the wife of the village plumber, for her to send to her husband who is now at the front. Hazeldene was misunderstood by the Remove. A wee bit goody-goody-goody, this 'un.

In "The Tricksters Tricked," Skinner sent a false telegram so that Mr. Linley, father of Mark, visited Greyfriars. I wondered why Frank Richards kept referring to Mr. Linley as "the old gentleman." After all, Mark Linley is only a year or two older than me, and my dad isn't an old gentleman. In fact, Dad says he will always be able to jump over my head.

I don't really know why I wasn't all that keen on the third tale, "Rake's Rival." I think it was rather an overcrowded yarn, if you know what I mean. I'm not keen on tales about so many new boys, perhaps. Arthur Carthew, a new boy, wanted the place in the cricket team promised to Rake, another fairly new boy. But Rake's cousin Tom turned up in a sloppy chapter, and told Dick Rake of the Remove that he, Tom, was suspected of robbing a bank. Actually it was Carthew's father who had robbed the bank. Awful itchy stuff, really.

But the final tale "A Split in the Study" was wonderful. Harry Wharton lost his temper with Skinner, and knocked him about. The Co disapproved - and Wharton went on the high horse. Marjorie Hazeldene (just a wee bit itchy, this bit) talked common-sense to Wharton - and he apologized to Skinner.

Doug read the tale, liked it a lot, and said that Marjorie Hazeldene is very much like his girl friend, Freda Bonestoril. Corks, crikes, and lor-luv-aduck!

At our local picture palace - one of them, that is - a new serial has started. It is called "Liberty" and it stars Marie Walchamp and Eddie Polo. With the first episode we also saw Marguerite Clark in "Out of the Drifts." Marguerite Clark is very much like Mary Pickford. Each of our cinemas shows a different news film. Pathe Gazette, Topical Budget, and Gaumont Graphic. I like Topical Budget the best.

A good month in the Gem on points. "Grundy the Detective" set about finding clues to the disappearance of Manners' camera. Very good, if you can put up with Grundy.

"Every Inch a Hero" was a bit of a sentimental shocker. Gussy hears from a Sylvia Carr whom he is supposed to have met during a cricket week at Eastwood House. But Brooke, the day boy, becomes friendly with Miss Carr (he is working with her on a project) and Gussy becomes jealous of Brooke. Gussy is very much out of character in this tale.

"Patriots of St. Jim's" was really a most remarkable tale to appear in a boys' paper. I am sure that it is a fine story, for Dad and Doug both read it and voted it tip-top reading, but only a very brainy schoolboy would really enjoy it. It is quite brilliant satyr in which Gussy had the idea that all wealth and possessions should be nationalised in wartime. Dad read aloud some of the dialogue between Gussy, Skimpole, and others, and it was great, though over the heads of most Gem readers I am certain. I think it is the most astonishing tale ever to feature in the Gem, and I shan't forget it in a hurry.

The last tale, "Kildare's Enemy," brought in yet another new boy - Sidney Clive from South Africa this time. Oh, these new boys! They're as thick as the leaves in Vaseline. Clive saved Kildare from the results of the plotting of Sefton and Gibbs - and at the end of the tale both Sefton and Gibbs were expelled from St. Jim's.

An early closing bill has just been passed in parliament and from September the First all shops must close by 7 in the week, and not later than 8 on Saturdays. It will seem a bit rum.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: In "Controversial Echoes" last month, there was some comment about the editor publishing stories out of sequence. A story so published was the sub tale "Every Inch A Hero," mentioned by Danny. It was actually a sequel to "Heroes of the Fourth," a story not published till over a month later.)

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COLLECTORS LAMENT

By John Trovell

Norman Wright in his outspoken article expressing the views of the younger members of our fraternity, with regard to obtaining copies of the old papers, will no doubt have his remarks endorsed by many collectors lacking his courage to state that they also are in no position to afford the exorbitant prices asked, and obviously obtained by some advertisers.

Dealers, interested only in the demand and financial gain from these transactions, sell to those able to afford the inflated prices. The recipient, in turn, could well be a person with no possible interest in his purchase except resale at a further profit, and so the genuine collector with limited means virtually a Mark Linley trying to compete with the Vernon-Smith's stands no chance in this battle of supply and demand.

Members of our hobby who have never possessed, or even seen a Blue Gem, Boy's Friend or early Magnet, accept that they must be grateful and content to glean knowledge of them through Danny's Diary, and the many excellent articles in the Digest, but to a keen young beginner a sense of frustration could only result from his efforts to obtain copies of these elusive publications.

Today the collector of the old papers has a hard and often disappointing furrow to plough, both patience and determination are necessary to add just the odd "want" to his collection, but there is, of course, a brighter side when the collector's lot - unlike the



# B L A K E I A N A

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

## THE EDWY SEARLES BROOKS STORY

By W. O. G. Lofts

Like everyone else, I was greatly saddened to learn of the sudden death of Edwy Searles Brooks last December. My own more vivid memories of his writings were in the Sexton Blake field, particularly in regard to his fine character creation WALDO THE WONDERMAN. Not that I have anything against St. Frank's; but the plain fact is that the NELSON LEE LIBRARY finished in 1933 - just when I started to read boys stories, so Handforth & Co do not have any nostalgic memories for me. Furthermore, not only was E.S.B. a prolific Sexton Blake writer, he admitted at an O.B.B.C. meeting that he preferred writing about Blake more than Lee.

Biographical details have always interested me. Not that I would ever dream of intruding into an author's private life - like the controversial Winston Churchill clinical revelations by his doctor; or indeed, to the extent of the distasteful facts recently written about Somerset Maugham. In my opinion this has nothing to do with the merits of the great writers as such, and is purely sensationalism. My interest is purely to try to discover how a writer obtained his skill in writing: Was it inherited? Did he base his own creative schools or characters on real life? Personally, I think this all adds up to the interest about an author, and I cannot see the slightest thing objectionable about it.

Now living alone - except for her pet Collie dog - in Norbury, London, is the widow of E.S.B. The beautiful house, surrounded by gardens, is full of wonderful and nostalgic memories. It has been my great pleasure to call on Mrs. Brooks several times and have longish chats about Edwy's life and writing career. Mrs. Frances Brooks, who also is a Londoner, I found to be an extremely interesting conversationalist with a great sense of humour. I have her full permission to publish all the new facts as revealed in this article - which I hope will please St. Frank's enthusiasts as well as Sexton Blake fans.

Edwy Searles Brooks was born at Hackney, London, on 11 November 1889. His father was the Rev. George Brooks, a Congregational Minister and a well known political writer for THE TIMES and other leading political magazines. Apart from being a very clever man he

had great principles, and even refused the Living of St. George's, Hanover Square, because of one of his religious beliefs. This was indeed a 'plum' post, and his family were greatly dismayed by his decision. One could say that the Rev. Brooks was the forerunner of Billy Graham, for he used to hire halls and give lectures and talks on religious instruction, complete with illustrations. E.S.B., who was given his first Christian name after a famous person in history and his second by his grandmother's surname, came from a large family. Apart from himself there were four other brothers and one sister. When still a baby, however, Edwy's family moved to Norfolk, where he spent most of his boyhood.

He attended Banham Grammar School for quite a long time; but, like many other well known people, he was not very brilliant, though he excelled in English - which after all is not very surprising. But his inventiveness was extraordinary, and considering that he was never taught anything in this line his knowledge of electricity and mechanics was nothing short of amazing. He seemed to know everything instinctively, and was also good at carpentry and always making gadgets of some kind. In fact, if he had not become a writer he could easily have become a brilliant mechanical engineer. It is quite possible that he may have inherited this ability from his grandfather, who was an engineer and constructed one of Egypt's biggest bridges.

As a boy Edwy, as is now well known, was an avid reader of the MAGNET and GEM, the latter his first love, though he did read the UNION JACK. He started writing in his teens, and one early GEM serial entitled THE IRON ISLAND was written at a place he once stayed at called KENNING HALL.

Now, there has always been something of a mystery surrounding Edwy's brother Leonard, who was also a writer and did indeed pen many Sexton Blake stories. Leonard, however, never showed the same ability as Edwy in this field, for he seemed to lack the art of making his characters 'live.' It is no longer a secret that Edwy, who was always ready to give a helping hand, gave his brother a lot of help. No wonder Blake researchers have been confused over these two writers! Another brother was very clever in the advertising line, and he too worked for the Amalgamated Press - but Edwy and Leonard were the only two in the writing field.

Edwy was married in 1919 to one who was to bring him 47 years of happiness. Frances, his partner, was also a writer in a minor way, having had an extensive education and attended college, and was well versed in all subjects. Probably no man and wife worked so much as a

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team as they did - there was a sort of telepathy between them, for they seemed to know what was in each other's mind.

Mrs. Brooks related to me many amusing stories concerning Edwy's writings. Here is one of them:-

E.S.B. was always well ahead of schedule with his stories, and whenever he was going away for a longish holiday abroad he would work almost night and day for a week dictating to his wife. On one occasion when they were on a bus on their way to Victoria, to catch a boat train, Edwy asked for two sixpenny fares and a full stop! This, believe it or not, was repeated again later to another astonished bus conductor.

E.S.B. did at one time have in his library all the stories he ever wrote, in bound volumes. But when they moved to their present house the packing case which contained them, plus ALL the personal letters he had received from readers, went astray and was never recovered.

Many familiar names came back to Mrs. Brooks's mind - like JULIUS HERMAN (who, incidentally, aroused a great deal of interest among our fraternity some time ago, by reason of being a substitute writer). She well remembered how our own JACK MURTAGH in New Zealand sent them a wonderful gift in war-time rationed England. Mrs. Brooks also recalled several groups of now unknown young men who visited them - to say nothing of the ceaseless letters and telephone calls they received, all in connection with the old writings.

I do not have to tell readers how methodical E.S.B. was in his work. In his study bookshelves I saw railway timetables, medical books - particularly books on poisons - and all the works of the greatest of all detective writers, Sir A. Conan Doyle, featuring Sherlock Holmes. Edwy also kept notebooks in which he most carefully wrote down the details of all his characters, so that he would be sure to be exact in future reference to them.

A perfect motorist, he had driven for over 50 years without a single accident and belonged to the select band of veteran motorists. A keen golfer, played snooker better than average, and could also paint and draw exceedingly well.

E.S.B., it could be said, had the mind of a futurist. (How many readers can recall his story THE SCHOOL IN SPACE.) He was many years ahead of his time. A remarkable coincidence is that E.S.B. named his last NORMAN CONQUEST novel "Curtains For Conquest," and flatly refused to alter the title despite objections! Of course he never meant Conquest to die, but it seemed an omen - as if he knew that it would

be his last book.

There were great hopes that their son, Lionel, would follow in his father's footsteps, but after showing distinct promise by having a science fiction story published he went into Public Relations.

Decent and clean-living, with a heart of gold and always ready to help others less fortunate, Edwy Searles Brooks will always be remembered with great affection by Nelson Lee and Sexton Blake enthusiasts alike.

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Part 2.

TINKER & CO

By Margaret Cooke

Never able to compete with Blake's mental powers, Tinker's intense interest in other people and his ready sympathy brought him friends in all walks of life, and a knowledge of men and affairs which became invaluable to Blake as the years passed. Experience taught Blake that if Tinker distrusted either client or crook, that person should be investigated immediately. Only once was the instinct at fault.

Whilst he was still very young, he went with Blake to Queensgate to search for the headquarters of a gang of forgers whose activities were menacing the stability of the German mark. A few minutes after their arrival a young man tried to engage Blake's services to prove that a certain Doctor Felberg was practicing vivisection on goats. During the night, however the young man disappeared and after following a false trail through the Doctor's garden where Tinker tamed a savage dog, to a cliff-edge and traces of a fatal accident, Blake and Tinker met a Captain Gay, owner of a Schneider Trophy Seaplane also engaged in the search.

The young man was charming. Blake liked him very much indeed but Tinker hero-worshipped him. He longed to try his hand at flying such a fast and beautiful sea-plane and spent all the time he could with his new friend. Captain Gay, working for the forgers, encouraged the lad's interest, intending to use the sea-plane to cause his death at a later date when his friends were ready to ambush and kill Blake.

In due course Blake received a telephone call from someone who offered to sell information about the forgers to him, if he would keep a rendezvous at a lonely inn and arrive in a blue car.

Tinker was already in the racing plane receiving instructions from Captain Gay, when Blake, after making arrangements to hire every car in the village, except the blue one, for the next twenty four hours, learned where he was. Driving a speed boat which he had hired for Tinker's amusement, at top speed for the plane, he whisked

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Tinker ashore with instructions to watch the forger's house, then returned for Captain Gay and kept him at his side until evening. Blake, accompanied by Tinker went by round-about ways to the scene of the rendezvous in his own car and it was Captain Gay arriving in the blue, and only available car, who was killed. (The Night Raiders.)

Tinker, deeply grieved by his hero's death, was inclined to blame Blake for allowing it to happen - until Blake outlined the kind of 'accident' intended for Tinker himself.

A saddened, but wiser, Tinker resumed his study of the people whom he met, and of the principles of detection taught to him by Blake, himself studying law and medicine between cases - sometimes indrawn but never indifferent; strict, calm, clever; always ready to humour Tinker's wishes if possible and to listen to his worries. A strong prop for a boy to lean on and worthy of his adoration.

Tinker's faith in his Guvnor's ability to cope with every situation grew stronger daily not only did he bring his own worries to Blake, he invited other people to bring theirs, knowing that Blake would listen and help if he could whether the people could pay his fees or not.

When, in his teens, he revisited Calcroft School where Blake had once posed as a master, and met Alan Mayne, a boy who was leaving school because his father was missing, believed dead, and who had to attend the auction sale of his old home next day, Tinker decided to go with him. Alan had no relatives, no money apart from that to come from the sale and no plans. Tinker persuaded him to discuss the matter with Blake before deciding anything.

The two boys bedded down on makeshift beds in an upstairs room but were disturbed by a would-be burglar. Surprised that anyone should try to rob a house prepared for auction, Tinker began an investigation of his own and discovered a roll of rubber shares in the leg of a table. After the sale he left Alan to settle up with the auctioneer and took the shares with him to London. Blake could not remember any rubber plantation called Lone Plantations and was inclined to believe them forgeries. He learned from a Stock Exchange friend that Lone Plantations was the early name given to Talilah Rubbers and that the earlier company had not, to his knowledge gone into liquidation.

Within a few minutes of Alan's arrival at Baker Street to meet Sexton Blake, Mrs. Bardell announced the arrival of the Rajah of Talulah, a young, sophisticated ruler who wanted Blake to investigate threats to assassinate him on his return home. As Alan's father had disappeared on that island, Blake took him with them, without telling

the Rajah who the boy was. While Blake masquerading as a native listened to gossip in the market places, gossip which included stories of a wild man on the plantations who changed at will into a tiger, the two boys went boating on the river. Their boat was rammed by another coming up-stream and sunk. The boys escaped with nothing worse than a ducking that time but a few days later while on a hunting expedition for wild fowl the punt was blown out of the water, the Shikari and Tinker stunned by the explosion and Alan lost. Tinker believed that he had been drowned. Blake believed that he had been kidnapped by the new owners of the rubber plantation which covered the same area as the Lone Plantations concession.

Blake, Tinker and Shikari found Alan's prison at the same time as the Wild Man and his Tiger passed by on their nightly hunt, and the chief kidnapper came to end the boy's life. During the ensuing mêlée the wild man was injured, the tiger shot by the kidnapper who was killed by its last spring. The Wild Man---? Alan's father and rightful owner of the rubber plantation.

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COLLECTORS LAMENT

(continued from page 8)...

policeman's - can be a happy one. Quoting from personal experience Norman will find many C.D. readers enthusiastic members of our hobby willing to give advice and assistance without demanding, as he asserts, high prices for high profit, and in the process, the kind helpful people who become, and remain true friends, will prove more than adequate compensation for his efforts.

To those of us who find some difficulty in recalling the far-off days of carefree youth, it is gratifying to hear of the interest of the younger element in our hobby. Norman and his friends who naturally wish to possess their own collections, deserve to be supported and encouraged to share the pleasure and relaxation provided by the old papers which the more fortunate of us have been privileged to enjoy for many years.

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W A N T E D

MAGNETS 1277, 1283, 1466, 1644. GEMS 1931-2. POPULARS 1922.  
 C.D. ANNUAL 1948. MAGNETS 1935 to 1939. S.O.Ls. 184; 188; 373;  
 391.

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

# NELSON LEE COLUMN

(CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD)

## FULWOOD LEADER OF THE KNOTS

By Herbert Chapman

I am writing this article in the hope that one or more of the St. Frank's fans will write a sequel to it.

Ralph Leslie Fulwood, along with his cronies Gulliver and Bell, was mentioned in the first St. Frank's story in No. 112 of the Nelson Lee Library and took a leading part from time to time throughout the life of that paper.

We might call him the "Resident Rotter of the Remove." Other cads came and went but Ralph Leslie went on his unlawful ways for - well a long time. Roughly eight years.

He was Captain of the Ancient House Remove, at the start of the saga, and under his leadership the House had gone to the dogs at class work and on the sports field.

One wonders why Handy, Monty and Tommy Watson, who proved such stalwarts later on, did not offer more resistance, but no, it was left to Nipper on his arrival to oust him from the captaincy and take the lead.

From then onwards there was always war between Nipper & Co and Fulwood & Co, the former usually coming out on top.

Fulwood, a rotter in most ways, was also a real snob with no use for anyone who appeared to be short of "tin;" but very friendly to anyone well off, especially new boys, and he was not long in trying to arrange a gambling session to get some of their money into his pockets.

Breaking bounds at night, horse racing, pub-haunting, etc., were all favourite pastimes of his. He only appears to have had one virtue. He was not a coward. He could put up a good scrap, although not always fighting fairly. If caught out in a scrape, too, he was always willing to fight, wriggle, even lie his way out. Not so Gulliver and Bell, neither of whom could fight, both great cowards, and, if caught, always gave the show away and put the blame on Fulwood. One wonders why he bothered with them.

As I said, Fulwood was the leading rotter in the Remove for many years and was a well-drawn character, always acting true to form. If he was not mixed up in any dirty work that was going something seemed

to be wrong. If he had done something decent for a change the reader would have been greatly surprised. To me he was a complete, satisfying opponent for Nipper.

There came a time, however, when I did not see the Nelson Lee for some months, but when I took it up again I was amazed to find that Fulwood seemed to be behaving differently. He actually seemed to be on good terms with Nipper & Co, Handy & Co, Archie, etc. Friendly, too, with the girls from Moor View School. I was forced to the conclusion that Fulwood, like many before him, had turned over a new leaf and reformed.

The other cases had been easier to swallow. They were usually new boys who soon gave up their shady ways as they settled down in the school. Fulwood, however, had always been a rotter and it was difficult indeed to imagine him as any other. Not having read the series in which the change took place it took me a long, long time to get used to reading of him hobnobbing with Archie, Montie and the rest, and even now it jars a little at times.

Having built up such a satisfying villain for the saga, such a well-drawn character, over so many years, was it wise to undo all that work? None of those who followed in his footsteps as leaders of the Knuts seemed quite so satisfying, to me, at any rate.

On the other hand if it made a theme for another good series, perhaps it was. As I say, not having read the story in question I cannot say.

Now what about opinions from some of those who have read how the change came about. What do they think?

\* \* \* \* \*

MUSINGS IN A PUBLIC LIBRARY

By William Lister

A few years ago, in my enthusiasm over the discovery of the Old Boys Book Club and its splendid magazine "Collectors Digest" (revealing to me that Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks and the "Nelson Lee" were still remembered) I purchased some back numbers of "Nelson Lee" and second-hand copies of stories by Berkeley Gray and Victor Gunn, these being the pen-names of Mr. Brooks, and thus renewed my acquaintance with the favourite author of my youth.

However, in my desire to read whatsoever I could of this delightful author, I found my hunger oustripped my cash. So I planned a visit to the Public Library at Blackpool, but though I looked high and low I found nothing under the names of B. Gray or V. Gunn, and



disappointed I came to the conclusion that there must be no demand for them.

Imagine my surprise and delight when owing to increasing bus fares, I transferred my cards to a branch library (a few minutes walk from home) and found on the shelves at least twelve copies of Victor Gunn and ten copies of Berkeley Gray stories, and of course there may have been some copies out on loan.

Looking at the date pages on each one I discovered that all the volumes had been out continuously two or three times a month since 1962 and 1963 and appeared to be still being borrowed at that rate.

It did me good to know that our Edwy Searles Brooks was so well read by the general public - and when you recall that the branch libraries only touch certain districts it led me to muse as to how many people in my district would know they were reading the stories of one of the stars of our hobby, and as to how many had read the "Nelson Lee" in their youth and would not even know that Victor Gunn and Berkeley Gray was none other than the creator of St. Frank's. How fortunate we are in our contact with the Old Boys Club and the "Digest."

Any reader of Mr. Brooks books will know how often some of the old characters of St. Frank's peep through the pages of his more recent writings under different names and settings.

Well now, I have taken a couple of these books home, and will be going back for more, and the titles in stock? "Conquest Overboard," "Turn Left for Danger," "Get Read to Die," "Nightmare House," "Conquest on the Run," etc., by B. Gray and "Murder with a Kiss," "The Body in the Boot," "Death at Traitor's Gate," "Next One to Die," "Death in A Ditch", "A Change for Murder," etc.; by V. Gunn.

If you are a Brooks fan, why not pay a visit to your libraries and maybe you will be as fortunate as I.

Is it possible that if he had written all his books under his own name, his passing would have caused more comment?

MAGNETS, complete years, 1917, 1918, 1919. £20 each year. Tiger Tims Tales, complete set of 28, except No. 7. £3. 10. 0. Some complete Magnet series, 1930's. Modern Boys, 2/6d. Holiday Annuals, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1926, £2 each. Sexton Blakes, Boys Friend Weekly and Libraries, Nelson Lee New Series, Buffalo Bills and odd copies of various papers.

S.A.E. L. SUTTON, 112, REPTON ROAD, ORPINGTON, KENT.

# HAMILTONIANA

## THOSE RATTENSTEIN STORIES

Laurie Sutton

I don't wish to appear contrary, as I have stated before that there are a number of sub stories not generally recognised as such, but I must comment on the suggestion by Mr. Machin that the stories in Magnets 422 and 423 are not genuine Hamilton.

I have checked all the stories of this period in detail, taking copious notes and actually looking for subs and doubtfuls, but I can only confirm that these stories, though not classic examples, are certainly Hamiltonian. Von Rattenstein featured in four stories, the first two and the last (433) being by Hamilton and the third (432) by Pentelow in the story which brought Piet Delarey to Greyfriars. I suspect that Hamilton's three were intended as a sequence and that the third, in which Rattenstein was removed from Greyfriars, was held back after Pentelow saw possibilities of using him in a story (I am aware that Pentelow was not the controlling editor at the time, but he doubtless had influence and access to MS before publication).

Hamilton can hardly have intended Rattenstein as a permanent character, and he was not mentioned in the four Hamilton stories published between 423 and 433. Furthermore 433 follows directly on from 423 in its theme of Rattenstein's emnity and trouble-making towards Wharton & Co.

Regarding these stories, they were typical of Hamilton's attitude during the highly emotional period of the first World War, when he wrote several stories on this theme of villainous naturalised Germans. Nevertheless it is to Charles Hamilton's credit that he was far more level-headed than most people at that time, as witness the sympathetic Herr Gans stories and the remarkably tolerant Hilary "conchie" stories.

\* \* \* \* \*

## LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

### No. 102. ARE AUTHORS NUTS?

It could be assumed that authors know their own business best. On the other hand, one wonders occasionally.

Conan Doyle is reputed to have had no love for his most popular character, Sherlock Holmes. After the initial success of Holmes, the

author wished to write no more of him, despite demand from his readers. After a long, long delay, Conan Doyle wrote some more Holmes tales, and then, with incredible stupidity, killed off his great detective. In response to an ever-growing demand, Doyle re-suscitated Holmes and presented him as one in the sere and yellow leaf.

The author's attitude seemed inexplicable. It looked like sheer cussedness on his part. Perhaps it was.

Richmal Crompton, creator of the world-famous William, told a reporter, according to an article I read in a magazine a few years ago, that "she wished she had never invented the brat!" If Miss Crompton actually said such a thing (and as we all know, interviewers tend to embroider everything that is said to them), it was an astounding comment and a sad smack in the eye for those who had loved the brat for so many years.

Agatha Christie was once reported to have said that she wished she had never invented Hercule Poirot. Agatha (who, incidentally, once had a story published in "The Thriller") seems to have confirmed her dislike of Poirot in recent years. Yet for many years, Poirot was the most popular of modern detectives, and I, personally, have not the slightest doubt that Christie's finest work was contained in such Poirot tales as "Five Little Pigs," "Cards on the Table," "Sad Cypress," and the like.

Even now, after Poirot has been neglected by his author for many years, I believe that a show of votes would place Poirot well ahead of Miss Marple, whom Agatha now stars for all she is worth. In some of the stage plays, taken from Poirot stories, Poirot is dropped. Hamlet without the Prince. This leaves one bogged down in conjecture, unless the reason is that Poirot is a difficult character to cast. Yet Charles Laughton, long ago, first made his name in the character of Hercule Poirot on the London stage. And Margaret Rutherford, delicious and delightful though she is, is surely not every reader's idea of Miss Marple of the books.

A year or two ago Agatha presented us with "The Mirror Cracked from Side to Side," a story in which Miss Marple was so old and frail and near ga-ga that she had to have a nurse to accompany her and look after her. That, surely, was a mistake, and a blow to disillusion readers. If the charm of Tom Merry and the others was that they never grew older, the reverse of charm must have been found in the decrepit Miss Marple of that tale. It was quite unnecessary, too. Miss Marple was described as an old lady way back in stories about

her in the late twenties. In real life, she could not possibly have been still detecting in the nineteen-sixties. So why offend readers by altering her?

Agatha may have learned a lesson. At any rate, in the latest Christie, "At Bertram's Hotel," Miss Marple is allowed off her lead once more, and is on holiday alone at a London hotel from which she pops off to do some shopping at the Army & Navy stores.

Personally, I shall always be annoyed with Agatha, my favourite crime writer, for scrapping Poirot in favour of Marple.

Edwy Searles Brooks, world-famous and beloved for his creation of St. Frank's, once told a leading member of the London club that he no longer felt interest in his old St. Frank's tales. Why on earth does any author risk alienating loyalty and affection in this way?

One can understand that an author, like many a film-star, likes a holiday now and then - a change of style and characters. But once a writer or a player is actually "typed," he is running a risk if he seeks change. Charles Hamilton found that out when he tried to star Carcroft. Old readers would have none of it.

It was inevitable that during so long a writing life Charles Hamilton should do certain things which might bewilder and annoy his regular fans. The prolonged periods of neglect of Greyfriars and St. Jim's while he gave his time to minor series is a case in point. The minor series provided a change which, in the case of Charles Hamilton, was probably as good as a holiday. He may have felt that he had always Greyfriars and St. Jim's to return to when the holiday was over. If that was so, it did not work out when the long period of substitute stories in the Gem gave way to the reprint period, which closed St. Jim's to him for many years.

The eclipse of Tom Merry, towards the end of the blue cover era, must have been disappointing, surprising, and annoying to many readers, and it is hard to see why it happened. I rather doubt whether it was deliberate policy, for Tom Merry was never actually replaced as the king-pin of the St. Jim's tales. It is true, of course, that Talbot took the lead in many series during the war years, but he could scarcely have been said to have displaced Tom Merry. The eclipse of Tom Merry was due to a diffusion of the limelight over a cast of characters which was allowed to become far too large and unwieldy as time went by. I think the enormous influx of new characters in both the Gem and the Magnet during the war years was most regrettable. An author who had built up a loyal following for a group of heroes was surely slightly "nuts" to drop so many into the background and replace

them with newcomers.

For factors which annoyed me at Greyfriars and St. Jim's during the long runs of the Magnet and the Gem I blame the author exclusively, for I personally believe that editorial policy had but little influence on Charles Hamilton. Of late it has been fashionable to excuse certain aspects of stories by saying "They were written to order." One reader told me that I was too hard on "Sunday Crusaders," alleging that it was "written to order" and in consequence the author was heavily handicapped. I can find no evidence that the story was written to order, but even if it were, that would be no excuse for a poor story. The only bugbear to any good writer is being short of a plot. Once the plot is suggested to him, a writer can write - if he can write.

I always regarded the reform of Levison as too wholesale to be really credible, though the reform tales were finely written. And if anyone tells me that Hamilton had editorial instructions to reform Levison, I just don't believe it.

I believe that the outlines of plenty of plots were suggested to Charles Hamilton, and I believe that he developed those plots magnificently as only he could. But I do not credit for a moment that anyone ever gave orders to Charles Hamilton what he should write.

For the successes of Greyfriars, St. Jim's, and Rookwood, - and those successes are prodigious - I give the author full praise. But where, in my personal opinion, some of the policy fell down, I blame nobody but the author. If a series overstayed its welcome, the author was at fault. Two indifferent travel series in 1937 were at least one too many. The author must carry the can back.

It is obvious that Charles Hamilton could have written every tale which appeared in the Gem and the Magnet. He chose to turn aside to minor series, as he had a perfect right, if he wished. But he was to blame for the fact that we had sub writers inflicted upon us.

I am not intimately acquainted with the St. Frank's stories, but I have the impression that changes were made - a multiplication of "houses" and so on - which marred the overall picture and may have caused the untimely demise of the Lee Library. If that is the case, it would be interesting to know where our Lee fans place the blame. Do they - as I do every time - blame the author?

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CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 100. THE LAST OF THE BLUES

ROGER JENKINS: It has been something of a mystery to me exactly why

the Outram series has been so famous and so popular. I have always found something displeasing about the manner in which the juniors reacted to the new boy, and, moreover, there seems to be an inconsistency: at the end of the first number, they had decided to be friendly with him, for Gussy's sake, whilst in the second number this resolution seems to have been completely forgotten.

Are you so certain that the theme was never repeated? I recall other people who tried to make a break with their criminal past, without success - a master at Rookwood and another at St. Jim's, to say nothing of Talbot and Lancaster. The two masters had to crack the Head's safe to rescue a boy trapped inside, just as Outram had to reveal his immense strength to rescue Levison's uncle in the car accident, and then to rescue Gussy from the footpads.

Of course, a sentimental glow lingers over the last blue Gem, and there is no doubt that the series was finely written: I just happen not to like the subject!

CLIFF WEBB: The effect of re-introducing a character specially created to play a part in a great series, can, perhaps, be rather like paying a visit to one's childhood home after many years away from it. What once seemed so colourful, exciting and large, can then seem to be drab, rather ordinary, and strangely cramped. It may be that a character such as you name is best remembered, like a comet, for one brief, but brilliant appearance on one's horizon.

RAY HOPKINS: Not long ago I read the two stories comprising the Valentine Outram series and thought how good it was. I also read the return of Outram in a Christmas Number, but he didn't seem to be the same character. I wonder why, after such a length of time (18 months), this character was reintroduced. Youngsters would have forgotten Outram in that time. This doesn't sound like the usual way the A.P. would go about plugging characters they thought worthy of a repeat.

ERIC FAYNE adds: Valentine Outram, an abnormally strong boy, had, under the false name of George Purkiss, been sent to a reformatory for injuring an adult male in a fight. I can see but little similarity between Outram and Lancaster or Talbot, both of whom were juvenile criminals and both of whom went to their respective schools with criminal intent, only to be influenced by their environment. There is, of course, a link between Outram and the masters in the "boy in a safe" stories, both of whom had to reveal their secrets in order to save a life. But surely one would hardly regard the Outram series as

a re-hash of the boy in a safe stories.

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## NEWS OF THE CLUBS

### MIDLAND

#### Meeting held June 28th, 1966

This was to have been our most important meeting for some time with the B.B.C. Film Unit having promised to attend, but it failed to appear and the gathering of 12 members was very disappointed. Our chairman who had put himself to tremendous trouble and expense, not to mention our having to hire a room at the Arden Hotel at the cost of 3 guineas, which we can ill afford, was instructed to write to the B.B.C. asking for an explanation.

Our disappointment was offset however by the attendance of a reporter and photographer from the Wolverhampton newspaper "The Express and Star," and a group photograph was taken and members were questioned about our club activities. The following evening a grand article appeared featuring our club complete with picture under the eye catching title "Where was the Owl of the Remove?"

Then followed a really first rate meeting with our postal member John Mann, who again travelled 80 miles from Retford, in attendance. What enthusiasm!

One highlight was a talk in humorous vein by Jack Corbett in the series "My Collection." Jack told us that in 1942 he found an old Magnet (No. 1681) used as packing for some glassware he was opening and this sparked off his slumbering interest for the old books that he had read as a boy. He started to collect and captured some remarkable bargains. Fancy getting three whole years of Magnets (1936-1939) for £6. 10. 0! Jack's talk was intimately connected with our club's history for it was he who on April 17th, 1951, founded the Midland O.B.B.C. Jack concluded by telling us he had at one time a very large collection which he had now thinned down till he now only possessed the very greatest of Charles Hamilton's works. He had all the Holiday Annuals and a good selection of S.O.Ls.

Another highlight was Tom Porter's account of his recent visit to the London Club held at Eric Fayne's home at Surbiton. He had had the privilege of looking over Eric's magnificent collection of books. Tom Porter has easily the finest collection of books your correspondent has seen, but he had to admit Eric Fayne's was even

larger. He also gave us some information about the new Holiday Annual now virtually certain to appear in September.

There were several other lively items - a quiz by Tom Porter, a game of "Mixed up Names" by the acting secretary and an amusing letter from our postal member Stan Knight, and of course our usual feature Collectors' Items including the Anniversary number Gem No. 855 published on 28th June, 1924. The Collectors' item was No. 4 of the Champion Library "Hated by the Team," by Rupert Hall dated 9th August, 1929.

The concluding item was a discussion started by Norman Gregory, "Is there more interest in other Old Boys' Books not just Magnets and Gems recently?"

Members were not sure whether this was the case. Tom Porter said he did a good deal of advertising and except for the odd collectors the greatest demand was, in his opinion, still for Magnets and Gems.

Our July meeting will be held at the B'ham Theatre Centre on the 26th when the programme will include a tape recording made by Bill Gander of Canada.

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NORTHERN

Meeting held 9 July, 1966

With members arriving from 6 p.m. onwards the meeting was opened by the Chairman at 6.45 p.m. after a busy library session. Geoffrey greeted a gathering of fifteen, and our full programme started at once. The minutes were read and signed and the Treasurer-Librarian gave his report. The financial position remained stable, and although there had been three resignations, six new postal members had joined our ranks. Gerry had had interesting letters - including a discussion on 'lobs' in first-class cricket with our President, P. G. Wodehouse, and news of the new 'Holiday Annual' from Bill Lofts of London.

The first item on the evening's programme was a reading by Jack Wood from "Mike at Wrykin" by P. G. Wodehouse. This was about the 'row' with the 'Town,' and the School Picnic. It was a very entertaining selection, and the conversation of the Masters faced with no scholars brought many chuckles.

Our game of the evening was "20 Questions" arranged by Myra Allison. The committee was instructed to remain in its place at the front and to be the team. Myra had ten items, and the members



obviously enjoyed the guesses, and brain-wracking of the team. The score was seven to the committee (Gerry Allison, Geoff. Wilde, Mollie Allison, and Jack Wood) and three to the Question Mistress.

The quiz of the evening was provided by Harry Lavendar and took the form of ten anagrams such as "Motherly Town" (making Monty Lowther) and they caused all present to be very quiet. For those completely stumped Harry had further clues to help (!) The only one to guess all eventually was Geoffrey Wilde, so Harry had almost wiped the floor with us!

The refreshments were greatly enjoyed, and after an interval of chat, Tom Roach gave us a talk of his early recollections in the hobby as a child. We heard how his elder sister introduced him to the "Gem" - and the reason for his aversion, to this day, to the "Union Jack"! Tom told us of a visit to Frank Richards (unfortunately at a very busy time) and how his childhood collection of books seemed to dwindle mysteriously after the visit of the charlady - who had a large family. This most interesting talk brought our Meeting to a close at 9.20 p.m.

Next meeting, Saturday the 13th August, 1966.

M. L. ALLISON - Hon. Sec.

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#### MERSEYSIDE

#### Meeting held Sunday, July 10th

Holidays prevented one or two of our members attending but we had a fair attendance.

The first part of the meeting was spent in discussing a suggestion by Frank Unwin that we should widen the scope of the club in an effort to attract more members. The feeling of the meeting was generally favourable towards the idea, but there were some who felt that we should retain our present identity.

After the discussion each member present was invited to draw a subject out of a hat and talk about it for at least three minutes. Some of these "mini-talks" gave rise to some discussion and I think we might try one again when we have a full house.

After tea Jack Morgan introduced a novel quiz in which we had to discover the name of a character from the four schools from a missing word in different phrases which he gave us. I was lucky enough to win, with Walter Prichard second.

Norman Pragnell promised to produce an item for the next meeting

which will be on SUNDAY, AUGUST 7th. Please note that this is the first Sunday in the month instead of the second Sunday when we usually hold our meeting.

BILL WINDSOR

\* \* \* \* \*

LONDON

Some 16 members made their way to "Greyfriars" at Wokingham (Berks) as guests of Eric Lawrence and family. Unfortunately our hostess was indisposed so the younger members of the family assisted in the preparations for our visit.

In the absence of Uncle Ben on holiday, Don Webster again acted in the capacity of Secretary and Treasurer, and after he had read the minutes of the previous meeting and dealt with the financial report we got down to discussing the forthcoming Annual Outing to Margate. Some 28 members had already signified their intention to come and it was decided to book the coach and a satisfactory menu was agreed upon.

Correspondence was read re the venue of the August meeting which would be held in the Oak Room, Y.M.C.A., Gt. Russell Street.

Bill Lofts stated that Mrs. E. S. Brooks had found some manuscripts and copies of Union Jack, which she was presenting to the Club.

We then adjourned for tea, which as Billy Bunter would have exclaimed 'simply scrumptious.'

After the interval we had a Quiz devised by Neil Beck. The winner was Bill Hubbard, with Don Webster runner-up and Eric Lawrence third.

Our meeting was concluded with Roger giving us a reading from Magnet 1287 - "Harry Wharton Declares War" - from the second Wharton Rebel Series, after which we wended our various ways homewards.

D.B.W.

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STAR ATTRACTIONS coming your way in

COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL FOR 1966

- \* THE STYLE OF CHARLES HAMILTON by ROGER JENKINS.
  - \* REMINISCENCES OF AN OLD-TIMER (a review of the career of famous writer Edmund Burton) by FRANK VERNON LAY
  - \* LEONARD SHIELDS - ARTIST SUPREME by W. O. G. LOFTS
- Your order form for the Annual will be reaching you soon.
-

NOT ALWAYS FOR BOYSBy S. Gordon Swan

Extensive reading of the old periodicals such as the  $\frac{1}{2}$ d Marvel, the Boys' Friend and kindred publications brings one to several conclusions:

That England in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was infested with wicked uncles and cousins plotting to cheat their hapless relatives out of money or estates to which they were entitled. The schemers were prepared to go to any lengths to gain their ends - to kidnap, shanghai or even murder their victims.

That every other orphan, ill-treated stepson, waif or ward was really a missing heir, a duke, an earl or at least a baronet.

That the stories fall roughly into three categories: The essentially juvenile, with japes and practical jokes abounding; those which might be described as for general exhibition, yarns which an adult could enjoy; and a small group which are definitely "A. O."

It was quite refreshing to come upon a story without the theme of the missing heir. Maxwell Scott was obsessed with this idea; though his meticulously-planned stories make good reading, he could not seem to get away from the secret marriage that produced the rightful claimant to the estate, the unscrupulous major - his villains were often majors - who plotted to remove the only obstacle to his inheritance of somebody's fortune.

David Goodwin used the idea once or twice, but could write on other subjects with equal facility. His school stories are readable, but not on a par with his adventure tales of mill life and exploits at sea. Henry St. John wrote on a variety of topics, with a background of school, sea, prison or historical events.

The quality of the stories in the old papers is variable. For instance, the  $\frac{1}{2}$ d Marvel published a lot of rubbish as compared with the material in the  $\frac{1}{2}$ d Boys' Friend. Apart from some good tales by Paul Herring, S. Clarke Hook and others, there were a number of anonymous stories which were sheer drivel - stupid and ridiculous efforts that were an insult to the intelligence. In one instance, at least, I found a story which should never have appeared in a boys' paper - or any other, for that matter - a brutal, sadistic story about an anarchist. One wonders how this tale ever crept into the pages of a juvenile periodical. (No. 204. The Fatal Button by John Herbert. 28-9-97).

The S. Clarke Hook of the  $\frac{1}{2}$ d Marvel wrote in more serious vein in these early days and I, for one, found his stories more acceptable.

## THE POSTMAN CALLED

(Interesting items from the  
Editor's letter-bag)

R. F. ACRAMAN (Harrow): Dealers fill a fundamental need in the hobby. They perform a useful function in buying up bulk lots which are too expensive for the average hobbyist, and selling them in retail quantities or singly. I am convinced that the average dealer is not in it for profit but from a genuine love and interest in the hobby.

C. H. MATTHEWS (Shepshed): I am not particularly keen on Danny's Diary - it was slightly before my time for I was only two or three years old at the time. A diary of the middle 20's would be much more interesting - to me at least. C.D. is a really wonderful magazine.

(If Danny continues to supply us with extracts, he will, alas, catch up with most of us all too soon. - ED.)

LESLIE FARROW (Boston): I have had my C.D.'s for 1964-65 bound, and am now the proud owner of a nice red leather cloth bound volume in mint condition with the title in gold lettering on the spine.

CHARLES CHURCHILL (Exeter): I think Mrs. Packman deserves our heartiest congratulations and thanks for so ably conducting Blakiana for the past 13 years. She deserves support in her efforts to maintain the column at its present high level.

(And so say all of us! - ED.)

CHARLES BAKER (Caernarvon): I much admire Danny's Diary. Whoever he may be, he is good - very good, and I wish him the best of luck. His diary might almost be my own, as I knew the old papers during the years he writes about. Fancy the first Pelham tale being written by Charles Hamilton. I had an idea this might be so, from the style. Well, that's another mystery cleared up thanks to Bill Lofts and C.D.

JOHN TROVELL (Colchester): I still look hopefully for another story on similar lines to "Penalty for Improper Use," and feel certain other readers will agree that although appearing months ago, it remains in the memory as one of the most outstanding contributions to the Digest.

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SALE: Collectors' Digest 1 to 235; Story Paper Collection 1 to 50.  
Any reasonable offer accepted.

HARRY DOWLER, 29, SYLVESTER AVENUE, OFFERTON, STOCKPORT, CHESHIRE.

NOT ALWAYS FOR BOYS

(continued from page 27)...

The first stories of Jack, Sam and Pete are to be found in the year 1901, and contained more adventures than the later ones. Apparently he struck a gold mine when he invented these characters, and as their popularity increased the character of Pete dominated the stories. The author seemed to find it easier to write pages and pages of dialogue and a sequence of events which involved horseplay and outrageous behaviour than to construct a story with a plot and related action and adventure.

The ½d Boys' Friend was providing much better reading than its contemporary. Some very fine serials appeared in its pages - what one might describe as "sensible" reading. "Outcasts," a sea story by Arthur S. Hardy, "Silver Blaze," an Australian tale by Hamilton Edwards, stories by Henry St. John and Charles J. Mansford - these were far superior to the stagy and sometimes infantile tales appearing in the ½d Marvel.

The first stories of Ferrers Lord, Ching Lung and Co. were serialised in the ½d Boys' Friend; "Wolves of the Deep" and "Lion Against Bear." In these earlier stories Ching Lung features as an irresponsible practical joker speaking pidgin English. It is noticeable that as the author matured, so did the Chinese prince. Later one finds him speaking good English and behaving less like an undisciplined schoolboy.

This character, I should imagine, was inspired by the Ching-Ching of Harcourt Burrage's tales of Handsome Harry of the Belvedere, which first appeared towards the end of the nineteenth century. The Boys' Realm revived these characters in the early nineteen hundreds. Ching-Ching spoke a peculiar brand of English which it required too much effort to interpret, and as much of the humour revolved about the tormenting of a man with a wooden leg, I did not find these stories acceptable.

Some good quality yarns by Alec G. Pearson are to be found in the ½d Marvel, the Boys' Friend, the Realm and the Union Jack. This author wrote tales of military and naval life, and detective and adventure stories. Often his name was not appended to the stories; many of the tales of Dr. Messina (who also featured in the Jester) and of Stanley Dare, both detectives, were published anonymously. Generally speaking, the yarns of Alec G. Pearson had distinct adult appeal.

One could expend much time and space in quoting all the good fare provided by the best authors, but it is too large a field to

explore here. It is time to examine some examples which fit into the third category.

Among these I should class "Not Guilty" by Henry St. John, which I have mentioned in another article. This is a fine story, but not really suitable for boys. The nature of the story and its development place it definitely in the adult class.

"Black England" by Allan Blair, which was serialised in the Boys' Herald, was really above the heads of the majority of schoolboys. This story exposed the evils of the nail and chain trade, something of which I will admit I was in ignorance until I read this narrative.

But the story which stands out as definitely "A. O." is "Jim the Stockyard Boy," which appeared in the Boys' Friend about 1906. In spite of its innocuous title, this is a stark, sometimes terrifying story of the Chicago meat-packing industry. No doubt it was inspired by Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle" and how much it owes to that book I cannot venture to say, as I was not allowed to read it as a boy and have never come across a copy since.

"Jim the Stockyard Boy" is a realistic and horrifying picture of the frightful conditions prevailing at the meat-packing factories, and the descriptions of the chemical treatment of putrid meat to make it "acceptable" for human consumption are enough to turn the stomach. This is a splendid story, but it is not a boys' story, and how it got into the pages of the Boys' Friend is hard to understand. The authorship is credited to one Hampton Dene, whom the editor quoted as a gentleman who was well acquainted with his subject. I have never encountered this name elsewhere, so either he was a newcomer who wrote only the one story, or Hampton Dene was a pseudonym.

Those who enjoyed the old periodicals in their youth will not need reminding of the pleasures to be derived from the reading of these stories. They reflect a different era, a different way of life, a different set of standards and code of ethics. Reading them in these days one feels that despite the heroics and the patriotism and the occasional glimpses of snobbishness, something vital has been lost to the present generation, some quality of solid worth which is derided by current literature, but which reaches out to one from the writings of these long-dead authors.



CHUCKLES THAT CHANGEDBy O. W. Wadham

Maybe Chuckles, that neat and nicely produced coloured comic of the Golder Age, would have lived longer than nine short years if it had not set out to steal the thunder of the long-lived Rainbow.

The Amalgamated Press began Chuckles on Jan. 10, 1914. Just one month later Rainbow began its successful reign of nearly 43 years.

Chuckles plainly catered for different clients in its first two or three years than was the case in 1919, when the very young were being catered for.

A little different from other comics, Chuckles gave generous instalments of just one serial in the 1914-15 period. First one I have is the issue of Nov. 21st, 1914.

Two full pages of close type were used to present "The Secret of the Thames," by John Tregellis.

The reading matter in that 4 chapter instalment was about equal to half the length of a Greyfriars yarn in a Magnet of that time.

Other fiction was two complete yarns, one a weekly affair featuring Ferrers Locke, detective.

Three months later another serial "The War Lord," by Michael Clifton was getting the same generous treatment, and Ferrers Locke was still going strong.

Two entertaining characters, Breezy Ben and Dismal Dutchy, were on the front page. Mustard Keen and Bono, the Muscular Marvel were "regulars" in the middle section, while Little Loo Lumme and Chuckles' Coloured Cinema were on page 8. In all, quite a nice effort that would appeal to readers of all ages from eight to eighteen.

By 1919 Chuckles had changed vastly, and by 1920 it was following the trend of the then well-established Rainbow, and only giving, in the process, half as much reading matter as it did in the war-time period.

Type used in the fiction section was twice as large, and the yarns were mainly short, complete tales, running to half-a-page or less.

One serial ("Chums of The Sea" by Harry Revel in early 1920 numbers) had space of little more than half-a-page, too, while

Chuckles Cinema (in its 334th week) had been moved into the fiction pages.

Ben and Dutchy had been replaced by animal characters, Pongo, the Monkey, and his Merry Playmates, while only Little Loo Lumme lived on from the comic's early years - and he was moved to the colourless middle section.

In fact Chuckles, taken all round, could have been a rival to Rainbow (and to Merry Moments, too) if it had made the grade successfully.

I fancy, however, that young readers of those days preferred the more attractive Rainbow, with those famous Bruin Boys, and older readers, who had bought Chuckles in its infant days, turned away when it became too juvenile.

Frequently during the 1914-16 period Chuckles Editor urged readers to "Send your soldier friend a copy of Chuckles - our gallant lads want something to read."

Well, one thing is certain: Those soldier boys would hardly have found much to their taste in the Chuckles of the flaming twenties. It is quite likely that comic would have notched up more than nine summers if it had stayed on the course it was steering so smoothly when it began life in 1914.

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NELSON LEE EXPERT AMONG THE BEST-SELLERS

Two new stories from the pen of Ross Story, who has written a number of Nelson Lee articles for the Digest, are now available in the shops. "Death Waits in Tucson," under the name of Desmond Reid (Mayflower) is an exciting western novel.

Under the nom-de-plume of "Richard Jeskins," Mrs. Story has also written "The Experimentist" (Consul Books 3/6). This frank and revealing novel is a surprising insight into the minds and morals of public-school boys.

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WANTED: Good loose copies or volumes containing any one or more of the following: MAGNETS: 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.