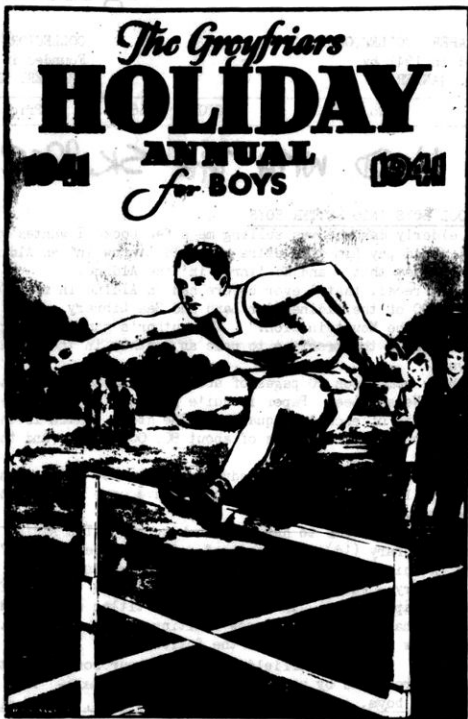


# Collectors' Digest

No.  
238

Vol.  
20

2-



O  
C  
T  
O  
B  
E  
R  
  
1  
9  
6  
6

# Collectors' Digest

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by

W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by

HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 20

No. 238

OCTOBER 1966

Price 2s. 0d

## A WORD WITH THE SKIPPER

### MAKING GOOD BOYS INTO BETTER BOYS

The elderly man who was selling me a few books I wanted wrote me that if I would pay him 10/- extra he would 'throw in' an Aldine. Well, I did just that - and he 'threw in' the Aldine.

I can't recall that I ever before had an Aldine in my life. This one is No. 200 of the Aldine O'er Land and Sea Library, and it is entitled "Blake the Mountain Lion." The author's name is not given. It didn't seem to be the practice to name any author in the Aldines of those days.

The book comprises 70 pages of about the dimensions of the sheets of the later Nelson Lee. Paper is quite good quality, and the printing, though small, is of excellent quality. The story, which is the only item in the programme, consists of about 80,000 words. And the whole thing was sold for 2d.

Even as a boy I never liked adventure stories, but as I have browsed casually over parts of this one I have come to the conclusion that it is very well-written.

The Aldine Co seems to have been a busy one. The Aldine First-Rate Pocket Library (1d) is advertised and the titles of 248 "volumes now ready in this series" are listed. Also advertised is the Aldine Garfield Library - each volume containing 192 pages in Beautifully-Illustrated Wrapper (3d). In this series 84 titles are listed, and you are informed that "1 to 84" are now awaiting you in the shops. The publishers draw your attention to the following -

"PARENTS! Give the Garfield Volumes to your sons, as - to quote from a letter received by us from a Rev. Schoolmaster:- "They make BAD boys into GOOD boys, and GOOD boys into BETTER boys, and we all thank

you heartily for the Garfield Library."

I was able to determine, more or less, the date of this copy of the Aldine which had been "thrown in" in return for my excess payment of 10/- . The whole of page 64 is devoted to a letter. The publisher states that "it is with particular pleasure that we print a letter from the eminent Dramatic Author and Critic, Mr. Mark Melford, giving his opinion of our Publications generally."

I don't know whether Mr. Mark Melford was as "eminent" as the publishers suggest, but his letter is headed Strand Theatre, and dated April 10th 1894, and he expresses himself with a wealth of superlatives, so he must surely have worn a fur-collared overcoat.

He concludes:

"I am only amazed that such thoroughly genuine literary ability can be obtained and dispensed at such a figure, and presume its explanation is in the highly gratifying fact of your enormous and colossal circulation. The thoroughly healthy, wholesome, and sound reading to be found in every number of your libraries will be admitted by every clergyman in England, and taken advantage of by every schoolmaster who desires to furnish his pupils with the principles of virtue, courage, and honesty."

Hm! I can't speak for the boys of 1894, but I feel quite sure that in my own boyhood I should have given a very wide berth to any books recommended for my improvement by my clergyman or my schoolmaster. The Aldine Co may not have understood boyhood psychology. The only books that my schoolmaster ever recommended me to read were "Kipps" and "Mr. Barnes of New York." I have never read either to this day. I am quite sure that my schoolmaster would have professed to take a very dim view of either the Magnet or the Gem - or, in fact, any Aldine.

#### A CORRECTION:

Last month we mentioned that Collectors' Digest has been given a new telephone number, but unfortunately we printed it incorrectly. From outside the London area, you dial 01-399-3357. From inside the London area you dial only 399-3357.

#### THE ANNUAL IS COMING:

Once again you will expect the Annual, which will be winging your way in December, to be packed with good things, and I do not think you will be disappointed. This year we have a real wealth of Hamilton and Brooksonian material to bring you, with all our great team of star writers at their best, plus some first-class articles which are off the beaten track.

Our only shortage now is in the field of Sexton Blake lore, and we are hoping that some of our Blakian experts will turn up trumps before it is too late. Have you ordered your copy yet of Collectors' Digest Annual for 1966?

A REQUEST:

Once again we must remind our advertisers that the name and address of the advertiser must be included with each advertisement. A surprisingly large number send in announcements without including these details, evidently assuming that at this office we have plenty of time to check and insert the information in question.

It will also be appreciated if readers who send in articles or letters which they hope to see published will write as legibly as possible, and print any titles or names quoted. If we ourselves find it difficult to read parts of an article or a letter, it is likely that our printers will find it an impossibility. In consequence, every month we find ourselves re-tying material to aid our printers' eyesight. It means a good deal of extra work for your editor who always has plenty to do, and it could usually be avoided if a little more care were taken with the original. Please be kind to the old boy.

THE EDITOR

-----  
WANTED: Nelson Lee 1st New Series.

MR. L. WORMULL, 245 DAGNAM PARK DRIVE, HAROLD HILL, ROMFORD, ESSEX.

-----  
MAGNETS WANTED, 1930-39. Also SKIPPERS, WIZARDS and HOTSPURS 1937-39. Would welcome offers of other papers of this period.

D. MALLETT, 24 BATCHELORS BARN, ANDOVER, HANTS.

-----  
WANTED: C.D. Annual, 1948. Magnets 1277, 1283, 1466, 1644; Gems 1931-3; Populars 1922; Magnets 1935 to 1939; S.O.Ls. 148, 188, 373, 391.

38, ST. THOMAS ROAD, PRESTON.

-----  
WANTED: C.D. Annual 1947; C.Ds. 2, 4-7, 9. Complete Set S.P.Cs. including index bound/unbound.

JOHN BECK, 29 MILL ROAD, LEWES, SUSSEX.

-----  
WANTED: Pre-war copies of Champion, Topical Times, and Puck.

HEARN, 191, ARBURY ROAD, CAMBRIDGE.

# HAMILTONIANA

DO YOU REMEMBER?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 60 - Gems 46-50 - the American Trip Series

Charles Hamilton's first foreign series would be noteworthy by any standards, but the one which began over Christmas in 1908 was exceptional in many ways.

The story began at St. Jim's, with descriptions of snowflakes sailing on the keen wind in the old quadrangle, and the horses of the station hack were steaming in the crisp air. There were dark, rich illustrations by Warwick Reynolds as well as the customary accounts of the various juniors taking their trains homewards, but the group accompanying Tom Merry to his Hampshire home of Huckleberry Heath would have been considered unusual in later days, for they were Gussy, Skimpole, and D'Arcy minor. Their adventures at Huckleberry Heath were all a little inconsequential, though charming in their simplicity. The story began in real earnest when Tom's rich uncle in Arizona, Gabriel Poinsett, expressed a wish to see his nephew with a view to leaving him all his money, and of course all four juniors departed for the United States, having been given a royal send-off at Southampton by all their school friends. Blake joined the party in rather dramatic circumstances later, in New York.

Charles Hamilton could scarcely be called a left-wing writer, and indeed Skimpole the Socialist was intended to be a figure of fun, but nevertheless there were some very radical comments on industrial life in the story dealing with Chicago. Not only were the questions of unemployment and the monotony of factory life touched upon, but some strikingly modern remarks about the dangers of full employment were made as well. This was to be the keynote of all future foreign travel series - adventure plus a social commentary that was all the more far-sighted for not being derived from personal experience in most cases.

The series must have delighted Gem readers in its time, not only for its novelty but also for the enthralling adventures in the Rockies, a scene to which the author was destined to return in his writings many times in future years. The series also bequeathed a permanent legacy to the St. Jim's cast of characters in the shape of Buck Finn, the ranch manager's son who accompanied the juniors back to St. Jim's. Like many Americans in Charles Hamilton's stories, he was rather boastful and unattractive. In the St. Jim's saga he was really

superseded by Kit Wildrake, the Canadian, who had all the good points of Buck Finn and none of his bad ones.

\* \* \* \* \*

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 104. OUT OF STEP

Danny, in his Diary last month, commented on Gussy being "quite, quite out of character" in the two blue Gem stories "Every Inch a Hero" and "Heroes of the Fourth."

These two yarns are worth a glance, quite apart from the fact that they were published in the wrong order, the sequel appearing before the opening story. They starred the St. Jim's day boy, Dick Brooke, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, plus a matter-of-fact young flapper named Sylvia Carr. They first met at a cricket week at Eastwood House, during which Tom Merry's team met a girls' eleven at cricket, and Gussy, who had fallen for Sylvia Carr, bet her a kiss that the boys would win. In the second tale (which was published first), Sylvia came to live near St. Jim's, and Gussy was jealous that the girl was giving more attention to Brooke than to him. A fight ensued, after which Gussy refused to shake hands with Brooke.

Apart from anything else, it is obvious that Gussy was, as Danny declared, "Quite, quite out of character." There was nothing out of character in his falling in love. Martin Clifford - the real one - often showed Gussy suffering from the dart of Cupid, but always in hilarious little pen-pictures of a simple lad's calf-love. To see him depicted as an ogling young bounder whose jealousy made him unsporting produced rather an itch for the regular reader.

Providing a substitute writer could write reasonably well there was no reason why he should go far wrong when handling the minor characters, which may have supplied the reason why the sub stories often seemed to give undue prominence to such characters. Dick Brooke provided no stumbling block, but when he tried somewhat unskilfully to use Gussy as a foil for Brooke, then the sub writer found himself on thin ice.

Charles Hamilton's greatest pieces of characterisation were never successfully handled by the substitute writers. In the last two or three tales in the post-war Bunter stories, Vernon-Smith was out of character. With most if not all of the other characters, the writer got by adequately.

Yet Talbot was constantly put in the lead in substitute stories

---

over a good many years, and these were probably reasonably successful so far as sub stories went. Which proves, in my view, that though Talbot in his time was unquestionably one of Hamilton's most popular characters, he was by no means a first-rate piece of characterisation. Action and sentimentality counted far more than characterisation in all the Talbot tales.

It was very different with Vernon-Smith who was one of the most outstanding pen-pictures of schoolboy literature.

Even with Bunter, the sub writers could not go far wrong, even though Hamilton at his best was capable of presenting joyous satire and rich comedy allied with some memorable cameoes of characterisation in connection with his most famous creation of all. But Bunter lived essentially from week to week, and "anything went" when Bunter was put in the picture.

Did Charles Hamilton himself ever present any of his best creations out of character? I think one could confidently say that he did not. All the same, he never recaptured the characterisation of Cardew in any of his post-war tales of St. Jim's. Possibly he had lost the art of putting brilliant repartee and droll comments into the mouths of his players. I think, too, that he was well aware of a stage comic who had won considerable fame in his role as "Cardew, the Cad."

Whether there was any link between the stage "Cad" and the St. Jim's Cardew it is difficult to say, but evidently Hamilton thought there was. He plugged the "Cardew the Cad" theme in the post-war St. Jim's tales to the detriment of genuine characterisation.

Concerning the first Rebel series, there have been a few readers who considered that the author should never have actually put Wharton on the road to ruin as happened in that series. Personally, I do not agree with them.

It was in the first Rebel series that Harry Wharton came into his own as his creator's finest piece of character writing.

It is interesting to see how the editor of the Companion Papers handled the matter when readers wrote to him in the autumn of 1916 to complain of favourites being portrayed out of character. It is fairly clear that by this time Hinton was in the services, and Pentelow was in the editorial chair, for the reply to the critics is ponderous and quite lacking in humour.

Letters to the editor, published in the Chat Page, were always suspect, but I feel that Pentelow was less given to invention than Hinton, and, in any case, the criticisms ring true. These were directed at one substitute story "Every Inch a Hero" and at one genuine tale "For D'Arcy's Sake." There was no mention of Gussy "betting a

kiss," though criticism of that may have turned up later.

"A Yorkshire reader," writes Pentelow, "complains bitterly of the manner in which D'Arcy behaved to Dick Brooke in the story 'Every Inch a Hero' and asks 'Is this our Gussy?'"

It was hardly possible for Pentelow to admit that it was not "our Gussy" at all. So he went into a rather hammy lecture to explain that "the green-eyed demon of jealousy got hold of poor Gussy, and made him do what he took shame for afterwards."

"It is a London reader," adds Pentelow, "who waxes bitter about the weakness of Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Singh in gambling with the sharper in the train in the story "For D'Arcy's Sake." It would appear that he can forgive Nugent, on the score of his being always weak and easily influenced, and also Inky, on the ground - a highly debateable one, I think - that he hardly knew he was wrong. But he cannot forgive Bob Cherry, or, rather, he cannot forgive Mr. Richards for making Bob the third victim of the gambler's wiles. He says that had Wharton been one of the gambling trio, he would never have read another Magnet."

The editor comments very seriously: "What the three Greyfriars fellows did was wrong -- admitted! But it was foolish, not wicked. They were betrayed by good nature, and not by love of gambling. I do not believe that any boy who read the story with intelligence failed to derive the right moral - and that a good one - from it."

One cannot help wondering what the London reader, if he was still reading the Magnet ten years later, thought of Wharton in the Rebel series. Also, one cannot help wondering whether it occurred to the editor that 'any intelligent boy' who read the story might decide on the real reason why Gussy was out of character in "Every Inch a Hero."

Most of us would agree that the Gussy of the two Sylvia Carr stories was not the real Gussy. Whether we would regard Bob Cherry, persuaded into gambling by Captain Punter, or Harry Wharton visiting the Cross Keys in the Rebel series as out of character is another matter. No doubt the credibility of characterisation depends entirely on just how a story is told.

A final bit of character work of this type came in the Gem's Torrence series, in which Manners insisted that Tom Merry should fight Torrence on account of the latter's attitude towards Manners Minor. I remember, when I read this story as a boy, that I was not happy over the series, considering that Manners was portrayed rather out of character, even though human actions in certain circumstances are impossible to analyse. As I have said before, the real trouble here



was that the mantle of Nugent, and the hackneyed younger brother relationship, should never have fallen upon Manners in the first place.

\* \* \* \* \*

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 102. ARE AUTHORS NUTS?

R. J. GODSAVE: Your article on "Are Authors Nuts?" makes one wonder if authors eventually get bored with the characters they create. Like you, I think that only suggestions are given to Authors by the Editors, and it is up to the Author to make any alterations if they so desire.

If E.S.B. made the change in order to broaden his scope in writing the St. Frank's stories then I am drawn to the conclusion that it was his responsibility alone.

In order to broaden the scene it becomes necessary - as in the case of Brooks - to introduce more new characters in order to fill the depleted ranks which distribution through additional houses makes. This in turn has the effect of completely altering the familiar scene which is usually imprinted on the readers' minds.

CLIFF WEBB: Whatever else successful authors may be, they are almost certainly not "nuts." The points you raise, and they are very interesting points indeed, are due, I think, to the fact that successful authors are very, very human. They have to be - otherwise they would not become successful authors!

The reformed characters seem to illustrate this. When a deep dyed "baddie" has often shown redeeming features, like unlimited pluck, for years, surely it is a very human desire on the part of the author to want to see that good quality triumph in the end, no matter what the reader might think?

When, like the authors you name, one has churned out millions of words over the years about the same set of characters, it may, sometimes, become a bit of a strain, no matter how lucrative those characters have proved to be, and strain can lead to resentment of whatever is causing it.

Any number of outside pressures can arise to break an author's normal concentration on his plots, and if a hard and fast deadline is added to this, his reaction could very well be: "To heck with it all!" These factors could account for the apparently incomprehensible attitude of an author who says he wishes he had never created a famous character.

Though I agree that Charles Hamilton could have written all the

stories appearing under his name, I don't think there is any doubt that the overall standard of his work would have suffered.

Whether he deliberately enlarged his own cast of characters in order to give himself more scope for plot ideas is an interesting question to me. We readers were never tired of our tried and true heroes, but perhaps their creator liked to give them a rest occasionally. Were the newcomers introduced because the author was currently stuck for ideas about the old brigade, or had he simply come across an interesting character in real life which he wanted to show to us? It would be interesting to know just how many characters were imposed upon him by suggested plots.

I feel you over-simplify the matter somewhat when you say a good writer should be able to write up a suggested plot. It may be that even a great writer like Charles Hamilton occasionally had some difficulty in developing an idea not his own. Certainly a suggested plot is no excuse for a poor story, but, in my opinion, if an author is not too happy with a plot the only alternative to a poor story is to scrap the idea altogether.

However, I must agree that when a series rambles on for too long the author should carry the can back. Reading a long, indifferent, series of that type, one has the feeling that if one were to ask of the author: "When and how will this thing end?" he would reply: "I'm wondering that myself!"

W. T. THURBON: You ask in the current "Let's be Controversial" "Are Authors Nuts?" and use, as your first illustration Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes. I have always understood that Doyle believed his best work to be in the historical stories in "The White Company" etc. and not in Sherlock Holmes. And possibly an author is not the best judge of his own work, but then also perhaps the public is not either. Every good writer is a creative artist - and each new work is a new creation - and he may well feel he wants to try, or has to try something new. Here of course there is a tension between author and reader. He wants to create something new, we want to know more about Sherlock Holmes, or D'Artagnan, or Frodo Baggins. Sometimes the author yields. After all, he writes to live as well as lives to write - so Sherlock Holmes returns. If he writes for money mainly he naturally sticks to his own line - hence James Bond (an industry, not a character). But on the whole I think the author does well to change from an artistic angle, if not a financial one. C. S. Lewis ended Narnia with "The Last Battle." C. S. Forrester would probably have done well to have ended Hornblower sooner. With the weekly series the

problem is more difficult. But S. Clark Hook would have written better if he had abandoned Jack, Sam & Pete years before they finished. And to each generation, I think, Sexton Blake is really only 'alive' for a ten year period.

And Charles Hamilton in later years really found it necessary to concentrate on one school at a time. Hence the sub-writers.

From the financial angle the author may indeed be "nuts," but from the artistic angle he may be right. We like Father Brown, but if Chesterton had stuck to him we should have lost "The Flying Inn" and "The Club of Queer Trades" - and if Rider Haggard had stuck to Alan Quatermain we should have lost all those wonderful historical and Egyptian stories - not to mention "Queen Sheba's Ring."

GERRY ALLISON: Most interesting why authors - and others prefer their lame ducks. Handel thought his finest work was THEODORA - a quite forgotten oratorio.

But I can easily understand why Tom Merry was eclipsed. Wharton was introduced as a rebel against authority - Merry as a mollycoddle. Miss Fawcett's many visits to St. Jim's always made Tom a laughing-stock of his enemies - and friends! "Manners and Lowther were waiting for him at the door of the House. They were looking very grave, having laughed themselves into a state of exhaustion in the study. "Miss Fawcett gone?" asked Manners solemnly. " (Gem No. 1290).

Wharton was never made to look ridiculous in the way for instance that Merry was in Gem 1285 "Cousin Ethel's Birthday." See the cover illustration! Even then Merry did not realise that he had been made a fool of, but we read:- "There was a rather curious smile upon Cousin Ethel's face as she walked up the garden path."

I think eventually Martin Clifford simply gave up trying to make Tom Merry a hero, and let him become a less important character. In a letter which I possess, Charles Hamilton says - "Figgins was my own favourite character at St. Jim's, and I gave him the lead in the first post-war story." But, my word, this is a very controversial topic!

W. O. G. LOFTS: It is a psychological fact that the creations of many famous authors are in time prone to get on their nerves. The characters of their own imagination gets so strong on their mind that they find it developing in their own personality and resent its presence. The most famous case was Tom Brown who created Weary Willie and Tired Tim, the two famous tramps in CHIPS. Tom Brown in time even dreamed about them, and confessed that they got on his nerves - so much so that he dropped them completely as far back as late 1899 - though they ran drawn by other artists right up to 1953!

There is no evidence of Charles Hamilton ever confessing that any of his creations got on his nerves - if they did he kept it to himself. It is alleged by editors at the Amalgamated Press that he tired of writing Greyfriars and St. Jim's at various periods, and wanted to create new series to refresh his mind. As our editor says, the change may have done him good though it did not always work out as he planned. It is of course perfectly true that many authors are prone to blame an indifferent story on it being editorially suggested though writers I have found never give praise to the editor when an editorially suggested tale is proclaimed a brilliant story! I agree with our editor that any story is how the writer concerned wrote it, as to its proper merits.

ROBERT KELLY: Re your comments in "Are Authors Nuts?" some authors do seem to get childishly jealous of characters of their own creation who succeed in becoming household names. Strange, but there it is. Charles Hamilton was not subject to such fits of temperament but understandably he wanted a change of pace every so often and he also wanted to prove a little late in the day that he had not lost the magic touch for creating new "household names."

PETER WALKER: May I say how much I enjoyed your recent article concerning cricket at the old schools. I grew up on cricket and the Magnet and Gem, and it isn't surprising that I shall always associate the great cricket names of the past with some of my earliest recollections of the Magnet and Gem. For instance I always recall that Hobbs and Sandham of Surrey go with my first reading of a Gem called "D'Arcy's Deal." I rather imagine that I must have picked it up at a second-hand bookshop around 1922 because I have an idea it was published during the 1914-1918 war.

RAY HOPKINS: Could it be that these best selling characters tend to 'take over' the lives of their inventors? (Angela Thirkell always uses the word 'invent' rather than 'create;' perhaps she doesn't want to put herself in a God-like position.) Maybe the authors get sick to death of having the constant companionship in their heads of their 'best-sellers.' Perhaps Sherlock Holmes' use of drugs and eternal scraping at the violin made Conan Doyle nervous. Maybe Miss Crompton found William's untidiness appalling (but I'm sure she laughed at some of the things she gave him to say). I can't imagine her ever thinking of him as a brat, though. I think she liked him too well for that. After all, he always won! The number of times that E. S. Brooks partially destroyed St. Frank's might lead one to think he was trying to dispose of all his schoolboy characters en bloc but they always

managed to escape the flames or the falling masonry, and were hale and hearty in next week's story.

HE ENTERTAINED MILLIONS !

By W. O. G. Lofts

many thanks for reviving old  
 memories your sincerely  
 Albert T. Brown



Probably the name of A. T. Brown would not mean a thing to most collectors - mainly because his work was never signed. But if I say - do you remember those wonderful comic characters such as...

Homeless Hector, P.C. Cuddlecook, Moonlight Moggie, Sunbeam The Innocent, Pa Perkins and Percy, Dad Walker and His Son Wally, and last but not least the fabulous Charlie Chaplin in the blue FUNNY WONDER - you will be interested to know that I recently met the now retired artist A. T. Brown (Bert) who

created them, and spent a delightful evening with him going right back to the turn of the century.

John L. Jukes (Alfie the Air-Tramp in the Joker) and an enthusiast in our hobby described 'Bert' Brown as the doyen of all comic artists and as a fellow artist has greatly admired his work through the years; and probably the majority of readers would instantly confirm that opinion, now that they know the name of the man behind the scenes as it were.

Born in Sutton, Surrey, "Bert" as I will call him - worked first in a draughtsman's office. Then, like all would be artists, sent up comic jokes to editors and having had many accepted joined the Amalgamated Press around 1905.

The King of all comic artists was and always will be the great Tom Browne - creator of Weary Willie and Tired Tim - and "Bert" was a

tremendous admirer of all his work. As a young man he called round to see him at his home in Greenwich and although Tom Browne was ill in bed "Bert" was still able to have a long chat with the famous and revered Old Master.

His first comic creation was Homeless Hector, that lovable doggie in CHIPS, of whom I am writing another full length article. In this same period and for roughly a year he also drew Weary Willie and Tired Tim - after A.B. Payne. (It is worth recording that Tom Browne drew the last set Dec. 22nd, 1899) and so yet another name can be added to a host of famous names who drew the two tramps.

"Bert" related with some amusement how one day a phone call came to the office for Phil Swinnerton to go to the Daily Mirror Office to start some comic animals for them. As Phil was not available A.B. Payne went instead. Payne of course became famous as the creator of Pip, Squeak and Wilfred, and it's funny how some little matters of chance change an artist's whole life. (A similar thing happened with Rookwood, C. H. Chapman/G. W. Wakefield, the latter going into an office out of his turn.)

"Bert" Brown's main job was creating comic characters, and as always many artists took over his original creations in time in periods when he was busy elsewhere.

Quite justly proud, he can well recall how fantastically enthusiastic the readers' reaction was to his first Charlie Chaplin sets in the Funny Wonder. Probably the first time a famous actor had been portrayed in a comic drawing form. (His idea obviously made Film Fun and Kinema Comic.) Harold J. Garrish was so pleased with his drawings of the world's greatest comedian that he presented him with a gold cigarette case, and grateful thanks.

He knew of course all the other well known artists in their prime. H. F. Foxwell who drew Tiger Tim for so many years before joining the Daily Mail to draw Teddy Tail. That great illustrator in the comics and boys papers - J. Louis Smyth an Irish/American who was fond of singing songs about the deep south - and who was quite a character. Percy Cocking who drew Weary Willie and Tired Tim for well over 40 years! and so many, many more.

In later years, apart from creating dozens of other well known and popular characters (The Merry Boys of Dingle School in Comic Life is another I can recall) he drew Harry Secombe, Petula Clarke and The Beverley Sisters in Radio Fun. Such was the demand for his work that at one time he was doing no less than 50 comic drawings a week, even taking them on holiday to do.

# NELSON LEE COLUMN

(CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD)

## DEATH OF LEE CONTRIBUTOR:

It is sad to record the death of yet another of the old school of Nelson Lee enthusiasts - this time Herbert Chapman of Barton-on-Humber. The passing on of Mr. Chapman is a particular blow to this Column, for he has been one of our most regular contributors for a good many years past. An enthusiastic and controversial writer, it is hard to think of anyone who can fill his place. We shall miss him sorely.

## THE BISMARCK STORY:

At the last meeting of our Midland Club, it was mentioned that the famous Sexton Blake story, recently most successfully reissued in the Sexton Blake Library under the title "The Case of the Bismarck Memoirs," was also published in the Nelson Lee Library in the late twenties, with the names of Nelson Lee and Nipper substituted for those of Blake and Tinker respectively.

This was a bit of a surprise to us at the C.D. editorial office, and we assume that the story in the Lee would have been the Union Jack story "The Clayton Moat Mystery" which was a version of part of the Bismarck story. Maybe some of our Lee experts can give us details.

It is, of course, testimony to the great popularity of Pierre Quiroule that this particular story should have been printed once in full and twice in part in the twenties, and then again in full in 1934. Most Quiroule novels appeared twice in the S.B.L., and sections of many also formed U.J. tales. It would be interesting to know whether any other played parts in the Nelson Lee Library.

- - - - -

## THE LETTER

By William Lister

During the average lifetime of anyone, many hundreds of letters are received. These could range from love-letters, poison-pen letters, anonymous letters, business letters, even (if you live to be 100) a letter from the Queen.

Almost every letter from a friend is a joy to receive, though one must confess that some letters contain sad as well as glad news,

over 99% of letters are immediately disposed of, while some are retained a few days or weeks. Of course there are letters of famous people preserved bound for posterity; such as those of Dr. Johnstone, or Samuel Rutherford or the epistles of Paul.

But there are those of such a personal nature that they are kept at least during the lifetime of the owner. Maybe a letter from the Queen, love-letters bound with ribbon, the last letter of a mother, wife or friend before they died.

Such is the letter of which I write. It is dated May 1st, 1961, the printed address being 26, Briar Road, London, S.W.16. and the writer, Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks, from which I quote:-

" Dear Mr. Lister,

Your letter of April 28th was very welcome. It always gives me a pleasure to hear from the "old faithfuls" who years ago used to read my "St. Frank's" school stories. I am further gratified that you are now enjoying my books about Norman Conquest and Ironsides Cromwell"(. here follows much of a personal nature). To resume "I am constantly receiving letters from men of your age, who used to read my school stories, and in many instances they have sons who are now reading old copies of the good old Nelson Lee Library. It almost makes me think that there must have been something interesting in my earlier work.

When I get a letter of appreciation such as yours, it encourages me to carry on, and all I can say now is to thank you for your generous words and good wishes.

Sincerely,

Edwy Searles Brooks. "

Perhaps only those who have heard of Mr. Brooks, or have read his school, adventure or detective stories will understand the value of this letter to me. It is now nearly five years old, and should another five, ten or fifteen years elapse, it will be treasured even more. This letter, my first and last from the late Edwy Searles Brooks, whom I consider the top author of my boyhood school tales, and among top favourite for adventure and detective stories in my early fifties.

STEPPING STONES

By R. J. Godsave

A small boy leaving a Public Library, meeting an equally small girl about to enter, said "They've a smashing book in there, all about a cat sitting on a mat."



From this elementary beginning we gradually advanced into the reading of fiction and non-fiction books. The former for mental relaxation, the latter being imposed for our own good.

The "Playbox Annual" type of book, was, perhaps, the link between the "cat" stage and the comics. Personally, I think the comic of the period between the wars were somewhat over the heads of those for whom the comics catered. I doubt very much whether the printed matter under the clever drawings was read or appreciated by the average reader at that stage.

Now one suddenly transfers their allegiance to the school and detective books, such as the Magnet, Gem and Nelson Lee etc. I do not know. I cannot believe that anyone can read such a book for the first time, and like it.

In my own case, the first Nelson Lee I ever read was O.S. 251 "The School on Strike" bought by my elder brother... Lacking knowledge of the background and characters, I found the whole book extremely confusing.

Unlike the hard cover books whose characters are gradually introduced to the reader, the characters are already on the scene, and, unless one starts from No. 1 it is a case of picking up the threads and carrying on from there.

I can only assume that I must have persevered or casually read Nelson Lee's until the whole picture of St. Frank's became clear in my mind. From that moment I became a regular and enthusiastic reader of the Nelson Lee Library.

It never occurred to me at that time to take advantage of the invitation made by Mr. Brooks to write to him.

-----  
HE ENTERTAINED MILLIONS ! (continued from page 14)...

Now in retirement, and looking probably twenty years younger than his real age "Bert" Brown still keeps his hand in by attending an art school (not of course in comic art but still life). He undoubtedly entertained millions of readers in his time - and as one who remembers with great affection especially Homeless Hector and Dad Walker, the latter appearing in the pink LARKS from the first to last issue on the front page, may I say thanks "Bert" for the pleasure you gave to us all.

-----  
 Wanted GEMS before 1310.

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

# BLAKIANA

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

## RECOMMENDING MR. S. BLAKE

By Deryck Harvey

So you want to hire a private detective? May I recommend a very good friend of mine, a Mr. Sexton Blake of Baker Street?

Yes, I know it's the done thing, and all that, to recommend the man from Baker Street to a friend in need, but I can assure you that Blake is a man of flawless integrity, and exceptional skills and perception. Let me tell you something about him.

He has been fighting crime - you might almost use the phrase literally - for longer than anyone would decently care to remind him. But he is still the athletic side of middle age, and he keeps himself in perfect fettle both mentally and physically. Such a demand is one of the walls of his profession.

This obsession for personal efficiency goes, in fact, much deeper. He is also an expert on guns, preferring a Luger for personal use, a first-class driver in his Bentley Continental, and he is an adept in Judo, fencing and art. He has trained his mind never to forget any special knowledge, once learnt.

His direct personal experience in crime and criminology is incomparable, and his academic qualifications are well-known. It is not because I am a Cantabrian myself that I can point out that he is a Doctor of Medicine and Bachelor of Chirurgy of Cambridge University.

Blake is a man of immense personal charm. He can be downright rude to the unimaginative criminal, whose living he scorns, but he respects nothing more than intelligence and, a close second, a man's ability instinctively to act upon his innate common sense.

He is sharply individual in that his personal dynamism is evident at once to all who consult him, whether at his Baker Street rooms or his Berkeley Square offices. You can immediately sense his tolerance, understanding, compassion and friendliness.

That streak of practicality which he so much admires in other people is, by the way, also his own property. Evidence of it is the way he has seen fit to look after his own home, which cost him £27,543 when he bought the property, which houses his penthouse flat, from the jaws of redevelopment.

---

The study is now the envy of all who see it, and Blake fits into it hand-in-glove, particularly when he is relaxing in his old and comfortable club armchair - the only piece of furniture he refused to give up when his flat was redesigned. Really, it is no wonder that he is a contented man whenever he is at home...

One more thing. You'll want to recognise Blake. I should say it's unlikely you would be able to mistake him, but he is six feet tall, lithe, muscular and big-shouldered. He has steely, grey-blue eyes, dark brown hair which meets in a V in his forehead, and a finely-etched mouth.

This is Sexton Blake as I have got to know him over the years, and I can feel confident he's your man if you want any kind of criminal investigation undertaken. I recommend him to you wholly without reservations of any kind.

Don't worry about the fee. Blake is as judicious in these things as in all else.

\* \* \* \* \*

A BLAKE-BOND BILL

By O. W. Wadham

In the February issue of Collectors' Digest it was announced that a series of Sexton Blake films in color were being made. First was said to be "Sexton Blake and the Double Five," specially written by Donald Stuart.

Being curious to see if that film would reach New Zealand, I kept an eye on the amusement columns of Wellington Evening Post. Sure enough, early in April the Princess Theatre a second-run house in the heart of the city, announced "the first of a new series of Sexton Blake," that feature playing second fiddle to James Bond in "Goldfinger."

The Blake film, "Murder at Site 3," was said to be "full of violence and murder," and was being shown for the first time in N.Z.

So those that went to see Bond saw Blake first, but both films were given A certs., so not many youngsters would make his acquaintance.

\* \* \* \* \*

R E V I E W

Sexton Blake Library No. 31. MURDER GOES NAP

Rex Dolphin

This is the first story from Rex Dolphin in the new series, and it is a great pleasure to welcome him back.

The novel starts off at a furious pace with Kit Lennox riding a horse in the Grand National, and, even though the body of the rider is left beneath his horse on the Aintree course, the pace is maintained from the first word till the last.

Sexton Blake is called in to find out who is responsible for the sabotage, arson, and vicious wreckings of the betting-shops owned by the jockey who came to grief at Aintree, and the result is plenty of violence. Much of the tale is centred in Sohc, and it is an overall picture of the seamier side of life. A very large cast of characters play their part, and Tinker adds to the number by frequently becoming Edward Carter.

Out of the ordinary, it is full of excitement and well told. Though it may not be a "favourite" for every reader, it is certain that the vast majority will vote it a "winner."

-----

## DANNY'S DIARY

October 1916

We were plunged right into winter when summer time ended on October 1st, and we had to put our clocks back one hour. It seemed awful at first, with it getting dark so early, but now it is pleasant to sit round the fire and read my books. I hope we get Summer Time back next year. It has been a wonderful success, this first year of changing the clocks.

I can't help thinking that authors tend to plug their successful characters to death. It happened with Talbot in the Gem. And now, even more so, it is happening with Mornington in the Boys' Friend. Of course, all the Mornington tales are first-chop, but I really think we are getting too much of him.

The first Rookwood story this month was "The Fistical Four's Revenge." Mr. Manders had been a nuisance, so Lovell and Jimmy made a number of calls to Mr. Manders on the phone from Mr. Bootles' study, and they dropped a penny on the carpet to pay for each call they made. Finally they inserted a notice in the local paper to say that a rich man wanted to help the deserving needy - and gave Mr. Manders' address. All sorts of "deserving needy" presented themselves to Mr. Manders, among them Mr. Horatio Curll, a broken-down actor from the Roser Moser Co.

Mr. Curll first appeared in the Gem. Later on he came into the Magnet. Now he has turned up at Rookwood. Which proves quite

clearly that the same writer is handling St. Jim's, Greyfriars, and Rookwood.

Second tale was "Barred From The Team" in which Mornington planned to play in the footer match at St. Jim's. Through trickery, Lovell was left at Rookham where they changed trains; Dodd was left at Laxham where they changed trains again. But when Mornington and Peele turned up at St. Jim's, Jimmy Silver still refused to play Mornington - and Arthur Augustus of St. Jim's played for Rookwood instead.

Mornington was now out for revenge (tell me the old, old story) and in "Jimmy Silver's Guilt," Morny provided a banknote and made Beaumont of the Sixth pretend that Jimmy had stolen it.

Last of the month was "Expelled from Rookwood." Jimmy was up before the Head for stealing Beaumont's money, and was expelled. However, Jimmy has refused to go, and has barred himself up in the End Study. It is a thrilling series.

Sometimes when we come out of the cinemas, we find all the street lights off, and the trams standing in darkness. It means that an air raid is on. The raids are a bit exciting, but it is a nuisance to have to walk home instead of tramping it. In one of the raids this month, a Zepp was brought down at Potters Bar, an omelette somewhere in North London.

Some goodish pictures this month at the cinemas. We saw Pauline Frederick in "The Spider." Bombadier Billy Wells was in "Kent, the Fighting Man," which was fairish though I don't think much of Billy as an actor. But I like Bessie Barriscale who was in a good cowboys and indians film called "Bullets and Brown Eyes." When the indians come on the screen, the orchestra always plays a certain weird piece of music which I like, though I don't know what it is called.

Charlie Chaplin in "The Fireman" brought down the house, but the best of the longer pictures this month has been Mary Pickford in "Hulda From Holland." A new Pathe serial has just started at our Gem Cinema. It features Pearl White and Creighton Hale (who were so wonderful in "The Exploits of Elaine" a long time ago) and it is called "The Laughing Mask."

Speaking of Mary Pickford, I bought Mum a copy of the Girls' Friend which gave away a silk picture of Mary. There was also a new serial called "The Best Girls are Here" by Mabel St. John. Mum seemed very pleased with my gift.

Nothing to put the flags up about in the Gem this month. In "Redfern to the Rescue," Julian was accused of stealing the sports

funds from a senior named Hubert Hake. Redfern proved that Hake was the thief. I had never heard of Hake before, and I shan't hear of him behind, for he is now expelled.

"By Cousin Ethel's Wish" was a bit of a hash, for there was a dog show and a cat show. Also, Cousin Ethel asked the boys to be kind to a slinky character named John Palmer, who had saved her dog.

"On His Honour" was a Grundy tale. Grundy, who had been flinging his weight about, was forbidden to fight for a week, and everybody took advantage of this. Not too bad, this one.

I suppose the best of the month was "A Surprise for St. Jim's," in which Levison played for the Wayland Juniors Football Club under Grimes, the grocer's boy. They beat St. Jim's.

I don't know that I'm all that keen on the new Levison, but there seems to have been a lot of changes at St. Jim's in the past year.

The price of a 4-lb loaf has gone up to 10d. Mum told Dad that the cost of living is getting out of hand.

The first story in the Magnet was "The Stolen Study." The Greyfriars boys were going back to school after their summer holidays. Fancy not going back till October. I reckon this tale was meant to follow after "For D'Arcy's Sake" of a few weeks back. Harry Wharton & Co had trouble on the train, owing to Bunter's ventriloquism. When eventually they reached Greyfriars, they found that Fish, Bolsover, and Bunter had bagged Study No. 1, and Wingate had said that it was a case of "first come, first served." Quite a jolly tale, with Wharton and Nugent getting their study back in the end.

"The Bounder's Guest" of the next tale was Mornington of Rookwood. Morny and Ponsonby made trouble for the Bounder, but Wharton saved the day.

I didn't like "Fishy's Latest." Bob Cherry took a snapshot, and then found it showed Skinner & Co smoking. Skinner wanted the picture back, and Fishy started a "Get-it-done" Bureau to get it. A bit funny in parts, but rather silly.

In "Under Bunter's Thumb," Bunter caused Wharton to suspect that De Courcy of Highcliffe or one of his friends had stolen a banknote which Harry had received from his uncle. Bunter tried to blackmail his way into the football in return for keeping the secret. There seems to be rather a lot about theft in the story papers this month, but I thought this a jolly good tale.

There is a new serial in the Magnet called "The Fourth Form at Framlingham" by Richard Randolph, about a character called Johnny Goggs. It seems all right, but I seldom read the serials.

# NEWS OF THE CLUBS

## MIDLAND

Meeting held August 30th, 1966.

The attendance was the smallest for many years, only four people attending. These were Tom Porter, Norman Gregory, Ted Davey and the acting secretary.

One wonders whether in view of the number of people likely to be taking their annual holiday about this time an August meeting might be omitted. Holidays however did not account for all absences and in point of fact the attendance at the meeting in August 1965 was very good.

It was a great disappointment to Tom Porter who was in the chair in Ivan Webster's absence, on holiday, for he had very thoroughly prepared a good evening's entertainment.

Norman Gregory read an extract from last week's Sunday Times entitled "Jolly Gems." This reported the fact that for the first time in its history the London Club had hired a room at the Y.M.C.A. Great Russell Street. Previously all meetings had been held in members' houses. Expanding numbers has necessitated the change. An outline of the hobby in its many interesting ramifications was given by the writer. It is very gratifying to hear of publicity of this kind.

Tom Porter gave two interesting items. One was a quiz on the lines of "University Challenge" and the other, "One Minute Talks." A title was drawn out of a bag and the one who drew out a particular title was allowed to talk for one minute only on it. It is a pity there were not more members to enjoy these intriguing items.

The sad death of Bill Gander was mentioned. By a curious coincidence his death occurred about the same time we were playing his tape recording at our July meeting. His passing is a great loss to the hobby.

The Anniversary number was Magnet 290 "The Schoolboy Shopkeepers" dated 30th August, 1913. The Collector's items were two Boys' Friend 3d Libraries Nos. 288 and 328. These two famous stories, "The Boy Without a Name" and "Rivals and Chums," are without doubt some of Charles Hamilton's finest work. So highly are they prized that Tom Porter informed us that £20 had been offered for just the two books.

The acting secretary read an amusing extract from, "Billy Bunter's Butler" which appeared in the Holiday Annual for 1921.

As we broke up we discussed the recent Sexton Blake issue, "The Case of the Bismarck Memoirs," No. 28 by Pierre Quiroule. This story, with changed names, substituting Nelson Lee and Nipper for Sexton Blake and Tinker, appeared in the Nelson Lee Library in the late 1920's. As Tom Porter said "What's in a Name?"

We meet again on September 28th at the Birmingham Theatre Centre. The attendance we hope will be better. It could scarcely be worse.

J. F. Bellfield  
Correspondent.

-----  
LONDON

Once again the "Claude Duval" coach sped along the A2, M2 and Thanet Way bound for the Nayland Rock Hotel, Margate. The date, Sunday, September 4th, and it conveyed 21 members and friends. A very pleasant journey with the usual stop at the fine Rank cafe. At the hotel, the president of the club, John Wernham, greeted the party; he was one of the 14 members who came under their own steam. Amongst the latter were six of the Beck family from Lewes, Eric Lawrence from Berks, Roger Jenkins from Havant, V. J. Clift from Hurstmonceaux, John Bush from near by Whitstable, and Miss Edith Hood from "Roselawn." Bill Lofts, journeying by train was unfortunately held up owing to a derailment at Bannington. The party sat down to a very good luncheon with suitable menu cards, kindly supplied by the president, John Wernham. These cards depicted, on the front page, an E. E. Briscoe drawing of the College House of St. Frank's whilst on the back page was the arms of the school and the motto "Consilio et Animis."

Owing to the late arrival of Bill Lofts for reasons given above, Len Packman ably officiated in the chair. John Beck proposed the toast of the Old Boys' Book Club after a very good and concise speech; Roger Jenkins proposed the toast "The Guests." President John Wernham addressed the gathering and stated how well the Hamilton Museum booklet had sold and announced that another publication may be out before Christmas. Len Packman read out a letter from Frances, Mrs. Edwy Searles Brooks, accepting the honorary life membership of the club and saying how sorry she was unable to be with the luncheon party that day. Then the sad news from Len of the passing of Jim Doyle and how a suitable wreath from the Old Boys' Book Club had been sent.

---



By now Bill Lofts had arrived and was regaled with his lunch. Before and after lunch, Roger Jenkins was very busy with his Hamilton Library and then it was decided that we all enjoy some of the amenities of the Margate scene. Four of us including Reuben and Mrs. Godsave, walked round the front and called in to see our Margate member, Maurice Black. All too soon it was time to return for tea and with Bill Lofts officiating an enjoyable meal it was with a few more announcements, conversations and then leave taking. Bill elected to return in the coach. A good run back in the evening sunshine arriving at Victoria in time for Brian Doyle's mother to catch the nine o'clock train back to Brighton.

Next meeting at 35, Woodhouse Road, Leytonstone, London, E.11. Phone MARYland 1737, hosts Reuben and Mrs. Godsave. Kindly advise if attending especially now our numbers are so large.

Uncle Benjamin

-----

#### NORTHERN

Meeting held Saturday, 10th September, 1966

As usual we commenced with the library session, and then Vice Chairman Elsie Taylor opened the meeting formally, welcoming the eighteen members present. (From Chairman Geoffrey Wilde came apologies for unavoidable absence, and also a quiz for our amusement later in the meeting.)

From Gerry Allison's letters we were sorry to hear that death had visited again, and we had lost Herbert Chapman of Barton-on-Humber. Gerry had had a large mail, and reported two new members. Also he passed round a copy of the "Charles Hamilton Museum" book beautifully prepared by the President of our London Club, John Wernham. Gerry had order forms, and many of our members will treasure this great tribute to Charles Hamilton. Other items of news, covered, briefly, a 'scoop' of Holiday Annuals bought for a 'song' at a second hand shop by a member; report of "Magnets" buried in the desert during World War II, and the ending of publication of "The Scout."

Vice Chairman Jack Wood had a cheerful word about a new series of P. G. Wodehouse coming on T.V. - Blandings Castle - to which we all look forward.

Now, we got down to Geoffrey's quiz (read out by Jack Wood, the answers being in a sealed envelope!) It was a searching brain stretcher - in Geoffrey's best style - and eventually Jack Wood himself came first with Neville Vear and Tom Roach tied for second place.

A reading selection by Gerald Allison, was read by his brother Jack, and this was the first story of Herlock Sholmes in the Greyfriars Herald - written by Charles Hamilton. This brought many chuckles, with its witty parody. Jack followed this with a reading chosen by himself (held over from a previous meeting) from "Sard Harker" by John Masefield. An account of a most difficult journey, only accomplished by great pluck and luck.

A break now for chat and refreshments, and then we had a game devised by Mollie Allison. Each one present drew a paper with the name of a hobby character, which had to be guessed by the rest of the company. Only three statements could be made about each one. Finally four members, Gerry Allison, Neville Vear, Bill Williamson and Alan Barker were all first with eight correct.

Time was running out, but Gerry Allison read out sentences with hidden names in for us to guess. The best at visualising the unseen words was Ron Hodgson, with Elsie and Norman Smith second.

Now it was time to say "Goodnight," and Northern members dispersed in all directions of the compass - to Mansfield, York, Keighley, Huddersfield, Bradford, etc. etc.

Next meeting Saturday, 8th October, 1966.

M. L. Allison  
Hon. Sec.

-----  
For Sale - MAGNETS, China Series Complete 1175-1185. Ex. Condition. Last 20 issues 1940, 1664-1683. Ex. Cond. REDS - 223 Good Cond. 193, 208, 220, 257, Complete story but no cover. 1061 Good, 1442 Fair, 1563, 1566, 1567, F. Good. 1607, 1676, Fair. 1/2d GREYFRIARS HERALD 1916, Nos. 1, 10, 14, 16, F. Good. GEMS, 1495, 1497, 1548, Mint. 161 MODERN BOY'S, Mostly near mint, including No. 1, only 3 missing from 1-75. B.F.L's. 1933-39, ALL Capt. Justice, Ex. Condition. 18 copies. 25 S.P.C's. Nos. 52, 57-80, Mint. C.D. ANNUALS, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1960.

Reasonable Offers to - JOHN GEAL,  
94, SHORTLANDS ROAD, KINGSTON, SURREY.

-----  
**FOR SALE:** Very rare items - 8 Girls' Homes (1910-1911) = 20/- plus postage. (One contains early work of C. H. Chapman). Moderate condition. Also Union Jack "The Food Profiteer" 1916. 4/- plus postage. (s.a.e. first, please)

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

# THE POSTMAN CALLED

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

A. G. POUND (Birmingham): The contributor of "Some Sensational Scoops" in the latest number of the C.D. is under a misapprehension; as, I am sure, Norman Wright, who wrote so excellently for the last C.D. Annual, could inform him.

"The Poison Belt" was not specially written for "Scoops" in 1936. It was published in 1913 as a sort of sequel to "The Lost World," the first of Doyle's Professor Challenger stories, which appeared in 1912.

I cannot agree with O. W. Wadham's rather contemptuous reference to the quality of "The Poison Belt." "The Poison Belt" is not mere Science Fiction. Its interest is mainly dramatic and psychological; and is enhanced by the delightful Conan Doyle humour. In my opinion "The Poison Belt" is by far the best of Doyle's Professor Challenger stories, and one of the best stories Doyle ever wrote. And, in my opinion again for what it is worth, we have never had a better storyteller in England (with all due respects to Charles Hamilton) than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

A. V. PACKER (Tottenham): I read last week that Hamilton invented 51 schools. I cannot arrive at a total anywhere near that figure. Perhaps you or your wide circle of Digesters could compile a list.

BERT HAMBLETT (Maghull): Any chance of finding whether Danny's son kept a diary? If he did, it would be around the 1930's, more my period. It seems an awful time to wait till 1986 to read about Danny's Diary for 1936.

O. W. WADHAM (New Zealand): A new all story paper is a welcome sign in this sickening surfeit of strip story sheets. May I commend the D. C. Thomson firm's new, neat one shilling monthly, Secrets, to readers? Number one, "The Golden Boy," issued in June is the only issue I've seen so far in this distant land, but I'll surely seek others.

S. WHITEHEAD (Argyll): Did you know "Red Circle" is being reprinted in current Hotspurs - and in words, not pictures?

H. MACHIN (Preston): Re the article on "Scoops." Surely it is impossible that Sir A. Conan Doyle began a serial "The Poison Belt" for Scoops in 1934. Doyle was born in 1859 and died in 1930. I seem to recall that "Poison Belt" was a serial in the Strand Magazine about two years before the first world war.

W. T. THURBON (Cambridge): Conan Doyle's "Poison Belt" was published in 1913. It was the second of his Professor Challenger series - the first appeared in 1912 (The Lost World). Scoops would not be the first paper to publish such a tale as a serial, long after first publication. Cheer Boys Cheer published Stevenson's "Black Arrow" c. 1912, if memory serves me, with a different title, and the Magnet in its last days published some of Zane Grey's tales. There must be other instances, apart from the downright plagiarising of e.g. Ivanhoe and "Cloister and the Hearth" for the early Aldine Robin Hoods, and much of Rider Haggard by e.g. Cecil Hayter and Reginald Wray.

JOHN UPTON (Southend): I was most interested in Mr. Lofts' article on Will Hay, who was also my favourite comedian in my youth. I remember seeing some of his films over and over again, such as what were, I believe, his last two for Ealing Studios, "The Goose Steps Out" and "My Learned Friend." By far the best, though, in my opinion, was "Oh Mr. Porter," mentioned by Mr. Lofts: this was a classic. Another excellent one was "The Ghost of St. Michaels," which featured fine character actors like Felix Aylmer and Raymond Huntley in its cast.

Though that matchless trio, Hay, Marriott and Moffat, are all dead, one great character who featured in a number of the films, usually as a prim bespectacled pupil, is the comedian Charles Hawtrey, who looms so large today in the "Carry On" films.

Memory may play tricks in suggesting that Will Hay's films were much funnier (certainly they were cleaner) than the Anglo-Amalgamated series. I wish the B.B.C. would show some of them on television, in any case, for a present-day assessment.

GERRY ALLISON (Menston): In a fortnight's time THE SCOUT will cease publication after running for 58 years. The 20-page first issue on April 18th, 1908, was really a bumper affair. And what superb writers filled its pages; a SCOUT volume would always be my first choice in a list of Desert Island books.

The magazine's present circulation is 21,000 - no longer an economic proposition. The Boy Scout Association say 'the magazine is a victim of the over-sophistication of modern youngsters. Boys papers generally are having a hard time, and T.V. is the great enemy.' They are not too depressed though, as their other magazine, "THE SCOUTER" for boys over 16 and Scout Masters is doing well. It is of course a monthly, and its circulation is 36,000. My happiest days were when I was a Boy Scout - yes even happier than these wonderful years in the OBBC, and I have always tried to live up to the Scout Law - "A Scout's first duty is to be useful, and to help others." What a hopeless

square I am, but still, I have thirty volumes of THE SCOUT on my bookshelves.

-----

DESMOND COKE - AND "THE WORM"

by W. J. A. Hubbard

Coke, of course, wrote quite a number of both long and short stories of a most competent standard but only in "The Bending of a Twig" and "The Worm" did he reach a height which places him among the masters of school story characterization.

It is notable, however, that it took Mr. Coke no less than 21 years to again produce a story of the standard of "The Bending of a Twig" which stresses once again the extreme difficulties experienced in writing the "realistic" school story which even an author of Desmond Coke's ability has to encounter.

"The Worm" was first published in 1927.

Of all the yarns I have so far reviewed "The Worm" is the most modern with its references to School Certificate, Night Clubs, Jazz, Mid-day milk, School Clubs and Societies and the slang of the times. It is not dated in any way and with minor alterations could easily pass as a School story of the present day. Despite such qualifications, however, it has always been one of the less well known school story classics which is rather a puzzle, especially to the discerning reader.

There are possibly two reasons for this. In writing "The Worm" Coke rather fell between two stools; he made his story too adult perhaps, for boys and too boyish, perhaps, for adults, while in writing the story he obviously had an object in view and stories written for a purpose often do not sell well, however brilliant their construction. Matters were also not helped by the fact that Mr. Coke included a certain passage in the book which referred to unnatural behaviour among certain of the boys featured. The reference was slight and relative to minor characters and to incidents that happened "off-stage" but was sufficient, in 1927, to ban the book from both School and Public Libraries.

The object that Coke had in view in writing "The Worm" was largely educational for he wished to try and present to his readers the life at school of the intellectual and largely retiring type of boy and to show that boy's point of view and one must say that he

succeeded in doing so. Such a boy would largely be in conflict with the dominance of athletics that prevails at any reputable school. In contrast to some of the stories previously reviewed in this series, however, Mr. Coke did endeavour not to show some of the marked prejudice that other authors showed against the athletic type of boy, a prejudice, I am convinced which was largely caused by resentment that they had been unable to reach such heights in their own school days.

"The Worm" is the story of Hugo Dean over a period of five years at Bilton School. Bilton is, incidentally, an entirely fictitious establishment and not based on Shrewsbury or Clayesmore, two famous Public Schools with which Mr. Coke was associated both as a boy and a Master.

Hugo is the son of a Naval Officer who is both a competent and popular man and a good athlete. Hugo, however, is a retiring and intellectual boy who by force of circumstances has had to spend a good deal of his time in his mother's company.

The House at Bilton in which Hugo is placed is moreover, on the downgrade as it is in charge of a Master whose age and health are telling on him. Consequently Hugo has little encouragement and finds things difficult and it is during this initial period that the nickname of "The Worm" is, with typical schoolboy cruelty, imposed on him.

A new Housemaster is eventually appointed who pulls things round and who sees distinct possibilities in the retiring boy and under his influence Hugo begins to expand. He has always been a good scholar but now he has aspirations to shine at Cricket as he has come to realise that the only way he can gain respect from the other boys is by means of games. He succeeds in his efforts and becomes one of the most popular boys in the House.

The story now begins to work up to its climax but the author has a disappointment in store for the reader. Hugo is appointed Head of his House but instead of continuing his sporting activities and ending his school career on a top note as one rather expects, he decides to exercise a privilege as Head Boy and not play any Cricket whatsoever. Why he does this he can hardly explain himself but he has always wished to put the athletic types in their place and he does so. His triumph is marred in the end, however, by an outbreak of typhoid which puts a stop to all sporting activity but enables Hugo to leave Bilton reconciled with the House Cricket Captain and conscious that he has done his duty as Head Boy.

Why did Coke end "The Worm" in this way and why did he not allow

his hero to act as I feel that any normal boy would? I suppose one could say that Hugo Dean is portrayed as the exception that proves the rule but I think the real reason was that the author wished to ensure the complete triumph of the intellectual type of boy and to show that such a boy was fully capable of exercising determination and will-power. Nevertheless it cannot be denied that such a curious twist does seem to spoil the closing chapters of the book.

Many boys would not like "The Worm" for it lacks the action dear to the heart of the immature reader. Its story is dull in plot and so is naturally very true to life. Its appeal would chiefly be to schoolmasters and to all who have to deal with boys. Such readers would find it full of interest and of great assistance in their work.

Desmond Coke died about 1955. He appears to have written quite a number of novels and burlesques as well as school stories and to have been a highly successful writer. As far as I can ascertain he wrote no more school yarns after "The Worm" but to my mind he deserves a high place among the writers of hard cover school stories because he appears to be the only one who achieved the distinction of producing a second "best seller" as good as his first.

**WANTED** - SIX SHILLINGS EACH paid for Nelson Lee Library Old Series, Numbers 114, 137, 143, 144, 146 and No. 550, also wanted Schoolboy's Own Library Nos. 27, 54 and 56 (St. Frank's) to replace volume "borrowed."

JOHN GUNN, MEADOW INN, 91, ARKRIGHT STREET, NOTTINGHAM.

£1 each offered for reasonable binding copies Gems 805, 807, 812, 813, 814, 816, 817, 818, 822, 826, 828, 829, 831, 841, 845, 846, 847, 852, 862, 866, 951, 952, 970, 980. 10/- each for 844, 863, 991.

Write airmail: CHARLES VAN RENEN, Box 50, UITENHAGE, SOUTH AFRICA.

**WANTED:** Boys Friend Library: 1st Series No. 514, 633 and 704; 2nd Series No. 447. (All St. Frank's).

JOHN GUNN, MEADOW INN, ARKRIGHT STREET, NOTTINGHAM

**WANTED URGENTLY:** Gems 494, 496, 585, 1657. Magnets 1424-26-32-33; 1561-63-64-65; 1619-22-23; 1632-33-35-39; 1661-63; 1682-83. 15/- each offered.

H. FRANKLIN, 83 UFFINGTON AVENUE, HARTSHOLME ESTATE, LINCOLN.

**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, 356 to 358 inclusive, 435, 773, 850, 858, 862, 863, 864, 865, 868, 942, 951, 985, 988. **GEMS:** Some issues between 801 and 832, 953, 954, 956, 975, 980, 984, 985, 989, 990, 992, 993, 998.  
**POPULARS:** 452, 455, 466, 452.

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

HAVE YOU ORDERED YOUR C.D. ANNUAL FOR 1966 ?

