

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Vol. 21

No ²⁴¹~~225~~

MAY 1967

FAMOUS

ALLY

SLOPER



brilliantly drawn by JOHN EVANS (after the original artist)

Collectors' Digest

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by

W. H. GANDER

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Founded in 1946 by

HERBERT LECKENBY

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THIS IS WHERE WE CAME IN

Readers who happened to be watching one of the 24-HOURS television programmes, early in April, may have been wryly amused and wondered whether someone had turned back the clock. It seemed that two new books were about to be published. These were works of fiction - a story by Gary Sobers, world-famous for his cricket, and a yarn by Dennis Law, equally famous footballer.

But, the TV interviewer informed us with suitable gravity, these books were not written by Messrs. Law and Sobers at all. They were written by a man named Martin who was quite agreeable that his stories should be published under more famous names.

The publisher of the books (he appeared to be somewhat embarrassed and at a loss for very convincing argument) claimed that plenty of the autobiographies of famous men had been "ghosted" by professional writers. But, countered the interviewer, these books are fiction.

The interviewer read from the introduction by Mr. Sobers who had written something like: "It has been great fun writing this book; I hope that readers will find it fun, too."

"Great fun for whom?" demanded the interviewer sternly.

"For the reader," pleaded the publisher.

"But Gary Sobers says it has been great fun writing it," persisted the interviewer.

"Mr. Martin is an excellent writer," said the publisher.

"Then why," demanded a famous authoress who was also present, "does he not have his work published under his own name?"

It was the interviewer who asked the 64-dollar question:

"How much are Sobers and Law being paid for the use of their famous names?"

"You can't expect me to answer that," replied the publisher, not unnaturally.

The interviewer asked the publisher whether there might be a prosecution under some new bill which prevents false descriptions being put on items for sale. The publisher thought it unlikely.

Now, though a practice of this kind may be new to the 24-HOURS team, it is by no means new to those of us who remember the heyday of the old periodicals. It was a common occurrence years ago for stories to be published under the names of famous sportsmen who perhaps accepted cheques for the use of their names. Wally Hammond was credited with the writing of "Cloyne of Claverhouse" in Modern Boy, though it is a question whether Mr. Hammond ever even saw the story. Sir Alan Cobham was much lauded, also in Modern Boy, for the early King of the Islands serial, and Charles Hamilton, later on, professed to be unaware that somebody else had been credited with his work. Plenty of other famous names were given to stories, the writers of which did not mind their work being credited to somebody else. Possibly the writers were suitably compensated in cash for their self-denial.

Long ago we thought this sort of thing was rather like cheating the juvenile reading public. We feel much the same way about it in 1967.

THE CHICKEN OR THE EGG?

Apart from his early school stories, which I regard as classics of their type, I have never been a reader of Wodehouse. Consequently I came as quite a new boy to "Blandings Castle" on television, thoroughly enjoyed it, and considered that Sir Ralph Richardson gave a magnificent performance as the elderly nobleman. In consequence, it is of much interest to me to note that our Merseyside club, as reported this month, had no high opinion of the TV series or the performances concerned.

When a book is filmed, it makes all the difference which you do first - read the book or see the film. Or, of course, the stage play.

A reader conjures up vivid mental visions of characters and places described in books. Almost inevitably, the picture presented on film or stage is at variance with that mental picture - and it

disappoints. Most of us, having our own pet imaginations of Greyfriars and its inhabitants, were mildly disappointed when the school was transferred to TV. In addition, producers take liberties. We found it irritating to see Mauleverer with a monocle or Hurree Singh (on the stage) in a turban.

Generally speaking, we prefer either the book or the film according to which we had acquaintance with first. I remember enjoying the film of "The Citadel" and being disappointed with the book which I read later. On the other hand, the film of "The Good Earth" disappointed, only being a fragment of the book.

Occasionally, as with the Sherlock Holmes stories and "The Forsyte Saga," the producers manage to equal the written word. But it's a risky business.

THE EDITOR.

FOR SALE: First four vols of Picture Post 1938-39 (bound) 50/-, fine condition. "Wonder Album of Filmland" (1933 A.P.) 10/-. Crusoe Winter Annual 1924 (Newnes) 6/-. First vol of Union Jack 1880 (poor condition but complete) 6/-. First vol of Everybody's Story Album 1909, stories of Bram Stoker, Pett Ridge, etc., 800 p.ps 15/-. Celebrated Cases of Charlie Chan pub 1933 - 1400 p.ps 7/6. 4 Buffalo Bill Annuals (Aldine) 5/- each; Old blood "The Young Rake" by Pierce Egan 5/-. Lilliput Annual 1939 6/-. Postage extra on all items.

L. MORLEY, 76, ST. MARGARETS RD., HANWELL, LONDON, W.7.

SALE: 7 copy run, Sunbeam comic, June 6th to July 18th, 1936, 25/- posted.

O. W. WADHAM, 12 MILITARY ROAD, LOWER HUTT, N.Z.

WANTED: Good loose copies or volumes containing any one or more of the following: GEMS: Some issues between 801 and 832; 953, 954, 959, 960, 967, 970, 974, 975, 981, 984, 985, 986, 987, 989, 990, 992, 993, 995. POPULARS: 401, 403, 407, 409, 413, 415, 421, 422, 427, 433, 441, 442, 466, 467, 474.

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

WANTED any odd copies of Union Jack 1914 - 1915.

MR. E. CORDY, 23 CARPENTER AVE., BULL FARM, MANSFIELD.

FOR SALE, old boys annuals etc. SAE list (UK only).

WANTED, Holiday Annuals 1920-28 - tatty copies considered if complete.

MILLER, 50 HILLSIDE GROVE, LONDON, N.14.

WHO WAS ALLY SLOPER?

Frank Shaw answers this question asked herein last year quoting a reference to him by Neil Bell and repeated in March Digest by William Lister.

- - - -

HE WAS a character in a Victorian comic paper, price 1d, Ally Sloper's Half Holiday, which (as with Comic Cuts at its outset) was not a comic for boys. Decidedly not. Though it would be an old-fashioned parent now who would prevent his son (or daughter) reading it. It was naughty for its times. Up to 1914 when it folded after 30 years of weekly appearance it was as well-known as Coronation Street. You might as well have asked "Who is Ena Sharples?" as Justice Darling asked "Who is George Robey?" (The barrister's reply is said to have been "He was the Darling of the Halls, my lord.")

That branch of Fred Karno's Army called the A.S.C. (not yet Royal) called itself Ally Sloper's Cavalry.

Ally followed the journalistic tradition by which a periodical is personified as with The Tatler, The Gentleman's Magazine (Sylvanus Urban), Punch, Esquire, Billy Bunter's Own. He was also in a tradition of vulgar but strangely innocent humour still present in the seaside postcard and a peculiar little publication sold outside North Country football grounds, "Billy's Weekly Liar."

Very well illustrated, written in a very bitty, diffuse, unaffected prose (anonymous), it appealed to a newly-literate generation of adults whose sons were reading the "bloods," and which was enjoying the first legal half-hol. Some of the drawings were by artists known in boys comics, like Jack Yeats, and the writing was often, in its way, very good. (It does not amuse now but neither - as a rule - does a Victorian Punch or last year's for that matter - for one thing topical allusions are lost and the current catch phrase or fad.) As Charles Hamilton wrote for Victorian papers of all sorts maybe - there are definite signs of his early style. Well known writers did write for it, it is believed. I found, circa 1912, a decided echo of Edgar Wallace's Educated Evans. It was the poor man's Pink Un.

Ally was an overdressed slummy with a tremendous conk and a huge umbrella. A magnificent artist with a richly baroque style, W. F. Thomas, on the front page weekly depicted his adventures and those of his dog and his cheeky son and dubious daughter (who had friends among the nobility like the Dook of Snook!) and his boozy friends, at the music hall, the seaside, elections, horse-races, royal occasions. (The tone was overwhelmingly loyal as such publications always were.

Radicalism never reared its ugly head and Labour or Trade Union supporters were loonies or hooligans.)

There were anything up to thirty pages, three columns to a page, scruffily printed on off-white paper, the size of the pages being the same as in the old Boys Friend.

It was edited by a printer named Dalzell from Shoe Lane and under its heading it did claim to be a Selection (Sidesplitting Sentimental and Serious) for the Benefit - not only - Of Old Boys - but - Young Boys and Even Girls. Umm!

My father read it, many notable Edwardian essayists refer to it, such as Chesterton, not unfavourably. Ally typified something of its age. It was revived in the twenties - I read it with a Nelson Lee inside my Tout's History in the Fifth Form - but, though Thomas still drew magnificently and the daughter still flaunted a noble bust, it went quickly as so many revivals and new publications did in that era. (Cheerio, Town Topics, London Calling, Polly's Paper, Girls Friend, Boys Realm...)

The war might never have been. The late Victorian and Edwardian approach was maintained. I thought this touching; I liked the rorty period. But if I take you for a few swift glances through typical issues from its heyday you may agree that resurrection - whatever of Sexton Blake and even Buffalo Bill (what about Dick Turpin and Tubby Hawke?) was impossible. On the other hand if you watch TV often you'll find some of the 'jokes' still live!

The front page of an issue in Volume Two, 1885 shows Ally in a kilt shooting pheasants in Scotland and being shot in the rear by Tootsie's friend, the Dook, arm in arm with that shapely maiden and bemonocled. Under this is another "toff" being sold a horse. Says the seller "It'll carry you over everything, sir." He adds (as it were blotto voce), "Over its 'ead perhaps." Almost good enough for a Carry On film. There is a surprisingly serious piece about a Quelch-like schoolmaster. The correspondents answered are as unlikely as H. A. Hinton's. Honeysuckle May (Bexley Heath) succeed in sadly shocking Ally and he tells Tom Jones (Sheerness) the epitaph he quoted is old - and unfit to appear in his pages! C.G. (Gateshead) is informed that William the Conky is buried near Rouen and an American reader is told of Ally's keen personal interest in that country.

Barmaids are defended, teetotalers attacked and there are funny Froggies talking like Mossos. Bejabers, there are, of course, funny Irishman and, as ever was, comic cops. Monks drink and "mashers" say "Doosid stupid" and have waistcoats like Gussy's. There is a short story, in a club setting, a serial, buxom ballerinas and, among much

else, a facetious essay on fishing. What do you think of these daffynitions, Hush Money, a nurse's wages, Worst Tax of All, Attacks of gout? And what about this ribtickler - Two people at a theatre. He: What are all the people clapping for? She: Maybe their hands are cold.

In 1895, we are told Thatcham was the place Wigs were first Made (use of initial capitals was always arbitrary). Funny tramps and Ikey Mo join the comic Irishmen, two tramps just look like Weary Willy and Tired Tim. Says one, Wunst you've been to clink your name is mud. (I would not have thought that slang phrase so old.) Says the other, Yes.

Of a negro who died in Fleet Street we are told he "is not a blackamoor but a blacky less" and there is the inevitable restaurant scene with a waiter just like Waddles. Daughter Tootsie dances rather suggestively a pas de seul which would seem demure in the Cavern. Well shaped bathing girls and ballerinas wear rather more clothes than the modern girl in the street.

Irishmen are, begorra, still funny and a shabbily-dressed Workingmen's Candidate promises the electors "I'll not spend one penny of my own money." This (as we sometimes found in brackets in Chuckles) is a joke:- Visitor to actor's dressing-room: I congratulate you on your clown's make up. Actor: I've not made myself up yet. (Collapse of stout visitor?)

There is a fake election address from Ally and the daffynition, Public Characters, Barmaids. A few years later we find the daffynition A Pressing Affair, Cuddling and The Feature of Our Age, Cheek. Tootsie's Marriage Agency carries a lot of sauce. With a sentimental poem, Just a year ago, my dear, just a year ago, as Victorian as the jokes.

Jump to 1906 - when the paper was also "A premium for £100 Insurance" - and we find ads for Epps Cocoa, How to Grow a Luxurious Moustache and those bikes for twenty-five bob the redback Magnets also featured. The stage is covered a lot, and King Teddy; the ballerinas are slightly less covered; there are plenty of sly boosts. Nothing, strangely, about sport. There are still mashers or "knuts" Gussy-like, and fatties too and drunks. Says The First Worshipper of Bacchus, I heard you had become a T.T. Second Ditto, Not me. More likely to become a D.T. (Collapse of buxom barmaid?) There is still much slyness and coyness but no sign at all of that smut we now miscall satire. Is this the first ever appearance of an immortal - Is your wife entertaining this season? - Not very. There is a parody of Marie Corelli's Sorrows of Satan (did Danny ever see Lya de Putti and Adolph Menjou in this as a film - a much better, though unconscious, parody?).

And a little boy says to an Edwardian Constable Cuddlecook "If you've seen a man without a little boy - I'm the little boy." (Collapse of Collectors Digest contributor.)

Finally, after two rhymes from the 20's almost as good as Dick Penfold, I will venture the source of the same:- The stork has brought a peach for you, said Nursie with an air, It's a darn good job, said Poppa, That it didn't bring a pear. (Get it?) I've been a walk along the Old Kent Road With all my beauty clad in fashion's mode, But, oh, I wish a bit more wind had blowed, For what's the use of paying ten-and-six a pair if they're not showed? (Paging Ken Dodd?)

Alleys predominated in Victorian London and slope (Partridge's Slang Dictionary) means to "make off; decamp, leave lodgings without paying." Moonlight flits were a persistent music hall source of fun, and doubtless founded on the lives of the audience. Is there a suggestion of this rednosed character sloping slyly up an ally for that or similar doubtful purpose?

Extract from letter from Bert Graves:-

(By courtesy of G. Allison)

"Now, just a thought. Imagine a paperback novel with a pictorial front cover and descriptive back, entitled SHORT STORIES OF EERIE AND MYSTERY. NO. 1.

The cover picture showing the Inn of 1000 Secrets, with its weird setting on a lonely moor, barren trees, ghosts, bats flying overhead and a storm raging.

Inside say a dozen short stories chosen from 'Bullseye' and 'Surprise' of the 1930's.

1. The House of Thrills	Bullseye 24	8. The Inn of	
2. After Dark	Bullseye 157	1,000 Secrets	Bullseye 105
3. When Midnight Chimes	Surprise 1	9. Who, Why, Where,	
4. The Man with		When?	Bullseye 104
£1,000,000,000	Surprise 1	10. Phantom of	
5. Night Patrol	Bullseye 1	Cursitor House	Bullseye 24
6. Phantom Tales (1)	Bullseye 156	11. The Black Moon	Bullseye 86
7. Phantom Tales (2)	Bullseye 157	12. Phantom Thief	Surprise 1

These books displayed on the newsagent's shelves, along with 'James Bond' etc. I think they would sell like Hot Cross Buns at Easter-time. Anyhow, it's just a suggestion for an enterprising publisher."

DANNY'S DIARY

MAY, 1917

There hasn't really been anything strikingly good in any of my papers this month, though I think I am going to like the Rookwood series about the new boy, Erroll.

The first tale in the Magnet was "National Service at Greyfriars." Temple & Co decided to help the war effort by growing potatoes. When the Famous Five heard of it, they decided to do the same thing, but Fishy "cornered" all the seed potatoes in the neighbourhood. However, Wibley, by some impersonating of a government official, put the wind up Fishy. A fairly good tale.

Next came "Sir Jimmy's Secret." In this tale, Bob Cherry's cousin, Paul Tyrrell, deserted from the army when he was accused of theft. But Sir Jimmy discovered that the real thief was Scaly Bill, whom he had known in his old days at Carker's Rents. Not a bad dramatic story.

"His Father's Honour" didn't appeal to me. A new American boy named Tracey, decided to bag the captaincy from Harry Wharton. He got the Bounder on his side by blackmail, saying that the Bounder's father had knocked down and killed a man with his car in New York. But the man turned up at the end, and Tracey was turned out.

"Two of the Sixth" was quite good. Skinner sewed up Gwynne's overcoat in revenge for punishment. Carne pretended to find cigarettes on Harry Wharton. The Famous Five, waiting up late to punish Carne, saw somebody breaking bounds in Gwynne's overcoat. Skinner tried a bit of blackmail. Actually it was Carne in the overcoat. Quite a neat plot.

In the Greyfriars Gallery this month were Bulstrode, Hurree Singh, Coker, and Wun Lung.

There has been a bus strike in London, and all the General buses were off the roads for four days. Luckily the trams kept running. They have now abolished the halfpenny fare on the trams.

Some time ago we went to see "The Bing Boys are Here" at the Alhambra. This was a tremendously successful show and ran for a very long time. It ended fairly recently, and was replaced with "The Bing Girls Are There." Though Violet Lorraine was in this one as well as the previous one, the Bing Girls did not click, and the show ended after only a few weeks.

The Maypole is wonderful. They have introduced a new margarine which really tastes nice and they are producing it in big quantities.

Also, at a time when so many shops are profiteering, they are selling their margarine at 6d a pound. It is ages since we had anything which tasted really nice on our bread. There are big queues at our Maypole, but there is plenty of this wonderful margarine. Everybody says "God bless the Maypole," and make resolutions that, when the war is over, they won't forget what they owe to the Maypole.

At one of our cinemas there is a new serial called "The Purple Domino." Among the big pictures we have seen this month have been Theda Bara in "Under Two Flags," a tip-top story about the French Foreign Legion and a girl named Cigarette; George Walsh in "The Beast;" Owen Nares and Marguerite Courtot in "The Rolling Stones;" Norma Talmadge and Ralph Lewis in "Going Straight;" Dorothy Gish in "The Little School Ma'am;" Pauline Frederick in "The Woman in the Case."

It has been a very poor month in the Gem. The first two stories were "Grundy's Secret Society" and "Grundy, Grand-Master" in which Grundy was running a secret society he called the Vehme.

"Looking For Trouble" was the best of this month's Gems, though it wasn't a knockout. Cardew gets at daggers drawn with Monsieur Morny. Cardew hints that Mossoo has stolen a £5 note from Gussy, but the note was actually an advance on Mossoo's salary.

In "D'Arcy Minor's Bolt," Wally was suspected of theft and ran away from school to join a travelling boxing booth. The booth caught fire, Wally rescued Piggott from the flames, and it turned out that Piggott was the guilty one over the theft.

Almost always, Rookwood is the most generally good of the three schools. Of course, for ages now there has been far too much Mornington. I should think that in the past year he must have starred in at least 75% of the stories.

"The Fall of the Fifth" was a good amusing tale. It turns out that the Fifth Form master is named Mr. Greely. I think this is the first time we have heard about him. This story was about the rivalry between Jimmy Silver & Co and Hansom and Co of the Fifth. The Fifth have an amateur dramatic society named "The Thesbians."

"Son of a Cracksman" is the start of what is clearly going to be another Mornington series, and it is very good. A new boy named Kit Erroll arrived at Rookwood, brought by his father who is Captain Erroll, 'Erbert, who is Mornington's prottergy, recognises Captain Erroll as a crook named 'Gentleman Jim.' So there is quite a mystery.

It was idiotic that the next story was nothing to do with the Erroll series. It was called "Rookwood on Rations" and was all about

BLAKIANA

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

THE HOODED TERROR

By Deryck Harvey

To say that I could scarcely believe my eyes would have been the understatement of the collecting year. But there it was: a cinema at Saffron Walden, a quiet Essex town not 15 miles from where I live, was about to show the film "Sexton Blake And The Hooded Terror" - and this in 1967, not twenty years ago!

I had chanced across the announcement in a local weekly newspaper. It transpired that the showing was part of a short vintage film season undertaken by the cinema's management, with Seymour Hicks as "Scrooge" the main attraction the night before.

The Blake film, dating from 1938, was awful. The acting, by today's standard, was vastly overplayed; the direction was almost completely unsophisticated, and the plot by Pierre Quiroule - although adequate by storyline and invention - smacked entirely of the melodramatic. Needless to say, I loved every minute of it.

But much more interesting than the acting, technique or actual plot, were the credits. Directed by George King, the film starred George Curzon as Blake, Tony Sympson as Tinker, and two names who were subsequently to become better-known, Greta Gynt as Julie, and David Farrar - fleetingly - as Granite Grant.

Blake was really up against it this time, facing The Black Quorum - "the greatest crime organisation of the century" - led by none other than The Snake, an evil master brain at large. But the detective's part started gently, as he issued a timely warning to Julie that he would not always be on hand to rescue her from incrimination. Characteristically, however, Blake was soon in action at a cracking pace. No sooner had Grant's messenger called on him with a coded message than Blake himself was lured away, Tinker was deceived by a disguised "clergyman," and the messenger was eliminated by means of a poisoned dart shot through a blowpipe.

Before long Blake had cracked the code and trailed The Snake to his pit. Unbeknown to him, he was seen arriving by a new scientific wonder - closed-circuit television, no less - and rendered helpless. But before further danger could overtake him, Julie came to Blake's rescue, allowing him a chance to expose The Snake.

As I hadn't known what to expect, I could hardly be disappointed

by what I saw. Nevertheless, Mr. Curzon's stuffed-dummy of a hero was certainly not my conception of the Man from Baker Street; and Mr. Sympson's brash young Tinker seemed altogether of a cloth-cap age I found myself doubting had ever existed.

Frankly, the most disappointing part of the evening was being forced to overhear the conversation of two witless teenage girls a row in front, as they seized on every naivety of characterisation and dialogue with a giggle. You see, although they were impolite by their noise, much of the time I had to agree with their reasoning.

But despite all reservations, it made a good night out. Do you know, I think I would go again. I'd even travel twice the distance.

* * * * *

A UNION JACK GIFT OFFER

By O. W. Wadham

Was the circulation of the Union Jack suffering a set-back in those glorious days of 1925?

Certainly there must have been a larger than usual number of unsold copies, because in the issue dated April 11 of that year, free copies of back numbers containing the opening chapters of Rafael Sabatini's great serial "Captain Blood" were being offered. The new serial was said to be "the original story of the great Vitagraph film."

In London and suburbs "Captain Blood" was being screened simultaneously at sixteen different theatres, and twenty-three other picture houses in the provinces were also presenting the film.

Star of "Captain Blood" was J. Warren Kerrigan, and the film was made in 1924 (according to "Pictorial History of the Silent Screen" by Daniel Blum).

In large type, at the head of each page in the 1924-25 period the Union Jack proclaimed "The paper with the distinctive covers."

When those covers showed incidents from the Sexton Blake stories, that was no doubt true; but those "Captain Blood" efforts (signed F.B.H.) could hardly come in the distinctive category. It would be interesting to know how many free copies were asked for.

* * * * *

THE ROUND TABLE

The object of this little Round Table column, when it appears occasionally, is to persuade readers to put pen to paper and express opinions. I didn't know whether to feel flattered or shattered last month when Mr. Walter Webb devoted the entire Blakiana section to cutting me down to size for my temerity in poaching on the preserves

of the C.D. literary critics.

I don't quarrel with Mr. Webb's findings. I agree that an ice-cream shoved down Bunter's spine by some thoughtless junior would not strike a false note in the Remove passage, any more than it would in an old Hal Roach comedy. I am still not convinced that it would make the victim amorous.

I suppose Mr. Webb is right about Paula. I daresay I was influenced by the author of "Snowman" who commented: "He (the policeman, Sergeant Plumtree) eyed her, her disarray, her long stockingless legs, the obvious fact that there was no more under the sweater than there had been under the skirt."

The policeman seemed to disapprove. Maybe he was an "old guard" copper.

I accept Mr. Webb's assurance that "to gloom" and "to grit" were used as verbs of speech in the S.B.L. of long ago. I don't like them any the better for that. They seemed so horrid, I just assumed they must be ultra-modern.

The years take their toll, but I hope my sense of humour is no more blunted than Mr. Webb's. My only excuse is that I didn't realise "Snowman" was intended to be a funny story.

DANNY'S DIARY (cont'd from page 10)...

Mornington trying to cheat over the food shortage. It seems so odd that the editor should publish tales out of their proper order.

However, next month the Erroll series continued with "Mornington's Master Stroke." Though Mornington believes that Erroll is a cheat and the son of a burglar, he realises that there must be a real Captain Erroll, for the Captain has won decorations in the Army. So Mornington sends away to get a Daily Mirror which gives a photo of Captain Erroll. Erroll is obviously alarmed, but when the picture turns up, it is seen that Erroll of Rookwood is very much like the Captain Erroll of the picture. So, for the time being, all is calm and bright for Erroll, and Mornington has to do some more plotting. These are the best tales of the month.

There is a new series in the Boys' Friend, boxing tales about Bob Travers by Herbert Britton.

WANTED: One or two odd copies of Chips, Comic Cuts, and the Penny Popular, all dated before 1918.

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

NELSON LEE COLUMN

(CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD)

THE IMMORTALS

By William Lister

The friends of St. Frank's must at some time have pondered as to what would have transpired if their favourite schoolboys had grown up. (Not that they could ever grow up, as there is the essence of Peter Pan about the boys of St. Frank's.)

Still if you can remember the time you followed the weekly adventures of Nipper, Handforth and the boys of the Remove, who at that period were about the same age as yourselves, and then read a vintage 1922 copy of "Nelson Lee" in 1967, you are bound to notice something.

Yes! that is it! The boys of yesteryear are as large as life - as young as ever - not a day older - not a twinge of rheumatism - not a trace of baldness - not a hint of dimming eyesight seems to touch the spirit there.

Now this is not true of the loyal followers and fans of St. Frank's.

(It could not be otherwise; there is not the essence of Peter Pan about the friends of St. Frank's.)

Therefore can we not be excused for pondering how life would have treated the immortals had they been mortal?

We can ask ourselves would the boys have matured true to character, would they now be true-blue citizens, (perhaps steering towards the roll of Senior Citizens) not to mention the cads of the school who would no doubt be responsible for much of the dirty work going on today.

And we do meet both types in the human jungle today.

It is here that the "Nelson Lee" readers score over the Hamiltonians - what a rich heritage Edwy Searles Brooks has left them in his Victor Gunn and Berkeley Gray stories!

Sometime in the future the writer hopes to go back over them making copious notes to illustrate where they coincide with the "Nelson Lee's." (This with the help of the public library and Bob Blythe's Lee library.)

Time and again glimpses of the past come stealing through, characters, both good and bad appearing on the scene, that are indeed counterparts of the boys of St. Frank's; sayings are almost taken from the lips of our famous schoolboys.

Anyone reading "Nelson Lee" and comparing it with the later

novels would realise that here indeed was the same pen at work.

From stories featuring a castle-barring out, strange doings in haunted houses and fresh-faced rugged young men rescuing damsels in distress, you can trace the old school tie (that is if the old school had a tie).

The following is a quote from "Curtains for Conquest" by Berkeley Gray:-

"Dr. Malcom Loring was a young thirty-five, fresh-faced, fair-haired, broad in proportion with the muscular development of an all-in wrestler, and his pugnacious face was red with anger and excitement as he blundered into the desk knocking it sideways. A mighty crash sounded as one of Loring's fists, like a ham, descended upon the desk nearly splitting it open."

"Oh, sorry!" he shouted "didn't mean to do that, but dammit, I'm angry." (Shades of Handforth.)

Or a slight glimpse of an old school porter in "Conquest in the Underworld" :-

"Carn't open them Sir - they're padlocked," said Gosling, who resented the other's aggressive tone - "If you want to come in, you'll have to go to the little door in the wall, a hundred yards up, and I'll unlock it for you."

In some of the stories that I hope to recheck not only the quotes but the story style brings back memories, and gives a glimpse of some of the St. Frank's characters in later life, but it must be borne in mind that the interest would stop there.

No one really wants those boys to grow old; it is bad enough that we have to grow old.

Growing old has been tried in the realm of fiction, without success. Well-liked fictional characters have later been portrayed as very elderly, and the public have not been happy about it.

For some reason we want our favourites to remain the same, Sherlock Holmes, Tarzan, Sexton Blake, Biggles must never grow old any more than Nelson Lee, Nipper, Handforth, Harry Wharton or Billy Bunter.

Still it does no harm to dream once in a while of what could have been, and Brooks has left us a legacy in his later writings that it seems a pity not to take advantage of them and see what they will yield on this line.

And there will be no harm done, having traced our St. Frank's Schoolboys to maturity and found them to be professors - scientists - adventurers or even crooks, we can return to the gates of the old

school (via Nelson Lee Library) and find our venture has all been a dream.

Instead of finding St. Frank's closed, derelict, forsaken since the 1930's, too costly to repair, broken doors and windows, cobwebs in the studies, their young occupants having been scattered abroad, the masters dead with old age we find they are all still there, as large as life and as young as ever, the studies and classrooms throbbing with excitement, the playing fields, Triangle and village just as we left them, and is that the porter coming to let us in?

Nothing has changed - Good, very good!

THE LONG WEEK

By R. J. Godsave

The Club libraries are undoubtedly a great boon to the members. Both the Hamiltonian and Nelson Lee Libraries of the London Club are so well stocked that one can borrow many of the series published.

A complete series enables one to read as though from a hard cover book. It is possible, though not desirable, to read the last episode first in order to satisfy one's curiosity as to the outcome of the story. This gives us a great advantage over the original readers of around the 1920's, but we lose heavily in the weekly expectancy which the majority of the series originally produced.

In the case of the Nelson Lee, Wednesday to Wednesday seemed to me to be an eternity. E. S. Brooks being at his best in the mystery and supernatural stories, caused an almost agonising wait of roughly two months before the story was unfolded and the mystery explained to the reader.

A casual reader who bought a Nelson Lee occasionally would be unable to follow the story, and as such would be somewhat confused and disappointed, although a brief resumé was usually given of the previous week's episode.

The serialized episodes had to be retained in the mind. One, therefore, read the story with greater diligence in order to remember the sequence of events. This could explain why, after all these years, these papers still have their faithful followers.

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HAMILTONIANA

Do You Remember?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 63 - $\frac{1}{2}$ d Gem No. 42 - "Figgins' Fig-Pudding"

Nowadays $\frac{1}{2}$ d Gems are usually classed as collectors' items, tending to be rare and expensive to purchase. Among these rarities, none is more sought after than No. 42 entitled "Figgins' Fig-Pudding," which was published at the end of 1907, and its popularity may be due to the fact that it was the nearest approach to a Christmas story in those far-off days.

Mrs. Kenwigg, the New House dame, had gone to nurse a sick relative, and Mr. Ratcliff's sister arrived as a stop-gap. Under this new regime, there was a considerable saving effected on meals in the New House, and the miserable scanty fare provided by Miss Ratcliff was so bad that the juniors were almost driven to desperation - especially Fatty Wynn!

One of the disappointments of the story was that Miss Ratcliff was never actually featured in person - she was merely referred to. There were obvious possibilities in the character of Mr. Ratcliff's sister, but for some reason Charles Hamilton decided to eschew these. It is possible that he thought it ungallant to present a lady in an unfavourable light, but if he did think this in 1907 he certainly had changed his mind a few years later, in the days of militant suffragettes.

The character of Tom Merry was still being developed at this time, and he is shown having slight disagreements with his friends on points of principle. The School House juniors thought that they ought to take advantage of the unusual state of affairs prevailing in the rival house, whereas Tom Merry felt some sympathy for the predicament of Figgins & Co. The situation was handled a little awkwardly, but it showed promise of interesting developments to come, in presenting the hero of the stories in a more individualistic light.

The climax of the story was perhaps a little flat compared with some of the later ones. Figgins had mixed into the pudding an ingredient not specified in any cookery book - syrup of figs! The result was inevitable.

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIALNo. 111. SWEET LAVENDER and OLD LACE

One of my favourite series in the Gem is that dealing with the holiday on the upper reaches of the Thames - the famous "Old Bus" stories. If when reading this series, one suddenly realises that it is over forty years since it was written, the realisation comes as something of a shock.

Here we have a series which does not date at all. It could quite reasonably have been written for the summer of 1967. It is as convincing in 1967 and it was in 1923.

It depends almost entirely upon an author himself whether his work dates. Charles Hamilton's work is indestructible because he seldom wrote in a style which dated. True, we have many period pieces from his pen, but this was due to topical allusions. I find, for instance, the stories in the Magnets and Gems of 1939 are often period pieces, dated in a way which does not occur with so many earlier stories. References to A.R.P. and blackouts and the like set a story immediately in the period of nearly thirty years back. Instinctively, one is in another age when reading them, and it was not a very pleasant period for those who lived through those times of blasted hopes.

The Old Bus tales, though actually about sixteen years older, contain nothing to bring back painful memories or scents of old lavender. They are timeless.

A school story, for the most part, should not date, even though the school story, as we knew it, is gone for ever. Yet the real modern tale, like the "This Man Craig" series on television, with its neurotic, scruffy, fag-puffing boys and girls, though it probably presents an accurate picture of school life today, gives no promise of lasting in the way that the school stories we love have lasted.

So Charles Hamilton's topical allusions have produced many period pieces. His immaculate writing, however, has produced hundreds of tales which might have been written yesterday.

Generally it is in his dramas that, so far as modern readers are concerned, the false note is struck. When the villainous character ejaculates "Bah!" we get a sense of old-fashioned melodrama and the second house for the Denville Stock Company. When, in the early Mornington-Erroll series, Erroll says to Mornington, "Do your worst!" we find ourselves at once in a make-believe setting of long ago. We

are certain that no schoolboy today would ever say "Do your worst!" I doubt whether he ever would have said it, but we were less critical when we first read the stories. When, in the Cedar Creek tales, the author tells us that "Frank Richards would fain have looked the other way," we don't need to remind ourselves that the tale was written long ago.

But that sort of thing in Hamiltonia is comparatively rare. For instance, the blue Gem stands up amazingly well to the passing of time. Between the blue covers there are scores of tales which time has left untouched. Time is less kindly to the contemporary red Magnet.

To some extent this is due to the fact that the Gem tales were mainly set in the school. The settings for the Greyfriars stories were more varied.

Even in appearance, there is a quaint old-world charm which gives its own scent of old lavender in the red Magnet, very much in contrast to the solid feeling of modernity which somehow exudes from the blue Gem. Arthur Clarke, who illustrated so many of the red Magnets, may be to some extent responsible for this. He was a delightful and first-class artist, but there was an old-fashioned exaggeration in his drawings which contrasted enormously with the matter-of-fact soundness of Macdonald in the Gem.

Clarke had a remarkable gift, which Macdonald lacked, for getting character into his faces, but his bodies and clothing and backgrounds had an atmosphere which was at least twenty years behind the times. By contrast, Macdonald, who was unequalled for drawing the Eton suit, gave the Gem a dignity by omitting the freakishness which dated so much of the work of Clarke.

Large numbers of the stories in the blue Gem would get by, if published today, without a word being struck from them or any amendments made. In many others, the only dating factor would be a sentence like "Tom Merry lit the gas in his study."

Far, far more removed from this 1967 age were most of the tales of the red Magnet. The heavily over-written tales of snobbery and penniless scholarship boys from pitifully poor families presented unlikely pictures even in Edwardian times, and had no counterpart in the Gem. The Chinese schoolboys, speaking "coolie" English even though they came from wealthy Chinese families, and inexplicably wearing Chinese robes in an English public school, sprayed their unlikely personalities over the red Magnet era. The comic, uneducated country policeman; the old seaman with the wooden leg; the

freak American - all these, and others like them, featured largely in the red Magnet. Probably it was the quaint old-world charm of the red Magnet which makes it so desirable to collectors today, but it made the stories themselves less timeworthy.

I do not suggest that the "dating" of any of the old stories matters in the least. On the contrary. When Tom Merry & Co board a tram in Dublin, or the gas-light fades in Nobody's Study, or Mr. Selby buys a thousand-franc note in order to gamble on the foreign exchange we realise that we are reading period pieces. Their attraction may even be enhanced.

A story dated by topicalities is a period piece. A story dated by a style of writing is a museum piece. There is a vast difference between the two. It is quite astonishing how very few of Charles Hamilton's stories fall into the latter category.

I have seen many old plays spoiled by the producer setting out to bring them up to date. In their original periods they would delight and charm. Tarted-up to meet the supposed needs of the nineteen-sixties they merely irritate.

Anachronisms are troublesome. Charles Hamilton himself made this mistake with his later Rio Kid stories. The earlier Rio Kid stories are distinguished by some quite beautiful prose in many of the adventures. This is missing in the later tales, but Hamilton's striking mistake was that he failed to realise that the Rio Kid's place was, at the very latest, during the first decade of this century. The author made a blunder when he used part of the plot of the Magnet's Hollywood series and set the Kid down to star as an intrepid rider in the talking-picture colony of Hollywood. Harry Wharton was all right as a prospective film-star. The Rio Kid was not.

It is, in fact, remarkable that, from style alone, the work of some writers of the middle-thirties is dated while much older work of other writers does not date at all.

Few writers have the gift of writing stories which have the same appeal after sixty years have gone by since they wrote them. Few of the old-time "greats" among authors had that gift. Charles Hamilton happened to be one who had it.

Our own Marjorie Norris writes, for the television section of "The Stage," criticisms of certain TV programmes. Recently, under the heading "Few Acts Which Don't Suffer," she wrote:

"Whenever I see ATV'S London Palladium Show from the beginning to the bitter end I am left with the same feeling of gentle melancholy that I get from the BBC's 'Come Dancing.' Both are survivals of a

past age. Fossilised entertainment."

I don't entirely agree with Marjorie. Surely a great many items are successful simply because they are survivals of a past age. When I see "Come Dancing" I usually enjoy it, not because I am much of a dancer but on account of the old tunes which the orchestras usually play. I rarely view the Palladium Show, and when I do, I think more of my own suffering than of what the acts may suffer.

I do not regard the Palladium Show as a survival of a past age. It strikes me as boring with its brash modernity. It has little to link it with the delights of an average performance at the Holborn Empire in the nineteen-thirties.

Our Gems and Magnets, our Rookwood, our Lees, and our Union Jacks are survivals of a past age. They have no counterpart today. When we read the "Old Bus" series or the "China Series" are we enjoying "fossilised entertainment?"

Or is there some charm in those old tales, which, when aided by some magic ingredient in our memories, places them beyond fossilisation? Do they still leave us with that "gentle melancholy" which Marjorie Norris experiences when she views the London Palladium show?

* * * * *

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

JOHN TOMLINSON: I have never read that Pentelow series about Delarey, but it sounds somewhat boring to me. Genuine Hamilton tales being interspersed with substitute stories made things confusing at times, as, for example, in 1924 in a tale about Julian, Crooke turned decent, and a few weeks later (genuine Hamilton this time) Talbot saved Tom Merry from a dirty scheme by Crooke. I thought to myself: "I wish Martin Clifford would make up his mind."

PETER HANGER: I am sure you have a good reason for saying that Charles Hamilton had no objection to sub-writers in the early years, but this is a complete contradiction to Chapter Six of the Autobiography. I can well understand that a relatively long sub series would act as a stimulant to Charles Hamilton.

ROGER JENKINS: I think you are perhaps a little too sweeping in your remarks about Charles Hamilton's opinions of the substitute writers. Possibly he did find it convenient to have such stand-bys, but he never ceased to object to their stories being published under his pen-names. He told me he would have been quite happy to have seen

the Sexton Blake system used, with the substitute stories published under different names.

I have been looking over old correspondence from him, and am quite surprised at the vehemence of his annoyance over this habit of other writers using his pen-names. In one letter he said; "Actually, it made me lose my temper at times --- I remember one occasion when I went so far as to damn and blast Hinton in his office at the Fleetway House, for which I was sorry afterwards."

His remarks on Pentelow are the strongest I ever knew him to use: "This man took advantage of his position as editor to steal my work and push me out into the cold. That was theft. In order to make his thefts effective he put my name instead of his own on what he wrote. That was forgery. By palming off the stuff on the public, deluding them into the belief that it was written by me, he was guilty of swindling."

I think there is no doubt that Pentelow was deliberately excluding Charles Hamilton's work in order to make room for his own effusions. No wonder Charles Hamilton was annoyed!

SYD SMYTH: I do not often pass on praise as I should, but I must say that the April Controversial came up with a refreshing new twist and I should imagine lit up the eyes of all Hamilton men. It was a gem and we are indebted to you for putting an article such as this before us to mull over. Indeed, it has long been my idea that the long-lived "Let's Be Controversial" could be collected together into one book much as other essays are.

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NEWS OF THE CLUBS

MIDLAND

Meeting held 21st March, 1967

The change of date to avoid a clash with the Easter holidays kept the attendance at double figures, ten members putting in an appearance.

We were informed by Stan Knight in the correspondence that Boots were selling packs of four S.B.Ls. (Mayflower Series) for 5/6d. Stan seems to ferret out these useful pieces of information and passes them on to us. His letters have become a regular item in our meetings.

The meeting was informal and without a fixed programme there was plenty of impromptu discussion. Ian Bennett raised the matter of the biography of Charles Hamilton now being compiled by Mrs. Hamilton Wright, niece of the great man. It appears from the newscutting appearing in the Birmingham Mail that many new facts about him will come to light, when the book is published. Mrs. Hamilton Wright is no stranger to Midland Club members for she has attended our club a number of times.

The Anniversary Number and Collector's Item this month were No. 6 of "The Penny Gem," "The Invaders" dated 21st March, 1908 and 59 years old and No. 1 of "The Old Boys' Book Collector." This publication only ran for a few numbers. It was published by Tom Hopperton, a great Old Boys' Book enthusiast who died at the early age of 59. His death was a great loss to the hobby for he was a prolific writer on hobby topics.

Tom Porter's celebrated game, "Take a Letter" was introduced and the solutions in this case were S.O.L. titles. This game is similar to the T.V. Game but applied to hobby topics. The winners were Norman Gregory, Ivan Webster, Ray Bennett and Bill Morgan.

This was followed by "Break the Cipher" another amusing game. The solution was "Send Master Harry to me," the first words written in Magnet No. 1 and to be followed by continuous weekly issues extending over 32 years. Ted Davey was the winner of this.

The raffle was again won by our chairman, Ivan Webster and the prize, Sexton Blake Library No. 34 "Dead Respectable" by D. Reid. The sale of library raffle tickets keeps us going nicely and our store of books is expanding rapidly.

A discussion on the best method of keeping our treasured books in good condition took place. Norman Gregory told us that the late Joe Orme of Uttoxeter used to keep his in perfect condition by wrapping them in newspapers after he had removed the staples (which rust and destroy the paper). All agreed that it was necessary to keep them away from the light.

The subject of another get together with our Northern and Merseyside friends at Chesterfield was raised and it was decided to explore the possibilities of arranging another meeting.

We meet again at the Birmingham Theatre Centre on April 25th. We hope that the good attendances will be kept up.

J. F. BELLFIELD

Correspondent

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MERSEYSIDE - 2nd April

Some confusion was caused by the change in date of this meeting in order to meet the wishes of one member. Consequently, this had its effect on the attendance and time of commencement, and it is hoped that all members will make sure that they make a note in their diaries whenever a change has been made.

In spite of this, it was a good meeting, and several interesting and animated discussions were enjoyed. Bill Windsor wondered how much the quality of a story or work of art was enhanced by the attachment of a famous name. The point was made that some members of the O.B.B.C. thoroughly enjoyed a Greyfriars or St. Jim's yarn when they were boys, yet in later years scorned these very stories when they discovered they were by substitute writers. A valid point. One interesting fact to emerge from this was that many of Charles Hamilton's earlier stories were poor, to say the least, but the improvement in his work as time went on was immense. On the other hand, Edwy Searles Brooks' early yarns were of the very highest order, but the deterioration as the years passed was painful. His K.K. Parkington 'stories' were given as a typical example.

To provide a little break from the old books, a new L.P. record of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band was played. These were the original recording made as far back as 1919/20, long before many of us had been introduced to the wonderland of the Magnet, Gem and Nelson Lee, and they brought back many happy memories of an age condemned by all the modern 'thinkers' and 'progressives,' but an age

which, for us, contained so much that was good and worth while.

The evening was ended on a happy and amusing note when Frank Unwin gave a P. G. Wodehouse Blanding's Castle reading. Members mentioned the thorough enjoyment of the Blanding's Castle stories in comparison with the rather laboured T.V. series. We felt that neither Sir Ralph Richardson nor Stanley Holloway did anywhere near full justice to their parts.

Please make a careful note that next month's meeting will again be the first Sunday in May, that is the 7th.

JOHNNY TODD

* * * * *

NORTHERN

Meeting held Saturday 8th April, 1967

The 17th Annual General Meeting opened at 6.30 p.m. with the Library Session back to normal brisk business, and the formal meeting was commenced by the Chairman Geoffrey Wilde after the books had been cleared away. The minutes were read and the financial statement given which showed a very satisfactory state at our year-end. From Treasurer-Librarian Gerry Allison's letters we were sorry to hear that three members were (or had been) in hospital, and we hope they will soon be back to usual health.

Now the Chairman gave a review of our year's meetings, mentioning the sharing of programmes by more members, the films and recordings, the quizzes (specially Cliff Webb who sends us regular and original efforts), the Christmas Party, and the Talks. The meeting was then thrown open for discussion and soon a host of new ideas were being eagerly thrashed out. Out of the welter we sorted out (a) a programme for the St. Frank's anniversary, (b) more 20 Questions sessions, (c) a request for easier (!) games, and (d) from a suggestion by Tom Roach, a serial about Greyfriars to be written by six members in turn for reading at our meetings. The six new 'sub-writers' are, in order of batting, Jack Allison, Mollie Allison, Jack Wood, Geoffrey Wilde, Ron Hodgson, with Harry Barlow to wind up. After details of ensuing programmes had been decided the election of officers for the following year was soon accomplished as re-election enbloc was proposed, seconded and carried without further nomination.

Now we settled down to a Quiz of 25 questions read by Gerry Allison. Each answer was either "yes" or "no" and the ground covered was nicely varied. The winner was Ron Hodgson with 19

correct. The ladies then handed round refreshments and an interval of chat followed.

The Chairman rang his bell, and announced that a famous visitor had been in our midst, although unseen. At the invitation of our good friend Cliff Webb, Billy Bunter, no less, now addressed the meeting, (the 'voice was the voice of Bunter' but the script by Cliff was in 'the hands of Geoffrey'), and we gathered that Bunter was stopping at Johnny Bull's over the weekend. We were very favoured he told us (as Johnny was too!) to have this boost up the social scale, and we heard how clever and popular he was at Greyfriars! Several of the audience were impolite enough to chortle occasionally, but Bunter steam-rollered over us. A slight hitch occurred at the end when dead silence greeted a request for a quid until Billy's postal order arrived, and the distinguished guest left in rather a huff! We hope during the coming meetings to have other famous 'guests' to address us.

This brought the meeting to a close, fifteen members having been present.

Next meeting, Saturday, the 13th May, 1967.

M. L. ALLISON

Hon. Sec.

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LONDON

Meeting April 17th, 1967

Some 20 members attended the April meeting, which was held at Neasden, the home of our St. Frank's colleague, Bob Blythe.

The meeting opened on a sad note with the news that our Secretary, Ben Whiter, had suffered the loss of his father and condolences were expressed.

After the preliminary items had been dispensed with, the chairman presented a quiz devised by Ben dealing with surnames and Roger Jenkins proved the winner. Thanks to the generosity of our host, all winners received book prizes.

This was followed by a reading from Gem No. 48 (1909) by Winnie Morss describing a visit to the Chicago Stock Yards when the St. Jim's juniors visited the United States. It was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

After tea we had the pleasure of listening to an excellent talk by Brian Doyle on "Boys Books" from Tom Brown to Tom Merry." This

talk would make a suitable article for the C.D. or the Annual.

It was a pleasant change to see a newcomer to our quizzes when Bob Acramon gave a serial reading from a Nelson Lee and we were asked to describe what apparitions the Duke of Somerton saw at his "invitation." Marjorie Norris just beat Eric Lawrence for the best description and received a Dictionary as her prize, and Eric a book.

Of course we had to include Bob Blythe in our programme and he gave us a reading from the 1st Marvel, in which Nelson Lee first met Nipper.

Don Webster, the chairman, ended the meeting by introducing "Ten Minute Talks" which proved popular as everyone had a chance to chip in.

Next meeting, Sunday May 21st at Surbiton, when we shall be the guests of our Editor, Eric Payne. Do advise him if you are coming. (Telephone 01/399/3357.)

D.B.W.

THE BEST OF GREYFRIARS and ST. JIM'S

By W. O. G. Lofts

On a recent visit to Fleetway House I was privileged to see a new product titled as above. From the same editorial office that gave us the wonderful collectors item the souvenir No. 1 MAGNET, this new venture is to take the form of an Annual. It contains two full length St. Jim's and Greyfriars stories, which to my knowledge (as those suggested by myself at least!) are all genuine Charles Hamilton stories. Priced at 3/6 it is wonderful value for money.

Publication date is approx. end of JUNE this year - but more details, and possibly a review by our editor and stories will be given in a later C.D.

WANTED: MAGNETS 1222, 1225, 1246, 1256, 1257, 1259, 1377, 1383, 1390, 1410, 1413. Condition fit for binding.

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THE POSTMAN CALLED

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

LEON STONE (Australia): The article on Lovecraft in the Annual particularly interested me. You see, I have been an ardent Lovecraft fan from way back. That was a very well written and well balanced article on HPL. I have in the vicinity of 50 various editions of Lovecraft books, by or about Lovecraft. In 1960, before my home was destroyed by fire, I had one of the world's best collections of Lovecraftiana, including the amateur magazines in which his first works appeared, with marginal comments in his own handwriting.

STAN KNIGHT (Cheltenham): The Annual had a wonderful variety of articles by a wonderful team of contributors, led by - yes, let's say it - a wonderful editor at the helm. High on the list for me was the Slade story. It's nice among the articles about stories to have a story as well, and Slade has certainly carved out a niche for itself in C.D. Mr. Swan's article on the Thomson papers was much appreciated. I have the four paperback reprints of some of the famous stories brought out by Thomson a few years ago. I only regret that they did not issue reprints of some of the Red Circle stories. Gerry Allison's "History of Tiddlerville" was highly amusing, and Henry Webb's illustration of these characters at the head of the article was superb.

(Grateful thanks to reader Knight for all the heart-warming things he had to say in a wonderful letter about the Annual - ED.)

CHRISTOPHER LOWDER (Stoke-on-Trent): I feel I must write and congratulate you on the continued excellence of Collectors Digest.

As you know, I have been away from the fold, so to speak, some years now, and only started subscribing again at the beginning of the year. My hopes were not crushed. "C.D." is still as great as it ever was, if not greater. The 1966 Annual was a joy to behold - a treasure-chest, in fact. And from the technical side, too, it was an amazing achievement. Particularly, I must congratulate the author of the H. P. Lovecraft article, W. J. A. Hubbard. I am a Lovecraft fan myself, and it was a pleasant surprise to see such a well-written analysis in the Annual.

The April C.D. was very good. Walter Webb's meticulous dismembering of Blake's unknown critic; Jim Cook's "Letter from St.

Frank's;" and "Let's Be Controversial" being particularly commendable. And it's good to see that Bill Lofts is still turning out his fascinating articles.

ALEX PARSONS (Birkenhead): I was intrigued by the April cover, and very interested in your remarks about the unknown artist. I can't remember ever seeing this copy of the Magnet. We will have to assign that master of detectives to the case - Chief-Superintendent Bill Lofts. If anyone can ferret out the mystery, he surely will. What a mine of information the man is! I never stop wondering how he digs it all up.

JOHN TROVELL (Colchester): Congratulations on the continued high standard of the Digest. Danny remains as delightful as ever, and his reference to the subjects of the Greyfriars Gallery will no doubt instil a longing in many readers not fortunate enough to have seen them. Would interest be sufficient to warrant a reprint in Hamiltonia?

With reader Joe Conroy, I would add my belated congratulations to Mr. Les Rowley in appreciation of his excellent and amusing articles on Prout and Hacker in the 1965-66 Digest Annuals, and look forward with interest to further gems from this talented contributor.

D. CLUTTERBUCK (Thornton Heath): Hearty congratulations on the excellence of the 1966 Annual. I found something good in all the items. I even found to my delight interesting byways not trodden by me as a boy. My interest in Hamiltonia made it inevitable that I should prefer the article "Charles Hamilton's Style." The extracts chosen (some of which I remembered after all these years) convince me that as a humorous writer (only one of his facets) Hamilton outshone even Wodehouse.

CHEERIO

By W. O. G. Lofts

Mr. O. W. Wadham in his interesting Annual articles mentions the paper CHEERIO and why it was not included in Derek Adley's and my own comic list of papers. This paper has indeed been queried through the years by many collectors, and was listed in an old C.D. Annual list of boys papers by Herbert Leckenby. Personally, I don't think it can be classed as a boys paper, or a comic as its contents are obviously for the whole family to read, and a short account of its contents may put the reader in the picture as to its

correct age group.

No. 1 appeared May 17, 1919, priced 1½d. with its cover portraying the great George Robey. Inside page had a serial story called "The Debts of Jasper Strange V.C." Private, millionaire, ex-convict, and illustrated by that wonderful artist from the American deep south of Irish extraction, J. Louis Smythe. Another page had a picture of Miss Alma Taylor, whom that may be. Smoking Room stories being witty; nutty; chirpy, and new, filled yet another page. Centre pages were filled with a serious drawing by G. M. Payne (of comic-strip fame) of Gnr. James Hardy who won the V.C. and came from my old Regiment in the Royal Artillery.

From Milly to Tilly, was yet another backchat page being the tittle-tattle of a tame typist to her girl friend! Serials by E. Allingham and H. B. Richmond prolific comic serial writers were also featured, and the last page on the back cover had Footlight Favourites with photos of Annie Saker, Fay Compton, Gladys Cooper, Owen Nares (who used to live at St. John's Wood and whom I knew personally as a small boy), Iris Hoey, Seymour Hicks, and Margaret Bannerman.

Other pages were filled with large half page cartoons that appeared in Titbits and Blighty though it did advertise Greyfriars Herald and Boys Cinema. It ran for a total of 49 issues until April 1920 when it was incorporated with KINEMA COMIC. This may possibly have caused some readers to assume that CHEERIO must have been a comic. I do agree with Mr. Wadham that this paper was similar to FUN and FICTION, but this certainly was a border line case. The editor of F.F. always assumed that his paper was for all age groups, but what strengthens its case is that a great many of the stories and illustrations were reprinted in the BULLSEYE in the 30's, and this paper without doubt was a boys' publication.

In closing about CHEERIO, I know that years ago I bought the first issue for a good sum assuming it was a boys' periodical, but was glad to change it with Gerry Allison for the rare A.P. Robin Hood Library. Gerry has fond memories of CHEERIO as he bought it each week on his journey to work, and this copy gave him happy memories of that period.

CHEERIO.

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RAY HOPKINS THINKS ALOUD

I was glad to read that Maurice Kutner thought that Hilda and Frank Richards were brother and sister. I also thought this was the case with Jack and Madge North, Lewis and Louise Carlton and Ivor and Ida Melbourne. It never dawned on me to wonder why so many brothers and sisters were writing for the AP. I never thought they might be husbands and wives, and certainly never dreamed that the two names could be nom de plumes of the same person. That was in the days when young people were naive. In the words of a long-running American comic strip: "Them Days are Gone Forever."

Mr. Clutterbuck's view (review?) of the later Bunter Books was interesting in that he was giving an unusual report. Unusual in that 25 years had elapsed between his last reading of, and renewing acquaintance with the heroes of his boyhood fiction. Undoubtedly coming upon the Bunter Books after so great a span, I am surprised that he enjoyed them as much as he did. We who read them one by one as they came out, and while Mr. Hamilton was still living, liked to feel that we were giving our old favourite a loyal hand (as well as giving ourselves a great deal of pleasure). For there is no doubt that while the Bunter Books were a far cry from the old Magnet, at least the old favourite characters were still living and moving in new adventures. Continuity with our childhood was there and we all revelled in it. Had Mr. Clutterbuck been an old Gem fan and was renewing acquaintance with old friends at that school, he would probably have been more rewarded by a reading of the Gold Hawk Series and the Spring Book bargains, as those stories had a lot more in common with life at St. Jim's as we remembered it in the twenties and thirties, and also the leading character was not always the same as in the Cassell Bunter series. I think two of the best Bunter books are those which also give a share of the limelight to others: Lord Mauleverer in Bunter's First Case, and Harry Wharton in Billy Bunter Butts In.

 From THE SUNDAY EXPRESS, 9 April (page 4)

MEMORY MAN: My wife is always telling me I have a bad memory. So I tried to prove her wrong by seeing how many characters I could remember from my favourite boys' magazine, the late lamented MAGNET.

I came up with 30 names of boys and staff from Greyfriars School including, of course Billy Bunter.

It took me a week to recall them, but I thought that wasn't bad - considering I stopped reading the magazine in 1911.

John Farrell, 20 Tannahill Road, Paisley.
