

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

NO. 16.—MAGNIFICENT DETECTIVE TALE.—1⁰

Vol. 21
N^o 247

NELSON LEE



TWENTY FATHOMS DEEP:
OR, TRAPPED BENEATH THE SEA.
A TALE OF NELSON LEE, DETECTIVE.

JULY
1967

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Collectors' Digest

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FIFTY YEARS ON AT ST. FRANK'S:

Our Nelson Lee columnists remind us that it is exactly fifty years ago since St. Frank's was created, and Nelson Lee and Nipper went to that school.

In some ways, this event is one of the most remarkable that ever occurred in the whole of old boys' book lore. It was Maxwell Scott who created Nelson Lee as a detective, way back in the last decade of the Victorian era. Not long after, Nipper was added to the cast, appearing as a schoolboy at St. Ninian's and eventually as Nelson Lee's assistant. Clearly both detective and school stories were popular at this time, and Scott had the clever idea of making a link between the two.

In 1904, the Maxwell Scott story "The Great Unknown," of very great length, ran as a serial in the Boys' Friend. This was mainly a thrilling detective tale, but some sequences were set at St. Ninian's where Nipper was a schoolboy described as a "semi-millionaire." As a public school boy he spoke a type of King's English which rather stretched the bounds of credulity, though readers were unlikely to be critical on this point.

When the Nelson Lee Library commenced in 1915, it catered for detective story enthusiasts. Various writers contributed to the saga. But in July 1917, exactly 50 years ago, Lee and Nipper went to St.

Frank's as schoolmaster and schoolboy respectively, and the series, from then on, was exclusively in the hands of E. S. Brooks. I am unable to say whether the idea for this radical change came from Mr. Brooks himself or whether it was editorially inspired.

A change like this in a popular series is not unique. The remarkable factor was that from now on the adventures were to be related ostensibly by Nipper himself, and in consequence the stories were written in the first person. It was a brave experiment.

Authors are aware that "first person" writing is nothing like so popular, generally speaking, as the other sort. Plenty authors admit, in fact, that they would find it difficult to write in the first person. I, myself, have always found it much easier to write in the first person, though it presents its own problems. For instance, the "first person" writer can only be convincing on events which take place while he is actually present. His comments are his own opinions, and consequently not so convincing as when a "third person" writer makes statements which must be accepted as facts. The "first person" writer may not be speaking the truth, or he may be biased, or his memory may be inaccurate. There are no such doubts about the ordinary "third person" storyteller.

Schoolboys are notoriously conservative, so Mr. Brooks's task was no easy one. It is wonderful evidence of his gifts that he was able to switch his style in this way, carry the "hard core" of Lee readers with him, and add to their number for many years.

I can think of no other series in old boys' book lore which was changed in the same way. The stories as told by Nipper earned a spanking following, and I should think it certain that the popularity of the Lee was at its zenith while Mr. Brooks's had Nipper holding the pen.

COMPLIMENTS FROM THE STATES:

In a post-bag of really massive proportions this month, I have received a charming letter from a comparatively new subscriber to COLLECTORS' DIGEST. He is Mr. J. Randolph Cox who is the reference librarian to a Minnesota college. Mr. Cox writes: "After reading five issues of COLLECTORS' DIGEST I thought it was time I offered you some opinions. I find it a fascinating and delightful publication though I am hampered by the strange dilemma of having little knowledge of the papers and stories you discuss. As a collector of detective stories and thrillers, I have long known the name Sexton Blake. On a visit to England last summer I saw my first Blake, and bought it as well as four others."

After some comments on various other matters in connection with the hobby, Mr. Cox concluded his letter: "May I also compliment you on a very literate publication. So many publications for collectors and hobbyists over here are so filled with slang and jargon that they actually are difficult to read, or at least that is what I think."

A letter like Mr. Cox's brings great pleasure to an editor's heart. It is very pleasing to know that Collectors' Digest is appreciated "across the pond."

WHO'S WHOS & DOUBLE NUMBERS:

Just a word or two about Collectors' Digest Who's Who which is due to be published in the early autumn. One or two readers have commented that we left no space on the form for your address. We already have your address, and this will be included automatically. If you wish to include a telephone number, this should be printed clearly at the top of the form. Readers are reminded that the last date for receiving the completed entry forms at this office is July 15th. The order form for the 1967 Who's Who will come to you with our August issue.

There has been an overwhelming support for the idea of the Double Number which we mentioned last month as a possible way of celebrating our 250th issue and our 21st birthday. It is impossible to say at the moment whether the Double Number will materialise. Such an issue would present quite a few problems for us at the production end. We hope to let you know something definite next month.

THE EDITOR.

THE CAPTAIN:- Bound volumes from XIV to XXI inclusive (Oct. 1906 to Sept. 1914). Excellent condition. 10/- per vol. Delivered Birmingham area.

W. W. MORGAN, 14 LITTLE GREEN LANES, SUTTON COLDFIELD, WARWICKSHIRE.

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.

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DANNY'S DIARY

JULY 1917

A remarkable thing has happened in the Nelson Lee Library. At the end of this month my pal, Lindsay, accepted a Gem in exchange for a Nelson Lee, and I was very intregued by the story. Nelson Lee and Nipper were being hounded by a gruesome Chinese gang called the Fu-Chang Tong. To escape attention for a time, Lee and Nipper went to St. Francis' School (shortened to St. Frank's), where Lee became a master and Nipper became a boy under the name of Richard Bennett. Nipper dyed his hair fair with a chemical invented by Lee, and it also made it curly so he could pass as a 15-year old.

But the unusual part of it all is that Nipper himself tells the story, and I very much liked it for a change. On his way to school Nipper went in a boat which was being rowed by three St. Frank's boys named Bob Christine, Roddy Yorke, and Charlie Talmadge. It was an exciting tale in which a Mr. Thorne was abducted, and Lee and Nipper naturally played their parts in saving the man. There is to be another of these St. Frank's tales, told by Nipper, in a fortnight's time, and I would like to read it.

This sort of thing must be catching for, in the Union Jack, Tinker is also writing his "casebook" in the first person and the story is entitled "'Twixt Sunset and Dawn." Doug was talking about it, and I may get him to lend it to me.

This month there was a daylight aeroplane raid on Harwich, and 11 people were killed and a lot injured. According to Dad's newspapers, the cost of food has risen by 104% since war broke out in 1914. It's really awful.

Once again Rookwood has been tip-top in the Boys' Friend. First tale of the month was "The Shadow of Shame," in which Jimmy Silver received a pencilled postcard from his cousin Bob who is a soldier at the front. The postcard seemed to show that Bob was sorrowful because he had been turned out of the army for cowardice. But Tubby Muffin had read the card while it was in the rack, and knew that it had been altered. It was Erroll who traced the crime of forgery to the new boy Lattrey.

"Saving a Scapegrace" next week was excellent. Mornington was peeved because Jimmy Silver would not say at once that Morny was to play cricket against Greyfriars. So Morny arranged to go out in a trap with Lattrey and his bounders. But Erroll was injured by Leggett and unable to play, so Morny was persuaded to take his pal's

place in the eleven.

"Smythe's Terrible Uncle" was a fair tale. Smythe felt disgraced because he had an uncle whom he had never seen, only a private in the army at Latcham. Morny paid a boozy bouncer from the Bird-in-Hand to come to Rookwood, pretending to be Smythe's uncle.

Last tale of the month was one of the best of all Rookwood stories. Called "Left in the Lurch." Knowles is spiteful because Bulkeley is only playing three "Moderns" against St. Jim's. So Knowles, Frampton, and Catesby lose the train, pretending it is by accident. But Jimmy and Co had learned of the plot through Tubby Muffin - and Jimmy, Erroll, and Lovell raise the money and go to St. Jim's. And Bulkeley is happy that he can field a complete eleven of Rookwooders, even though three of them are juniors.

It has been a month of surprises. Sheerness has abandoned its tramway system this month, the first time such a thing has ever occurred. It really was a strange thing to do in wartime.

Both the Gem and the Magnet have been fine this month. First story in the Magnet was "Sir Jimmy's Pal" in which a young fellow called "the Spadger," from the slums, came to visit Sir Jimmy at Greyfriars. He was accused of theft, but the Bouncer cleared him and, later, the Bouncer's father saw to the Spadger's future.

Then came "Sharing the Risk" in which Snoop's father, who was in prison, escaped and came near to Greyfriars. In the end Mr. Snoop joined the army as a private.

"Against His Own Side" was an excellent cricket story. Ponsonby persuaded Harry Wharton to agree to meet his, Pon's, eleven at cricket. Wharton put out rather a scratch team, but the Bouncer played for Pon's eleven and Greyfriars was defeated.

Finally, in "A Lesson for Skinner," Skinner tried to cause trouble for the Bouncer. Vernon-Smith is always ruthless, and one night, when Skinner went out on the tiles, Smithy locked him out. Skinner, terrified, tried to climb up the ivy to the dorm window, and the Bouncer rescued him at great risk.

Every story featured the Bouncer prominently, and it has been a grand month in the Magnet.

At one of our cinemas there is a new Pearl White serial. It is called "Pearl of the Army," and Episode One was called "The Traitor." The big pictures we have seen this month are Fanny Ward in "A Gutter Madalene," Clara Kimball Young in "The Rise of Susan," Alan Hale in "The Love Thief," and Jack Pickford in "Seventeen." I don't care much for Clara Kimball Young for she is dramatic and always has a heaving boosoom, but Alan Hale and Jack Pickford are very jolly boys

in nice, lively pictures.

Charlie Chaplin in "The Rink" and also in "The Vagabond" came round again, and I liked them as much as ever.

I am not very keen on Grundy, but "The Great Grundy," which was the month's first tale in the Gem was quite good though it had a bit coincidence. Grundy's uncle had been robbed by an abskonding secretary. This secretary was reported as having been seen with a wooden-legged man. Taggles has engaged a new man-of-all-work named Smith. He has a wooden leg. Through the cleverness of Levison, it is found out that Smith is the wicked secretary, and his wooden leg is a false one.

Next month it was Fatty Wynn who was "A Disgrace to the Study." He is accused of hogging food in wartime. Actually he is helping a widow whose husband has been called into the army.

I really was not keen on "Kildare of the Great Heart," in spite of its nice title. Kildare, returning late from Southampton, found Knox out late at night. Kildare was biffed on to the railway line. Monteith, also out late at night, rescued him. Later, to get money which Monteith badly needed, Kildare took part in a prize-fight. A bit crummy, and the seniors talked like walking dictionaries.

But the last tale of the month, "His Brother's Keeper" was really outstanding, and the first of a series. Manners Minor is taken up by Racke & Co. But Manners Major, like the Bounder, is ruthless. He threatens Racke that unless he leaves Reggie Manners alone he will appeal to the Head. So Racke slings out Manners Minor, who is bitter and furious. Fine tale, and more to come.

These days the Gem stories seem to be getting a good bit shorter than those in the Magnet.

Fancy. School is now over, and the long summer hols are here. I am not sure that we shall be going away, though Gran would like us to visit her at Layer Marney.

FOR SALE: A.P. Annuals: Modern Boy 1935; Popular Book Boys' Stories 1932; Bo-Peep Bumper Book 1929 - 6/6 each. Film Pictorial Annual 1935 14/-; 28 Picturegoer and Picture Shows 1943 - 1949 - £1. Thomson Anns: Skipper Book for Boys (mint) 11/6; Speed Book for Boys 6/- . 7 Champions 1950; 1 Schoolgirls' Own (1934) 6/- the lot. Percy Westerman Omnibus 800 pages 5/-. Tales Out of School - G. Trease 5/-. Funnies Albums (Gerald Swan's Pubs) 1942, 43, 44, 45, 46 - 3/- each or 13/- the lot. Mysteries of Paris (Eugene Sue) 800 pps 6/-. 8 Young Britains 1920 - 21 - 11/-.

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LONDON O.B.B.C.

"NELSON LEE" LIBRARY

On this 50th anniversary of the creation of St. Frank's, why not renew or make your acquaintance with Brooks' immortal characters? Practically every St. Frank's story he ever wrote in the Nelson Lee is available to readers of Collectors' Digest through the London club's unrivalled collection. Many stories written for other papers also available. For conditions of loan, write to:-

BOB BLYTHE, 40, Ellesmere Rd., Dollis Hill, London, N.W.10. (S.A.E. please).

WANTED: Old series 1 - 110; 114; 116; 121; 124; 129; 130; 136; 137; 138; 139; 141; 144; 145; 146; 147.

NELSON LEE CATALOGUE: A few copies still available. 6/- post free.

SEXTON BLAKE MAKES HISTORY

On July 29th Sexton Blake makes history by going into hard covers. The publishers, a new firm under the name of HOWARD BAKER, will be offering the first four titles of the already historic Fifth Series of the Sexton Blake Library, issued as two bound omnibus volumes.

Entirely reprinted on top-quality paper, and given a durable binding, these books will be a must for every collector.

The FIRST Second Blake Omnibus will comprise 208 pages, and will contain "LAIRD OF EVIL" and "THE BREAK-OUT."

The SECOND Sexton Blake Omnibus will comprise 192 pages and will contain "MURDERER AT LARGE" and "LET MY PEOPLE BE."

Both omnibus volumes will be published by Howard Baker, and will cost 8/6 each. 9/6 inclusive of postage and packing to any part of the world.

Readers wishing to secure copies should send no money. But they should put their names and addresses on postcards, stating their requirements, and mail to Howard Baker, 82 Girdwood Rd., London S.W.18. They will be advised when their copies are ready for dispatch.

Additional information is that Sexton Blake is to be featured in a Radio Serial (21 parts) to be put out by the BBC in September.

NELSON LEE COLUMN

(CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD)

NIPPER AT ST. FRANKS!



Being No. 1 of a New Series of "NIPPER'S NOTE-BOOK" Stories. Dealing with the adventures of NELSON LEE and NIPPER during their sojourn at St. Frank's College. Set down by Nipper, and Prepared for Publication by the Author of "The Duplicate Door," "The Ivory Seekers," "The House with the Double Meat," "The Yellow Shadow," etc.

THE MEETING OF NELSON LEE AND NIPPER

By Robert Blythe

Have you ever wondered under what circumstances Nelson Lee and Nipper first met? Most of our information concerning them has been recounted by E.S.B. but what were they like, this immortal couple, as envisaged by Maxwell Scott their creator?

I doubt whether there are many who know the details of that historic first meeting. I must confess that I, for one, didn't, until I was loaned a copy of the "Halfpenny Marvel" entitled "A Dead Man's Secret" dated 1895.

Rather than let these gems of literature be like the flower "wasting its sweetness on the desert air" I thought it would be rather a good idea, in this anniversary number, to make the facts known to a larger audience and thus enable these fascinating details to be handed down to posterity.

After reading them you might think that they ought to remain decently dead and buried!!

Here then, in deathless prose, is how Nelson Lee first met Nipper as told by Maxwell Scott.

The situation is this. Outside a railway station Nelson Lee had lost track of the crooks who had absconded (must keep in character!) with some luggage belonging to his client. Later a porter is able to help.

"Out with it now!" said Nelson Lee eagerly. "Better late than never! If it enables me to trace the luggage you shall be well rewarded for your information."

"Well, it's this," said the porter. "There's a dirty young ragamuffin, called Nipper, who hangs about the station selling matches and evening papers, and who's a perfect young demon for jumping up behind the cabs and carriages. He was here about ten minutes ago, and, as soon as I clapped eyes on him, I remembered that I had seen him jump up behind the carriage in which Mr. Thomson's luggage was taken away."

And so we receive our first inkling of what to expect from Master Nipper. The "ragamuffin" is duly found and reports to Lee.

Punctually at nine o'clock, just after Ruth and the Pryces had departed, the landlady knocked at the sitting-room door, and announced that "a dirty young vagabond" was downstairs, and had the impudence to assert that he had an appointment with her lodger.

"Show him up," said Nelson Lee, to her obvious disgust and surprise.

"Are you Nipper?" he asked of the barefooted urchin who presently entered the room.

"Yessir," replied that precocious individual. "Are you the gent who's offering 'arf-a-sov. for an address?"

"I am," said Nelson Lee, producing the coin in question. "This is yours as soon as you have told me all you know."

"Then it'll be mine afore you can wink," said Nipper. "I rode behind the kerridge till it stopped outside a empty office in one of the streets off 'Olborn. I seed about 'arf the luggage unloaded, and then I seed a bobby. Arter that I didn't wait to see no more. Tip up that 'arf-sov., guv'nor!"

"I'm afraid you haven't earned it yet," said Nelson Lee. "I must know the name of that street off Holborn. Can you remember it?"

"Never knew it, guv'nor," said Nipper. "But I'll take you to the very spot for a extra bob."

"Very well," said the detective. "But it would never do for us to go out together in our present clothes. The difference in our appearance would attract everyone's attention, which is just what I want to avoid. Either you must put on better clothes or I must put on shabbier. Which shall it be?"

"I should be happy to oblige you," said Nipper, with sublime cheek, "but unfortunately my evening dress is at my huncle's. But I don't mind being seen with you, for once in a way, in your working clothes."

There was something so indescribably ludicrous in the manner in which this impertinent speech was delivered, that Nelson Lee was doubled up with laughter. Having somewhat recovered his gravity, he presented Nipper with a cigarette (he knew the way to win a street-arab's heart!), and, after bidding him keep out of mischief, retired to his workroom to make the necessary changes in his attire.

Being left to his own devices, Nipper first made himself comfortable in an easy-chair, and then lit his cigarette. He was about half-way through it, when there was a rap at the door.

"Come in!" cried Nipper; and there shuffled into the sitting-room a seedy-looking tramp, who asked, in a thick, unsteady voice, if Mr. Lee was in.

"He is," said Nipper, blowing a cloud of smoke into the visitor's face, and thereby causing him to cough in a most distressing fashion. "But wot's your business with Mr. Lee? He's engaged at present, and I'm doing of his work."

"Indeed!" said the tramp, after another violent fit of coughing. "Then p'raps you can tell me where my little boy is? He come 'ere to earn 'arf-a-sov., and he's never been heard of since!"

"Wot!" cried Nipper, bounding to his feet.

"Don't try any of your tricks on me!" cried the tramp excitedly. "Where's my lad? They tell me Nelson Lee gets boys to come to his house by promising to give them money, and then he cuts 'em up alive!"

"I'm off!" cried Nipper, whose hair was literally on end; and, seizing his cap, he made for the door. Before he reached it, however, the tramp had caught him by the

collar of his coat, and the voice of Nelson Lee said, "Where are you off to, Nipper?"

This only added to his terror, and he made frantic efforts to wriggle away from his captor's grasp. At last, however, Nelson Lee - for, of course, it was he, disguised as a tramp - succeeded in making him understand the trick which had been played on him.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Nipper. "Yer own mother wouldn't know you in that get-up. There's got to be no more of these tricks, if you and me ain't to quarrell. My nerves won't stand 'em."

"All right," said Nelson Lee, "I only wanted to test my disguise. Now, then, come along with me to Holborn, and remember, if any questions are asked, my name is Stubbins, and we're both on the look-out for a job!"

"Right you are, Stubbins!" cried Nipper delightedly.

I love that bit where Lee gives Nipper a cigarette, don't you?

We are not told either then, or later, how Nipper lost his cockney accent but we do know that by the time he arrived at St. Ninians (yes! he was at St. Ninians long before he took up residence at St. Frank's didn't you know?) he was talking like any other public school-boy although we are not told whether he spoke English with a public school accent.

There isn't room in this article for more of this sort of stuff, but some time in the future I'd like to regale you with the description of the first time Nipper saved Nelson Lee's life. Of course, later in life they saved each other's lives with monotonous regularity, but this first time was something special, believe me!

Until then you must possess your soul with patience.

IN THE SEATS OF THE MIGHTY

Here at the Digest office this month we received a letter from a reader who informed us that the Duke of Windsor and Lord Thomson are keen Sexton Blake fans, and enquired whether these two illustrious gentlemen subscribe to C.D. I'm afraid that they don't.

Owing to the somewhat ambiguous nature of its name, Collectors' Digest receives scores of enquiries every year on topics which have nothing whatever to do with old boys' papers. A number of folk, especially in the States, collect motor car licence plates. Donald Rosenberg, a 12-year old of New Jersey, writes me that he is seeking these plates. He commenced his letter: "I have written to the Prime Minister and he has referred me to you." I'm wondering whether your editor may claim a place in the Cabinet.

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S E X T O N B L A K E

(concluded)

By W. O. G. Lofts

Sexton Blake has often been described, even today, by some writers as "the office boy's Sherlock Holmes," which suggests that the stories were intended for adolescents only to read. The UNION JACK especially disputed this by claiming that its stories were for readers of all ages and a survey conducted by the editor in 1926 proved that its readers came from all age groups ranging from 9 to 90! Indeed, such readers included famous people from all walks of life - Stanley Baldwin, whilst Prime Minister, often read Blake stories to pass away the time on tedious train journeys. The Liberal Prime Minister, Lloyd George read especially those tales by Gwyn Evans, a fellow Welshman and the son of a clergyman who was a great personal friend of Lloyd George.

King Edward VIII (afterwards the Duke of Windsor), was also a reader, being a great admirer of stories written by Donald Stuart (his private secretary sent a letter to "Gerald Verner" as he is now better known, confirming this) whilst I could add the late Tommy Handley, Tod Slaughter - who claimed to have every Blake story ever published - Bransby Williams, and A. E. Matthews (Matty to his friends). Only recently that grand actor James Hayter, now appearing in MY FAIR LADY in the West End, confessed that he was an avid reader in his early days and was most interested to learn from me that a cousin of his, Cecil Hayter, had written dozens of stories in those days when the author's name was not given.

The Sexton Blake bust made its appearance in March 1926, when it was sculptured by Eric Parker who, amusingly enough, had to stick a lead pencil in the base of the neck of the original plaster cast to stop the head from drooping! Originally 850 busts were sent out to lucky subscribers who had enrolled at least five new readers and only about a dozen are known to exist today. When the sensational historical remains from the Temple of Mithras were discovered in the City a few years ago a much-battered, almost unrecognisable bust of Blake was being offered for sale in a secondhand curio shop as being an authentic relic from the famous Temple!

The late Miss Dorothy L. Sayers has often been quoted regarding

her statements that she considered Sexton Blake part of the National folklore. Proof that Miss Sayers showed an intense interest in Fleetway's famous characters is shown in the fact that she gave the name of Bunter to the valet employed by Lord Peter Wimsey - easily her own most famous character. Another fact, also not generally known, is that whilst running the EVENING STANDARD short story features in 1936, Miss Sayers specially commissioned 'Pierre Quiroule' (The Rolling Stone - real name W. W. Sayer, who had written many fine Blakes), to write a special tale featuring the great detective for the London evening newspaper. This appeared the same year and was reprinted in overseas papers all over the world with stories by such famous names as H. G. Wells.

During this period Sexton Blake became more popular and better known to the public than ever before. There was the Sexton Blake gramophone record entitled MURDER ON THE PORTSMOUTH ROAD (HMV No. C2044), with Arthur Wontner in the lead; The Sexton Blake Card Game, and the highly successful yearly Sexton Blake Annuals, which ran right up to the start of the Second World War.

Nineteen-thirty-three saw the UNION JACK move with the times and change its style into the big buff DETECTIVE WEEKLY, where its opening story by Jack Lewis (Lewis Jackson) introduced Blake's wastrel brother Nigel. H. W. Twyman left his newspaper after a year to go free-lancing for the American market and his place was taken over by Len Berry, who later went on the staff of the United Nations in New York. In 1935 a young man was given his first job as editor of the DETECTIVE WEEKLY and he did a wonderful job keeping Sexton Blake in the public eye by sheer initiative and by being absolutely topical. Mr. Hunt had Blake playing alongside Syd Walker, the famous BBC junk-man whose adventures were known to millions; whilst later on Fleetway's great detective was found pitting his wits against Raffles, the Gentleman Crook, in a series of stories now penned by Barry Perowne (Philip Atkey) successor to the creator E. W. Hornung.

August 1939 saw Mr. Hunt called up from Amalgamated Press for war service and until the DETECTIVE WEEKLY closed down through paper shortage in 1940 it was run by Donald Bobin, who was fortunate enough to win a large sum on the football pools a few years ago. He was the son of Jack Bobin, a prolific writer of Blakes for many years.

The closing days of the DETECTIVE WEEKLY, before it became a casualty through paper shortage, saw a Blake serial written by that fine craftsman, and the last editor of EVERYBODY'S, George Edward Holmes - run in conjunction with a serial on the BBC.

PRO CAPTU LECTORIS HABENT SUA FATA LIBELLI - "the fate of books

depend on the capacity of the reader." So wrote Terentianus Maurus in the year A.D. 200 - and little did this old scholar dream that in A.D. 1939 the art of reading would take a sharp decline owing to the popularity of the picture-strip. The plain fact must remain, however, that the strip form of story-telling is exceedingly popular with youngsters today; and since the beginning of the last war - consequently it is not surprising to find that in the very early days of the KNOCKOUT COMIC Sexton Blake appeared in picture strip form as well as in short stories.

Despite the closing down, through paper shortage, of many papers, the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY managed to survive although it had its four-monthly issues reduced to two. Despite great difficulty in getting copy through from those star authors on war service (alas, many passed on during that period, including G. H. Teed, Gwyn Evans, Ladbroke Black and Robert Murray Graydon), Mr. Leonard H. Pratt, the editor, succeeded in keeping the S.B.L. going through the war years - and indeed until his retirement in 1955 after 50 years of faithful service.

W. Howard Baker took over the editorship in November 1955, and about this time Sexton Blake was given an extensive modernisation to bring him up to date with current trends.

The result of this face-lift was that Sexton Blake became a rather less ascetic character. Not quite so infallible as of yore, but more in keeping with his contemporary rivals. Startling changes had to be made to keep abreast of the rapidly changing social mores.

And what a remarkable transformation was wrought in the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY. It became as up-to-the-minute as a daily newspaper headline. And on several occasions was actually ahead of the news!

First, Blake moved offices from Baker Street to Berkeley Square. The front door of the new quarters bore the legend: "Sexton Blake Investigations." Also about this time Blake entered into reciprocal arrangements for co-operation with other private investigators in all capitals of the world.

His original staff of two who assisted him on his cases, Tinker and the bloodhound Pedro, had been increased. First to arrive on the scene was Miss Paula Dane, originally a copy writer for an advertising agency. The second addition was Miss Marion Lang, the receptionist, a girl who in recent stories where she has played a leading part has really touched the heart strings. To complete the trio was Miss Louise Pringle the office typist; a direct contrast to the honey blonde Paula, and beautiful, dark Marion. She is a middle-aged plainly-dressed spinster.

I must also on no account forget Milly the sealpoint Siamese cat - an intensely loyal feline of her special breed, based on a real life namesake, as I can prove by the scratch scar marks on my hands! Tinker, of course, is an important part of the setup. He is no longer the boy assistant, but a much more mature young man. Under his full name of Edward Carter, he holds a very strong position in the Sexton Blake Organisation. Pedro the bloodhound, I should mention, has been out resting in the country for some time - but reappeared with his young offspring Manuel both residing at Berkeley Square.

New authors were brought in with fresh ideas, and stories were written to suit a great variety of tastes. Crime, overseas adventure, war, and even comedy drama. The editor himself penned some really excellent yarns, two of which dealt with war. His LAST DAYS OF BERLIN and THE SEA TIGERS have been acclaimed by many readers (including the old-guard Blake fans) as being the finest Blake stories ever written.

Did you want humour in the New Look SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY? Well, there was Jack Trevor Story (who wrote that best seller filmed by Alfred Hitchcock THE TROUBLE WITH HARRY - and who wrote the current West End film success LIVE NOW, PAY LATER) to write it.

New artists were also introduced, and when one can compile a list such as F. N. Carcupino, Caroselli, De Gaspari, De Seta, Fratini, W. S. Greenhalgh, Margaret Higgins, Jacoby, Lionel Morgan, Olivetti, Hugo Pratt, Simbori, Marcus Stone, Symeoni, David Wright, Stephan Berany, and many others, one can ~~glean~~ glean some idea of the variety used.

Thumb-nail sketches too have been introduced, and amongst the many artists commissioned one can include Jack Dunkl y of Daily Mirror fame.

Nineteen-fifty-eight saw another highly popular feature appear in the LIBRARY, the Mailbag Section. Here, readers from all over the world could air their views, and some highly interesting letters were published, too! Including what must have been Blake's oldest reader ever! A gentleman aged 98 living in Canada. Another film was made of Blake also in this period, MURDER AT SITE THREE, with Geoffrey Toone in the leading role, based on W. Howard Baker's novel CRIME IS MY BUSINESS.

Sexton Blake today is still a household word, and the Press especially seize on any topic dealing with the magic of his name for a news-story.

...THE THEFT OF THE FIRST STRASBURG EDITION OF THE MARSEILLAISE FROM THE BRITISH MUSEUM WORTH ABOUT £2,00. LEFT IN A PANIC BY THE "BORROWER" AT THE LOST PROPERTY OFFICE AT BAKER STREET - UNDER THE

FIRST NAME THAT CAME TO THE BORROWER'S HEAD - SEXTON BLAKE!

...A MAN ARRESTED FOR RECEIVING STOLEN PROPERTY IN NEWCASTLE WHO SAID HIS NAME WAS SEXTON BLAKE. Investigations conducted by myself proved, however, that his full name was William Sexton Blake. No records at Somerset House show any registration of a person having the single Christian name of Sexton followed by the surname Blake.

They come from all walks of life - from an Irish Peer, Lord Mount Morres, who wrote in the 1900 period under the name of Patrick Morris, to Joseph Stamper, who confessed in his autobiography that he was at one time a tramp on the road! History, too, was made with regard to contributors to the new SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY when Mrs. Ross Story, wife of the well known writer, penned a story - the second woman known to have done so, the other lady in question being Miss Cecily Hamilton, a well known playwright way back.

Sexton Blake has just passed his seventy-third year! Much has happened to him in the last couple of years. The SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY ceased publication in June of 1963, a decision arrived at with understandable regret by Fleetway, but the Library has since then been revived (by arrangement with Fleetway, who hold the exclusive copy-right), by Mayflower-Dell paperbacks. Sexton Blake is a mixture of the old and the new in this series. He has moved out of his luxurious offices in Berkeley Square and is now back in his apartment (now a pent-house!) in Baker Street. Tinker is with him. W. Howard Baker continues to edit the series.

* * * * *

THE SCOTLAND YARD INSPECTORS

By S. Gordon Swan

Since the inception of the Blake saga in 1893, many members of the CID have stalked the pages of the various periodicals devoted to Blake's adventures, but only one has survived from earlier days to battle his way through to the precarious present. Inspector Coutts is best remembered by oldtimers for his encounters with Dirk Dolland and his epic struggles alongside Blake and Tinker against the infamous Criminals' Confederation.

His creator, Robert Murray, subjected him to many adventures grave and gay, but in addition Anthony Skene came along and brought him into contact with that brilliant criminal, Zenith; Gwyn Evans involved him in some bizarre exploits; other authors featured him in a number of investigations; and the modern writers introduce him into the current scene without his appearing an anachronism.

Certainly he is a somewhat more dignified Coutts than the officer who smoked an exploding cigar supplied by Tinker, or jumped on his bowler hat in a fit of exasperation, or spouted whisky like a whale when overcome by some emotion the nature of which I cannot remember. One is pleased to note he has achieved promotion in the past few years; surely he deserved it after more than fifty years of service!

Apart from Coutts, however, other names spring to mind from the bowler hat brigade. Harker, Martin, Widgeon, Rollings, Superintendent (otherwise Inspector) Boar, (alternatively Bore); Spearing, the egregious Superintendent Claudius Venner, Lennard - and, - of course, the more recent additions, Superintendent Dukelow and Commander Grimwade.

One of the earliest entrants on the scene must be Murray Graydon's Inspector Widgeon, a peculiar, eccentric character who was at times friendly towards Blake and at others definitely hostile. Sometimes he would play a straight-forward role and give staunch support to Blake; at others he would get into a towering rage and deride Blake and his methods and threaten the detective with dire penalties for allowing some criminal to slip through his fingers. His worst manifestation was in a crime involving Chinese when he became the recipient of a symbol denoting death. He gave such an exhibition of craven cowardice that was scarcely consonant with his position as a Scotland Yard officer and it is difficult to believe that a man of his training and experience would betray such a yellow streak so blatantly. (U.J. 310 The Yellow Cord).

Widgeon appeared solely in Murray Graydon's stories, except in one instance. In a story of Dr. Satira, while Coutts was temporarily off-stage, Robert Murray introduced his father's creation into the Union Jack, from whose pages Inspector Widgeon had long been absent.

Inspector Martin is another who might be described as a pioneer of the CID brigade. Several authors introduced him into their yarns, notably Norman Goddard, Mark Osborne and Lewis Jackson, and he is to be found in the early Rex Hardinge stories. It is noticeable that Mark Osborne, in writing of this character, had him talking in the jerky, telegraphic style of Inspector Spearing.

The latter appeared in many of the Norman Goddard stories from 1905 onwards. He was a stodgy, unimaginative individual who spoke in the jerky style aforementioned. An odd aspect of this inspector is that, while he was fading out of the pages of the Union Jack, he began to appear in a series of adventures in Pluck. These stories lasted for some years and were written by a number of authors.

As far as the Pluck yarns were concerned, Spearing (called more

familiarly Will and very much younger) was the hero, and appeared to be brighter and more intelligent than the older inspector who blundered along with Blake. In some of the stories in Pluck, Spearing had a girl-friend named Nell Renard, who was difficult to reconcile with the descriptions given of Inspector Spearing's wife in the Union Jack.

On one occasion at least, in the Pluck series, Will Spearing encountered Laban Creed, whom Sexton Blake fans will remember as an opponent of the great detective, and a creation of W. Murray Graydon.

Inspector Lennard we know as the Scotland Yard man who appeared in the Waldo stories, and was exclusively written of by Edwy Searles Brooks. It is interesting to note that, while some of the inspectors were written of by several authors, others seemed to remain the property of their creator. Another of this ilk is Inspector Rollings, and one may also include in this category Andrew Murray's officer with the variable surname and rank, Boar or Bore.

Despite the long-term affection one feels for Coutts, it has always appeared to me that the most level-headed and likeable of the CID men was Edward Harker. Other authors also wrote of him - Coutts Brisbane, Anthony Skene, Reginald Poole, even A. C. Murray. But it is Lewis Jackson's conception that I remember, a man of integrity, unassuming and intelligent, a good police officer and a good friend and admirer of Blake.

In Blake's long battle with Kestrel and his syndicate, Harker was at Blake's side most of the time, and his assistance was invaluable, his loyalty and honesty unimpeachable. It is to be regretted that we do not hear of him nowadays.

Running Harker a close second was Inspector Rollings, who lined up with Blake to counter the cunning schemes of the Indian criminal Gunga Dass. There is a tragedy to be spoken of in this connection. In the last story of Inspector Rollings - not a Gunga Dass yarn - the Scotland Yard man was found dead in a locked room. At first it was believed to be suicide, but when it became apparent that it was murder Sexton Blake and Tinker set out to catch the murderer and vindicate their old friend Rollings. This noteworthy occasion will be remembered by those who read "The Riddle of the Amber Room." This is the only instance I can recall of an inspector who was featured in a series of stories eventually being killed in the course of duty.

That arbiter of sartorial elegance, Superintendent Claudius Verner, was not a likeable character, although a conspicuous one. He was not a staunch friend of Blake, but a self-opinionated, unscrupulous officer who picked the brains of his long-suffering "handmaiden" Detective-Sergeant Belford and of the great detective as well, if he

could manage it. His verbal feuds with Tinker provided some amusement, but one does not remember him with admiration. The later arrival, Dukelow, resembles him in many characteristics.

Of the newcomers Commander Grimwade impresses one as a man to respect, of solid worth and integrity. In the final analysis, however, Inspector Harker remains in my mind as "the best of them all."

R E V I E W

"THE SLAVE BRAIN"

Desmond Reid
Mayflower 3/6

This entertaining, well-written story belongs to that rare genus - novels which appeal to those who like the so-called modern set-up and also to those who prefer the type of story of earlier years. It is immensely readable.

A story of political intrigue and international power-seeking, with many neat twists, it introduces most of the Blake characters of the Sixties, and older readers will welcome the appearance of Inspector George Coutts. The Prime Minister, complete with pipe, plays a part, and at the end we are told that Sexton Blake has an appointment - a Command Performance - at a little place near Slough. And that sort of thing - very heart-warming - is a flash back to much earlier times in the S.B.L.

Altogether this is a worthy story to herald the return of Sexton Blake after his few months' absence. The story, in passing, is credited to Desmond Reid on the cover and to Peter Saxon on the title page. Not the first time that the SBL hasn't been able quite to make up its mind.

WANTED: Nelson Lees (Old Series) numbers 364, 371, 407, 451, 452, £1 each offered if in good condition. Nelson Lees, Old Series, for sale and exchange.

P. HARLEY, 214 SALTWELLS ROAD, DUDLEY WOOD, CRADLEY HEATH, STAFFS.

SALE: Ten Chips, six 1934, one 1935, three 1938. Good Order. 25/- the lot. Post free.

O. W. WADHAM, 12 MILITARY ROAD, LOWER HUTT, NEW ZEALAND.

SALE: Holiday Annual, 1936; Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's (Spring), 25/- two. Perfect. Postage extra. WANTED: Collectors' Digest before 1965. Reasonable. L. WORMULL, 245 DAGNAM PARK DRIVE, ROMFORD, ESSEX.

HAMILTONIANA

Do You Remember?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 64 - Schoolboys' Own Library No. 68 - "Sir Japhet's Heir"

Charles Hamilton was never at his happiest when dealing with upstarts. He was prepared to show almost unlimited indulgence to waifs like Joe Frayne and Flip - and even to downright dishonest ones like Skip - but for some reason or another he could never tolerate people who had come up in the world, shopkeepers who had made a fortune and who were presumptuous enough to want to mix with their betters. And for some strange reason, Rookwood had more than its fair share of upstarts.

Arthur Bresford-Baggs was the son of Sir Japhet who, after the collapse of his limited company (from which he prudently withdrew at the right moment), went on to make a fortune in sausages. For three years he was given private tuition by a Cambridge M.A., and then he was launched forth on his career at Rookwood. Sir Japhet had concealed his son's whereabouts from the rest of the family, but Arthur had innocently written to them all, and a succession of disastrous visits commenced, each one creating more distress than the previous one.

To do Charles Hamilton justice, he was quick enough to point out the defects in some of the permanent Rookwood characters. There were three sets of juniors trying to cultivate the friendship of Beresford-Baggs, and all for the same reasons: Topham and Townsend, Peele & Co., and Smythe & Co. Tubby Muffin made a fourth, but he was really a non-starter. In addition to those who liked the newcomer for his money, there was one who hated him for it - Mornington, who had recently lost his own fortune. The varying attitudes of all these made interesting reading enough, but the wretched situation of Beresford-Baggs himself caused the reader to writhe. Perhaps it was too like real life to be bearable.

Oddly enough, there were some very discerning comments on human nature made in this series. For example, when Jimmy Silver spoke politely to Uncle Peter, who dealt in gents' cast-off wardrobes, the following conversation took place:-

"It would s'prise you, the people that are selling their left-off wardrobes in these 'ere days. Rich folks, you know - really grand people, what wouldn't look at the likes of you or me!"

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy.

Lovell chuckled helplessly. Jimmy's civility to Uncle Peter had the rather inevitable result that Uncle Peter cheerfully reduced him to his own level.

No one can deny the truth underlying Charles Hamilton's presentation of character, but equally there is no denying that this is one of those truths that one would rather not read about.

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 113. SURVIVAL! REVIVAL!

Recently, at the time of writing, a revival of the famous Musical Comedy "The Desert Song" has opened at the Palace Theatre, London. According to the newspapers, members of the audience called out "This is what we have been waiting for." Probably, like a good many of us, they were ordinary family people who are sick to death of the filth and muck which to-day often passes for entertainment in the theatre, the cinema, and in literature.

Most of the critics were warmly kind in their reviews, though many admitted that their gentle reactions were due to nostalgia. One critic, of a London evening paper, stood almost alone in slamming the production, and his review seemed merely spiteful. He commented, so far as I recall, that if "Desert Song" were to be staged at all in 1967, it should have been done as a "send-up." Meaning, presumably, that it should have been "guyed."

The profession's own organ, "The Stage," was not complimentary. This paper observed that "the scenery is tatty;" "the orchestra is inadequate;" "the chorus, in numbers, is only a fraction of the size of that of the original production." The summing-up by "The Stage" was that the production is "unworthy of a theatre like the Palace."

Now what has "The Desert Song" to do with the Hamilton papers? Nothing, of course, except that it was first staged in London in 1929, at a time when Charles Hamilton was at the height of his powers. And its music, like his masterpieces, is deathless.

There is a danger in any revival. Unless it compares fairly and satisfactorily with the original presentation, the younger generation may say "Now what on earth did Mum and Dad once see in this?"

I made exactly the same comment a few years ago when a paper offered some heavily pruned substitute stories while giving the impression that they were the work of the genuine Frank Richards. I do not believe that any child of any generation would have been pleased with them.

Not so long ago I said that the school story, as we knew it, is

dead. This, mainly, is because the master craftsman of the school story is no longer with us, while revivals give no promise at all. This does not mean that I think that no profitable sale of school stories can be made in modern times. The success of the post-war Bunter books gives the lie to any such assumption.

I said once that I should not welcome the re-publication of some of Charles Hamilton's greatest pre-war series, and one or two readers were sadly reproachful that I should write such a comment. Yet I still feel the same, for I am quite assured that any re-publication would be "tatty," "inadequate," and unimaginatively slashed to ribbons. And that, in my view, would be deplorable.

We have seen a number of these "revivals" of the old stories in the post-war years. Apart from the unhappy experiment of "Look & Learn," there was another paper which presented re-publication of some of the Rookwood stories, which were pruned to the bones and dithered with so that the stately Dr. Chisholm was made to say "Rot!" One of the Armada books was made from chunks of five Magnets, while another fine story was spoiled in Armada by an integral part of the plot being omitted. An old Magnet tale in last year's Holiday Annual had lost no less than five chapters. Nelson Lee tales reprinted since the war suffered much of the same fate.

I like to see a revival if it is good - like "A Strange Secret" put out privately by the Charles Hamilton Museum. But revivals which are third-rate shadows of former greatness - no, thank you.

In its Editorial last month, Collectors' Digest looked at an article which compared the pre-war publications for youngsters with those of today. From the little I have seen of modern periodicals for the young, they seem to be the worst on the market for sixty years.

It is odd what an enormous improvement there was in the printing and general presentation of weekly publications between 1902 and 1909. The other day I was browsing over some periodicals circa 1902. The presentation was crude; the printing was small and messy; the paper was cheap and shoddy; the artistic work was reasonably good, but the pictures were few; editorial items were mostly absent; the writing seemed in the hack class.

Yet by 1909 a great change had taken place. There was, in fact, a far greater improvement in general presentation between 1902 and 1909 than there has been between 1909 and 1967. In spite of modern technique and in spite of what was said in the article which we criticised in last month's editorial.

"You could hardly expect to sell a paper with a name like Boy's Friend," wrote Mr. E. S. Turner recently. He has a point there,

though it is tantamount to saying that "The Sound of Music" would play to packed houses in the Odeon or the Granada but would be a complete failure if screened in theatres named Kinema or Electric Palace. If we want to see a film do we really care what the theatre is called? And if a series of stories caught on, would boys really bother two hoots what was the name of the paper presenting those stories?

There were periods during the long, long life of the Boys' Friend when it offered magnificent programmes of reading matter which, in my opinion, would be attractive to boys of any generation. Even in the cursing, long-haired, sex-mad, gambling "sixties," I believe that a paper named Boys' Friend which offered the stories which that paper was offering in the autumn of 1917 - Rookwood at its best, Cedar Creek at its best, supported by adventure, travel, and boxing tales, all superbly illustrated and presented - would be a smash-hit with to-day's over twelves.

Nothing of the sort could be offered now at a price within reach of even the elastic pockets of today's youngsters. When Magnet No. 1 - originally published at a halfpenny - was reprinted, the charge per copy was 1/6; even though there was no author to be paid for his work.

Since the war there has been nothing published of the same type and quality as the papers we knew thirty or forty years ago, so anyone who writes glibly that modern youth wouldn't read them is merely guessing. I, too, am merely guessing when I believe that youngsters today would buy papers of the old type if they were available, and buy them in the same numbers as they did long ago. But the fact is that, in 1967, those numbers would not be adequate. Giant circulations are now needed to make any paper pay its way.

Nowadays youngsters are not given what they want but what publishers think they ought to want - and professional writers on the subject take their cues from the publishers.

A young children's paper like "Puck" - issues on the market as long ago as 1912 - has never been surpassed, and so far as I can see there is nothing of the same quality on the market today. The colours were superb, the printing excellent, the contents charming, the paper of good quality. If Mr. Turner or anyone else tells me that a paper like "Puck" of long ago would not sell well for sixpence or whatever they charge for Blam and Powie, I just don't believe them. But, of course, a paper like Puck could not be produced today to sell for sixpence or whatever they charge for Blam and Powie.

In Britain today, charm and genuine worth have been superseded by a slick, hard brightness; vulgarity is both offhand and outspoken; a moral tone seems ridiculous. All this is admitted. But the dregs of

youth get the spotlight. There is still a hard core of fine youngsters who would buy and read good papers if they had the chance. That they do not get the chance is not the fault of the publishers. It is the result of the money-grab and enormous overhead costs which makes the normal circulations of yesteryear quite uneconomic now.

Finally, I do not like "send-ups." They strike me as dismal and unfunny.

Excuse more now. I'm off to book my seat for the "Desert Song."

EDITORIAL COMMENT: The above article was written several weeks ago. Present reports are that "The Desert Song" is playing to capacity business with enthusiastic audiences. We wish it every success.

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

W. T. THURBON: I was most interested in your reference to the Empire Library. I have never seen any of them, but from advertisements I remember seeing in old Marvels when I was looking carefully into these I think the early numbers must have been in Harmsworth's most patriotic mood. Your cover shows a visit to a battleship. I remember an advertisement of one copy showing a shooting match between St. Jim's, Greyfriars, and Gordon Gay's school. I think the original intention must have been the promotion of Harmsworth's campaign for rearmament on the lines of "The Invasion of 1910" and the John Tregellis stories in the boys' papers. I should, for my part, like to see the very early numbers of the Empire Library.

GERRY ALLISON: I have always thought "Cousin Ethel's Schooldays" to be a fine story, and a recent re-reading has not changed my opinion. To me, the character of Ethel Cleveland is Charles Hamilton's greatest study of an English girl, and this story brings out her charming personality to the full. Her wit and humour, her courage in adversity, her gentle affection for her cousin Arthur; her happy friendship with the St. Jim's boys and her deeper feeling for Figgins are all portrayed perfectly. Most of all, the vivid contrast between the open, sincere nature of Ethel, and the complex, perverse and involved character of the Spanish girl, Dolores Pelham presents a fascinating picture.

In my opinion, chapters 25 - 36 of "Cousin Ethel's Schooldays" - (in B.F.L. 367) give the very quintessence of St. Jim's. The tea party in Tom Merry's study is a sheer delight - I once had the pleasure of reading the scene at a meeting of the London O.B.B.C. Arthur Augustus bears no malice for his smutted face, and being the greatest lady's man at St. Jim's is seated next to Dolores. He tries to entertain the

bored girl with "a wathah good stowy about a fellow named Wobinson - or Wadcliffe - who had a vevy large plum-cake on his birthday." Poor Gussy never finishes the story.

Later that evening, D'Arcy and Figgins drive Cousin Ethel and Dolores back to St. Freda's in the horse and trap. The scene reveals Martin Clifford at his most masterly - the interplay of the four characters upon each other is a powerful tour-de-force.

I agree that it is strange that this story, and others such as "The Boy Without a Name" were overlooked when the Schoolboy's Own Library was being printed. I hope they will not be overlooked by John Wernham in his superb reprints of Hamilton masterpieces.

W. O. G. LOFTS: According to Mr. C. M. Down the EMPIRE LIBRARY was doomed from the very first issue, probably the most astonishing statement made by an editor about a paper. The brain wave of Percy Griffith the first Magnet/Gem editor, the idea was to produce a weekly school story paper with great appeal to colonial readers. Charles Hamilton was to write the stories each week, and who knows? It may have become as successful as MAGNET and GEM. But there was a rift in the lute with Percy about the tales and the outcome was that before the first number was published Charles Hamilton refused to have anything to do with the paper. Rather than drop the idea, Percy Griffith got the two sub-editors C.M. Down and H.A. Hinton (both later to become editors) to write the stories between them each week. Our editor is perfectly correct about Mr. C. M. Down's writings. He did have a pleasant style, and was probably the best of all substitute writers. H. A. Hinton however was no writer at all, and his work especially lost readers. Undoubtedly the magic of Charles Hamilton was needed to make the paper any success. I have not checked all the stories, but our editor probably is right that Charles Hamilton wrote No. 12 THE DOCTOR'S DOUBLE, but I do know for a fact that Mr. Hamilton did write No. 32 THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL'S JAPE. Possibly these may be 'the few' that Mr. Hamilton wrote originally and were to be used when copy was low. The author 'Jack Lancaster' hid the identity of A. M. BURRAGE, whilst according to G. R. Samways GORDON GAY was one of John Nix Pentelow's most favourite characters and he used him a great deal in stories. I hasten to say that this does not mean to assume that it was his creation. The name of GORDON GAY suggests a Hamilton connection at least. This has been commented on many times.

WANTED - MAGNETS 884, 886, 1180, 1186, 1188, 1194. 1926 MAGNETS and GREYFRIARS S.O.Ls. for sale or exchange. S.A.E. for list.
 JOHN BECK, 29, MILL ROAD, LEWES, SUSSEX.

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

DAVID HOBBS (Seattle): To this reader, some of the most interesting and informative reading in C.D. is contained in pieces written by Mr. Roger Jenkins.

It would never have occurred to me to question any statement of his, until "DO YOU REMEMBER? #63" in C.D. #225. May 67, page 18 -- just received here.

Mr. Jenkins describes GEM #42 "Figgins Fig-pudding" as "the nearest approach to a Christmas story in those far off days."

Granted that #42, dated December 28, 1907, could well have been on the newsstands in time for Christmas reading. Nevertheless Mr. Jenkins' statement, as quoted is surprising in view of the fact that GEM #37, dated November 23, 1907 (in time, no doubt, to be received by many overseas readers) is actually a Grand Christmas Double Number, the first such - this being the GEM'S first Christmas.

It contains the prototype of what was to become a typical Hamilton yuletide story. Entitled "Tom Merry's Christmas," it is chockful, from beginning to end, with snow-falls and snow-fights, breaking-up and homecoming, holiday plans and parties, Christmas carols and feasts - with Peace and Goodwill glossing over School and New House rivalry.

A grand yarn, thoroughly readable after almost 60 years.

No criticism intended, and my most sincere thanks to Mr. Jenkins, and all other sterling contributors to C.D.

E. THOMSON (Edinburgh): Danny, with his wonderful diary, still is one of the highlights of the C.D. the old-time filmstars, the names of the silent films, to me is simply marvellous. What a memory he has. I can recall some of the titles he mentions and some of the film celebrities, but could never compete with Danny.

J. S. ELLIOTT (London): Reference your comment on Jack Harkaway (Jack, not Tom) he featured in "Boys of England" as you thought. The first story appeared in No. 249, August 19th 1871, and there is no doubt that he was the most famous school character ever invented until the advent of Billy Bunter & Co, and Charles Hamilton. Also, there is quite a lot which could be written about Spring Books, a detail of which Mr. O. D. Wadham seems woefully unaware.

STAN KNIGHT (Cheltenham): The front and back illustrations on the June C.D. are very clear. They must be very good copies to have taken

so well. I have never seen a copy of the "Empire" library, although I have one or two of the "Popular," - they are the later edition, not the "Penny" one.

RAYMOND TAYLOR (Wolverhampton): I wish you could get an article on the early days of the "Jester." It is a complete blank to me. My earliest memory is of the stories of the "Human Bat" and the "Red Admiral."

CHRISTOPHER LOWDER (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Incidentally, I think an interesting field of research lies in the papers of the late '40s and the early '50s. I take it that we are all agreed, as Bernard Levin would say, that the "comics" (Comics? Ye Gods!) of today are pretty ghastly. Not so 15 years ago. "Knockout," "Sun," "Comet," "Film Fun," "Radio Fun," and so on, had some splendid serials in them - a lot of them reprinted, I understand, from papers like "Bullseye" and "Surprise" of the 1930s. And, of course, there were those marvellous Dick Turpin yarns. The early "Thriller Comic Library" and the "Super Detective Library" were good value for money too - Rick Random (the first Space Age detective), John Hunter's Captain Dack, the Armchair Detective, Turpin, D'Artagnan and the Three Musketeers, etc. I have a nice little collection going up to about 1958 when the stories began to standardize and, following on from that, deteriorate in quality. I recall that they changed the title of the "Thriller Comic Library" to the "Thriller Picture Library." Obviously, the word "Comic" was thought to be a little "rough" for the times!

ARTHUR HOLLAND (Australia): I certainly would like to see a double number of our "C.D." to mark our 250th issue, and our 21st birthday. Such a historic event in our hobby is worthy of something special.

I thought the June "C.D." was an extra fine number. The high standard of interest sustained by our regular features such as "The Editor's Chat," "Danny's Diary," "Do You Remember," and "Let's be Controversial," always amazes me.

I was much impressed with Jim Cook's recent visit to St. Frank's, and of his interview with Reggie Pitt and Ezra Quirke. His comments on the Christmas Party at Raithmere Castle, and the strange and thrilling adventures of St. Frank's juniors, and Moor House girls, brought back many interesting and enjoyable memories.

PHILIP TIERNEY (Grimsby): Whilst acknowledging that Mr. E. S. Turner's knowledge of juvenile fiction, past and present, far exceeds mine, I strongly dispute his statement that the youth of today "doesn't want to know" about the school stories which were once so popular.

This has never been put to the test so how can anyone assert that

modern children have rejected what in fact they have never had the opportunity of reading.

In my opinion many thousands of thoughtful children would be delighted to welcome a new "Magnet" or "Gem" as a refreshing change from the comic strip nonsense which is all their present periodicals offer them.

RAY BENNETT (Solihull): By all means a double number for the 250th issue and 21st birthday if you can manage it. Cost? Here's one who will gladly pay double, or more if required to cover expense. After all, the C.D. costs less than one penny per day now and surely very few club members would quibble.

NEWS FROM THE CLUBS

MIDLAND

Meeting held 23rd May, 1967

The Annual General Meeting was attended by 11 members.

There were two letters, one from Stan Knight and the other from Mr. Hull. Stan's was interesting as usual and set us finding the authors of lines of poetry, and Mr. Hull's contained two excellent ideas. He suggested members who borrowed library books should do their best to repair them before returning if they required it. Also he suggested advertising for new members in the Exchange and Mart. Both these ideas were accepted and we intend to act upon them.

As this was the A.G.M., reports on the year's working were given by the officials. The chairman, Ivan Webster reported a year of progress and we had several new members. He said new members were the means of widening our horizon for we now had those amongst us who did not place Charles Hamilton as No. 1 in their interests.

Unfortunately the year had had its darker side. The tragic loss of Madge Corbett had made a breach in our ranks which it would be difficult to fill.

The acting secretary said the newsletter, which was his main job, had increased in length during the year. This was because it was his aim to bring closer into the fold those who could not attend the monthly meeting and yet paid their subscriptions faithfully. There had been considerable correspondence with them besides visiting and their letters formed an interesting part of our monthly programme. No one must be allowed to think they were forgotten.

The financial report from Norman Gregory was given and a loss of

£8. 6. 8. was reported. As Norman said there was no cause for worry. Now we were installed at the Birmingham Theatre Centre with a low rental we should be able to carry on without trouble. After all as Norman pointed out we are not a profit making organisation.

The librarian, Tom Porter gave his report and said the solid support of our members had enabled him to make it a successful year. We now had 347 Magnets in the library in addition to other books and we could look forward to even better things in the future.

All the officials were warmly thanked for their sterling work. They were re-elected "en bloc" except for the chairman which by club rule is changed every year. The new chairman was George Chatham a worthy and popular choice. He has been a member a long time, but has never previously been chairman.

The Anniversary number and Collector's item were Union Jack 1125, May 23rd, 1925, and Boys Friend Library 469, "Biggles Learns to Fly" 7th March, 1935. The raffle was won by Bill Morgan with Ian Parish second - both got prizes.

The meeting closed with a discussion on future policy and ways and means of attracting new members. The next meeting is on 27th June at the Birmingham Theatre Centre.

J. F. BELLFIELD,
Correspondent.

NORTHERN

Meeting held Saturday, 10th June, 1967

While sunburnt spectators were leaving the Test Match at Headingley, the June Meeting started with thirteen members present. Chairman, Geoffrey Wilde, in his opening remarks had a special word of congratulation to George Riley who is now the proud father of a baby son.

After the minutes, the Treasurer's statement was given, and Gerry Allison followed it with news from postal members. We were all delighted to hear that Kathleen Hunt had had a children's book published recently called "A Midsummer Acorn." A copy was handed round, and we were very thrilled with this achievement of one of our members.

A letter from our colleagues in Birmingham about the possibility of a get-together in Chesterfield was discussed next, and several present were interested. Although it is now rather late to arrange a meeting in the summer, the Secretary was asked to write to our Midland friends to see if an Autumn meeting would be possible. More details of this will be given when the matter is arranged.

We were now divided into two teams captained by Ron Hodgson, and

Geoffrey Wilde, and each set to work to solve an identical Cross Word Puzzle compiled by Gerry Allison. All the clues were hobby items and Ron's team romped home winners, each receiving a plastic bookmark from the Secretary.

Jack Allison now took the chair to give the second instalment of our Greyfriars serial. He adeptly picked up Tom Roach's threads in his first chapter, and the second was an amusing classroom scene with the Remove construing Latin with Mr. Quelch. Bunter made a lovely new 'howler,' which was very well received.

The Rhyming Quiz from Cliff Webb was read out by Gerry next. (The answers were sealed up.) There was a good deal of brow wrinkling and requests "Would you read that again, please," but also a good many satisfied ejaculations of "Oh, yes." Out of twenty Geoffrey had a full score, and Ron, and Bill Williamson followed closely with eighteen each.

The ladies now handed round the refreshments, as welcome as ever, and the interval of chat followed. Harry Barlow had brought a Quiz along too, so now we sorted out pencil and paper again, to solve the questions (some rather abstruse) delivered in Harry's inimitable manner. Geoffrey and Bill were joint winners, with Gerry third.

The time had gone far too quickly, and Sexton Blake (who had 'come' at Cyril Rowe's invitation) had not time to 'speak' to us, but happily this interesting event can be enjoyed next month. Also we shall be celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the founding of St. Frank's with a talk by our resident expert, Jack Wood. So, the members dispersed with an enjoyable evening to look back on, and happy anticipation of another to come.

Next meeting Saturday, July 8th, 1967.

M. L. ALLISON
Hon. Sec.

LONDON

There was another successful and jolly garden party gathering on the occasion of the Ashford, Middlesex meeting on Sunday, June 18th. Following on to the Eastwood House one of happy memories, there was a good muster on one of the finest Sundays of the year. The host, Ben Litvak and his capable hostess wife, provided a very fine study feed out in the garden, amidst the fruit trees and with the song birds in attendance.

Roger Jenkins, librarian of the Hamilton books gave an excellent report; more postal borrowers can be accommodated. No Nelson Lee

report as Bob Blythe was on holiday in Wales.

The Sherlock Holmes pub dinner was discussed. Don Webster and Brian Doyle to get more particulars.

Len Packman gave details of the mini-bus which is to convey those members who signified their intention to use this transport, to the "Greyfriars," Wokingham meeting.

Ben Whiter's quiz was won by Millicent Lyle and Larry Morley, thirds were Bert Staples, Roy Parsons and Josie Packman.

Two readings from "The Boys' Cinema," by Larry Morley were Round the Campfire by William S. Hart and a paragraph about Charlie Chaplin and "The Kid." These were thoroughly enjoyed.

Bill Lofts then displayed the coloured cover of Best of Magnet and Gem, which will be on sale on July 7th by the Fleetway Publications. The price will be 3/6. This led to a very lengthy discussion and debate as to what period was the best in the history of those two papers. Roger Jenkins, Charlie Wright, Len Packman, Don Webster, Ray Hopkins were amongst those who voiced their opinions, all of which were different.

Ray Hopkins rendered a delightful Robinson Cleaver reading taken from his story "Short Term at Greyminster." Winding up the meeting, Don Webster read an article from a recent "Daily Mail" issue entitled "Speaking as one who wields the cane." Written by a north country headmaster, it invoked a lengthy debate on the subject of corporal punishment in the schools. A very good discussion ensued and probably it will be resumed at a future meeting when one and all can air their views re the subject at the old boys' books' schools.

With grateful thanks to the hosts and the many helpers it was time to wend our way homewards on a very delightful summer's evening.

Next meeting on Sunday, July 16th, at Greyfriars, Hollybush Ride, Wokingham, Berks. Kindly inform host, Eric Lawrence, if intending to be present.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

DEATH OF A VERY POPULAR AUTHOR

By W. O. G. Lofts

It is with very deep regret that I have to record the death of GEORGE E. ROCHESTER. I only learned of his passing on a recent visit to Fleetway House.

Older readers of the C.D. will remember that it was my privilege to meet Mr. Rochester several times, and to report in the C.D. full

details of his writings and various pen-names.

George E. Rochester won fame in juvenile fiction for his stories of the air. His work appeared in dozens of boys papers including serials in the MAGNET. The late Charles Hamilton once told me that his tales read 'like a smack of fresh air.' A former bomber pilot in the first world war he was shot down and became a prisoner of war, and so was able to write first hand authentic stories of flying and adventure.

A small man, who never got over the loss of his wife, Mr. Rochester seemed to lose interest in life, and, after suffering a stroke, plus a year living in the U.S.A. with a daughter, he entered a R.A.F. hospital where he eventually died.

Giving pleasure to millions of readers (he wrote over 75 books) George E. Rochester deserved a better and much happier life in his later years, but his readers will always have happy memories of his fine stories.

THE BEST OF MAGNET & GEM

We had hoped to be able to give you a review of the forthcoming publication "The Best of Magnet & Gem." Unfortunately, at the time of going to press, no copy of the keenly anticipated book has yet reached us.

"The Best of Magnet & Gem," published by Fleetway Publications, at 3/6, is due to be on sale in the shops from July 7th. All being well, we shall review it in our next issue.

WANTED: MAGNETS 1278 - 1284 (Egypt); 1573 - 1582 (Texas); 1589 - 1598 (South Seas).

W. HOWARD BAKER, 82 GIRDWOOD RD., PUDNEY, S. W. 18.

HAVE YOU YET COMPLETED AND RETURNED YOUR ENTRY FORM FOR
INCLUSION IN COLLECTORS' DIGEST WHO'S WHO FOR 1967?

THIS IS JUST A REMINDER THAT THE LAST DATE FOR RECEIVING
THE FORMS IS July 15th.

DON'T LEAVE IT TOO LATE!