

# COLLECTORS' DIGEST

APRIL 1968

5 SPLENDID STORIES INSIDE!

## The POPULAR

THE POPULAR IN ITS HEY-DAY

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Date  
November  
1926



THE NEW BOOT-BOY AT NICKEL

DON'T MISS THIS AMAZING STORY OF JIMMY SILLY

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# Collectors' Digest

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

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W. H. GANDER

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COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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## A CHAT WITH MY CHUMS

Conducted by  
**THE ADMIRAL**

### NEGLECTED FIELD? MY FOOT!

It appears that V. S.

Pritchett has written an autobiography of his childhood and adolescence, under the title "A Cab at the Door." The book has been reviewed in the Evening Standard by Mr. Michael Foot, with the heading "Horrors! Father's Burnt The Comics."

Mr. Foot started off with the following:

"George Orwell wrote a famous essay in which he exposed the snob-appeal and rubbishy content of those glamorous journals of our youth, The Magnet and The Gem. The indictment was contested at the time, and now fresh doubts arise in this neglected field of literary criticism."

Now, in the first place, George Orwell did not expose the "snob-appeal." He merely exposed his own prejudices and his ignorance of the stories which he was criticising. In the second place, he did not expose the "rubbishy" content of the Magnet and the Gem, for the content, so far as Charles Hamilton was concerned, was not rubbishy. Rubbishy stories could not and would not have won the affection of millions of boys and men for more than half a century.

As for the "neglected field" of literary criticism, well, I ask you. As we have mentioned often, the masses of articles which have poured from the pens of professional writers make us think that the motto of these gentlemen must be "When in doubt, have a bash at the Gem and the Magnet "

I don't know whether Mr. Pritchett's book hinges so much on the Magnet and Gem as Mr. Foot's review does. Mr. Foot concludes his review: "How could such rubbish arouse such love and such hate? Some of us old Magnet-addicts would like to know?"

So Mr. Foot was once a Magnet addict. Yet, apparently, he found nothing but snob-appeal and rubbish in the Magnet.

### MUSINGS

I wonder sometimes why some of these intellectuals - I suppose that is the right word to use - seem to have a passion for destroying, regardless of popular opinion, the happy memories of the very things which seemed so worth while in years gone by. And why, when they turn their attention to reading for youngsters, it is almost invariably the Hamilton world which they pin-point for attack. Is it just that the Magnet and Gem are the most loved British papers of all times - so they must be smeared?

Virginia Ironside, TV critic of the Daily Mail, writes in a very different strain. She says, of the Sexton Blake TV series: "If it were shown on Sunday afternoons when more people would have an opportunity to watch it, Sexton Blake could easily become a huge cult programme."

"Sexton Blake was the gentleman detective so popular with schoolboys in the late 20's and early 30's and someone involved in the series has been very sharp about it all and, instead of miserably updating it, has kept as close to the original as possible.

"A really splendid series. If not exactly the answer to Bonnie and Clyde, probably as near as the British will ever get to it."

Some of us, perhaps, will not quite go all the way with the lady in her acclaim of this TV series. But our hearts warm to Miss Ironside.

### BLOOD AND THUNDER?

One of our contributors last month alleged that, when we were children, our parents used to condemn the Magnet, and our loved papers, as "Penny Dreadfuls" and "Blood and Thunder." Well, my parents didn't, at any rate! I very much doubt whether yours did either.

As I have mentioned before, when I was too young to read for myself my sister used to read aloud to the whole family from the Gem. And I have often seen my father, bless his memory, sitting and chuckling over Dreamy Daniel and Butterfly Bill.

In fact, even when we were children, the terms "Penny

"Dreadful" and "Blood and Thunder" were old-fashioned. They had been used to refer to sensational Victorian papers.

Way back, very early in the century, Hamilton Edwards used to claim that the Boys' Friend had done much to eradicate Penny Dreadfuls from the bookstalls.

THE EDITOR.

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DEATH OF MRS. EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

We deeply regret to record the sudden death of Mrs. Edwy Searles Brooks, the wife of the famous Nelson Lee author who died just over two years ago. Mrs. Brooks had a heart attack while enjoying the sunshine on the green in front of her home at Norbury on March 15th. Cremation took place on March 19th, and Mr. Len Packman arranged for flowers to be sent to express the sympathy and sadness of the Old Boys' Book Club.

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WANTED : "Death on the Hit Parade" by Berkeley Gray. Also stories of Kestrel or Granite Grant in U.J. and S.B.L. Also Jim the Penman or Zingrave in Nelson Lee.

BLTYHE, 40 ELLESMERE RD., LONDON, N.W.10.

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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, 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.

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WANTED : GEM 805; MAGNETS 779, 782.

TOM PORTER, 1 TIMBERTREE ROAD, CRADLEY HEATH, WARLEY, WORCS.

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WANTED : "ADVENTURE;" "HOTSPUR;" "ROVER;" "WIZARD;" and their Annuals. However old or new, but particularly 1950 - 1964.

J. CALVERT, 67 BRAMERTON RD., BILBOROUGH, NOTTINGHAM, NG8. 4NN.

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WANTED : Boys' Friends. S A L E : 6 Gems (1931-2), 3 S.O.Ls (St. Frank's).

MACHIN, 38 ST. THOMAS ROAD, PRESTON.

# DANNY'S DIARY

April 1918

Rule Britannia! The Royal Navy has done a terrific job, and everybody is thrilled to death about it. Just the tonic we all needed. The navy made a raid on Zeebrugge, under Admiral Sir Roger Keyes. Several old ships, including H.M.S. Vindictive, filled with concrete, were sunk across the mouth of the harbour, thus bottling up much of the German fleet.

The Cedar Creek series - all the stories this month starring Beauclerc - have been just wonderful. It's hard to imagine what life used to be without Cedar Creek. The first story was "The Shadow of Fear." Beauclerc started on his journey to England where he is to be adopted by his uncle, an English earl. But when Beau reaches Kamloops, some inner voice tells him to go back to the old shack near Cedar Creek - and he is just in time to save his father from taking his own life.

Then, a new Beauclerc series. Beau goes to the aid of a man who is being attacked by Frisco Joe. This man's name is Trevelyan. However, when a new master, Mr. Trevelyan, comes to Cedar Creek, Beau senses that it is not the same man he aided.

Next week in "The Heir of Trevelyan," Lascelles Beauclerc, Beau's father, recognises the new master as one, Gerard Goring. Goring has kidnapped Trevelyan, who, unknowingly, is the heir to vast estates in England. Goring tries to bribe Mr. Beauclerc to aid him in the swindle, and Mr. Beauclerc is tempted.

The last story of the month "A Fortune at Stake" continued the Trevelyan series. Really first class reading.

Rookwood, also in the Boys' Friend, has also been pretty good. The first tale was "Put to the Proof," and Jimmy arranges a kind of test to make sure whether or not Lattrey has really reformed. Lattrey passes the test, and the fellows ask the Head to rescind the sentence of expulsion on Lattrey.

The next two tales were "Algy's Pal" and "Betrayed by His Chum." Algy's old friend from High Coombe comes as a new boy at Rookwood. He is a young waster who eventually shows himself in his true colours and opens Algy's eyes.

Last of the month "The Schoolboy Investors" was not a tale I liked much. It was about a scheme for buying War Savings Certificates.

A bus overturned at Hendon, and one person was killed and 18

were injured.

Tom Redwing is back at Greyfriars, and the whole month in the Magnet has been devoted to a new Tom Redwing series. The opening story was "Tom Redwing's Chance." To please his son, Mr. Vernon-Smith endows a scholarship at Greyfriars as a memorial to old Greyfriars boys lost in the war. Mr. Vernon-Smith goes to Cliff Edge, which is the nearest railway station to Hawkscliff, Tom Redwing's home, to see Redwing. At first, Tom is not too keen on entering for the school, as he wonders whether the Greyfriars fellows might disapprove.

In "Tom Redwing-- Hero," Redwing rescues Ponsonby who has fallen over a cliff. Pon pretends to be grateful, but in the next story, "Bunter to the Rescue," Pon is at the bottom of a dispickable plot to ruin Redwing's chances. The title of the last tale of the month "Tom Redwing's Win" tells what happened - and Redwing is back at Greyfriars for good.

We have been quite a lot to the pictures this month, and they have been good. Ivy Close and Gerald Ames were in "Missing the Tide." One evening we saw "The Whip" which was quite exciting. It is really the film of a stage play, and when it was on at Drury Lane there was actually a horse race on the moving stage. I wish I had seen it. But the picture was quite exciting.

Billie Burke and Thomas Meighan were in "The Mysterious Miss Terris," and I liked this one. Mary Pickford was in "Stella Maris." Mary Pickford has been ill, and on the newspaper placards they printed "World's Sweetheart Dying," but I think she is better now.

All the comic papers have also gone up to 1½d. I used to always have "The Firefly," but it was amalgamated with the Butterfly, and now I usually get the "Butterfly & Firefly." Butterfly Bill is on the front page, and T. E. Dunville (who used to be on the front page of the Firefly) is now inside. There are also Dicky Doenut; Beatrix Buttercup; Andy, the andy man; Tommy Dodd, the tricky traveller; Inspector Spot, and Rushing Rupert, the reckless reporter. Some of these came from the Firefly. Cheerful Charlie Brown is in a funny story each week, and Daring & Co are in a detective story. The serial is "The Mysterious Mr. Green" which is nearing its end, and a new serial called "Doing His Bit" is announced to start soon.

I also had the Funny Wonder this month, and, of course, Charlie Chaplin is on the front page. It also has a good navy

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serial entitled "O.H.M.S."

Finally, the Gem. The first two stories of the month were "A Drawn Game" and "The Three Minors." These continued the sports contest series, and they were grim. But the third story "Who Shall be Captain?" was a real winner. Blake had heard about the Greyfriars Remove having a captain, so he thought it high time that the Fourth at St. Jim's had one too. The trouble was that almost every fellow in the Fourth felt himself to be the one to fill the job. A tip-top tale.

Also very good and very amusing was the next tale "Spoofing the Shell." Though it was actually part of the sports contest (the form which can fool the others takes the points) it was deliciously written and a gem. Kerr won the event for the Fourth. If all the Contest series are like this one, I shall have no complaints. But I fear they won't be.

There is a new series in the Nelson Lee Library, and titles of the first two stories are "The New Housemaster" and "Hunter the Hun." Nelson Lee has to leave St. Frank's for a time, and Mr. Kennedy Hunter is appointed housemaster in his place. He is a man with very weird ideas, and a barring-out series seems to be on the way. It's all very exciting.

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(EDITORIAL COMMENT: "THE SCHOOLBOY INVESTORS," mentioned this month by Danny, was only the fourth substitute story of Rookwood ever to appear in the Boys' Friend.)

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LETTER TO DANNY (from a Colchester fan)

4th March 1968

Dear Danny,

Recently having the pleasure of again reading your delightful Christmas contribution to the 1964 Annual, I thought the enclosed cuttings would be of interest and revive happy memories of days long gone.

The market stalls have long since ceased to trade in the High Street, the Hippodrome is now the inevitable Bingo Hall, the old Vaudeville cinema still stands but now used for furniture storage, no Cups Hotel for a good meal, but at the Headgate cinema (now the Cameo) it is business as usual, and you will note from the cuttings that Gran's 'Bottles' station still operates.

Your trams have been replaced by a fleet of cream and brown buses but alas you would get no change from a shilling today, your

old journey would now cost you 3/-.

I would like you to know how much we have missed your articles in the recent Annuals, and trust our Editor will consider allowing you to contribute to the next edition, and should he ever contemplate dropping your efforts from the monthly Digest tell him your loyal supporters (with banners flying) will march in protest to his office.

In conclusion may I thank you for the pleasure your diary has provided, and trust the Editor has decided to book your spot in the forthcoming Annual.

Yours sincerely,  
Camulodinum

Our Colchester reader sent Danny an aerial view of the village of Layer Marney, where Danny's 'gran' lived long ago.

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W A N T E D : B.F.L. 1st series: Nos. 200, 403, 405, 514, 568, 633, 704, 708, 713. B.F.L. 2nd series: Nos. 105, 257, 261, 265, 269, 277, 455, 615. Union Jack: Nos. 431, 446, 720, 1501. S.B.L. 1st series: Nos. 265, 274, 282. S.B.L. 2nd series: Nos. 406, 683, 744. S.B.L. 3rd series: No. 6.

BLYTHE, 40 ELLESMERE RD., LONDON, N.W.10.

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The Jester 1928 - 38. £1 per copy offered.

Write: F. WESTWOOD, 9, CHEVIOT CLOSE, CHADDERTON, LANCS.

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W A N T E D : Magnet, Skipper, Hotspur, Wizard, Comics.

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

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FOR EXCHANGE: Wizards 2 (1938), 2 (1939); Rovers 1 (1927), 1 (1938); Startler No. 6 (1930); Thrillers Nos. 54 (1930, 310 (1935); Topical Times Nos. 305 (1925), 543 (1930); Young Britain's; Champion Annuals 1926, 1938, 1947, 1950.

W A N T E D : Dixon Hawke Libs. or any Thomson Papers 1939 - 1943.

MCMAHON, 54 HOZIER CRES., TANNOCHSIDE, UDDINGSTON.



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# HAMILTONIANA

Do You Remember?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 69 - Gem No. 432 - "In Spite of All"

The troubles that Nugent had with his minor at Greyfriars probably turned Charles Hamilton's mind towards creating the same sort of situation at St. Jim's, and this duly came about when Manners minor arrived in 1916. The situation in the Manners family was probably drawn more strongly than in Nugent's case, because Mr. Manners was very stern towards his elder son, and indulged the younger one, at the same time blaming Harry Manners for all Reggie's misdeeds. The drama was accordingly more intense at St. Jim's for, whereas Nugent was often worried and harassed by his younger brother, Manners was far more deeply involved.

Stories that featured Fifth-formers at St. Jim's often had an unusually dramatic theme, mainly because most of the prominent Fifth-formers were shady characters. Cutts had taken up Reggie Manners, who was useful to him as an unofficial fag, and a source of income from gambling. Yet the picture was not overdrawn: Cutts was depicted as having some good-natured feelings towards Manners minor until the juniors intervened suddenly and unexpectedly, after which Cutts's thoughts turned to revenge in a particularly unscrupulous way.

At this time, the St. Jim's stories had been reduced to about a dozen chapters each week, and it cannot be denied that the paper had lost some of its former glory. There were still plenty of incidents, but the intricate developments that took place in the earlier numbers, which made some of them seem like minor novels, were now no longer possible.

The story was illustrated by E. E. Briscoe, and although he was an artist of no inconsiderable ability in some spheres - he was particularly good at buildings - he was undoubtedly one of the least successful illustrators of St. Jim's juniors. Issues of the Gem that contained his work often seemed inferior because of the strangeness of the drawings. Perhaps "In Spite of All" would seem a more satisfactory story today if it had been accompanied by the well-loved illustrations of R. J. Macdonald.

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 122. IF..!

It was Kipling who, looking into the future, summed up various possibilities concerned with the little word "IF," and he ended on an optimistic note.

Whittier, more despondent, looked at the past, and observed:  
"For all sad words of tongue or pen,  
The saddest are these: 'It might have been!'"

Let us, for a couple of minutes, adopt Kipling's title, but follow the example of Whittier - and look back. To some extent I am writing tongue in cheek, for I am a bit of a fatalist.

Was it purely by chance that Charles Hamilton became the world's most prolific and greatest exponent of the school story? How did he first come to find his metier?

Unfortunately, nothing is extant of his earliest work. Did he, in his twenties, see a future for himself in school stories? In the Cedar Creek series, he tells us that he started off with tales of school life. Unhappily, the Cedar Creek yarns were not autobiographical in the slightest degree. They were fiction to the last detail, and cannot be regarded as anything else.

All the very earliest of his work which we have ever seen comprised tales of adventure. It may have been the success of his few school stories in Pluck which caused him to concentrate on fiction of this type. If St. Jim's had not been a success in Pluck, would his school yarns ever have found their way into the Gem? Was it merely chance which changed his direction from vivid adventure to ivy-clad schools?

The Gem was put on the market as a paper for adventure stories. Why was the plan changed? If Tom Merry had never been created, would the Gem have remained an adventure paper?

Why did the editor decide to close down St. Jim's in Pluck, transferring it to the Gem and amalgamating Clavering with it? Why did not the editor suggest that both schools should continue at the same time, Hamilton writing both. St. Jim's in Pluck, Clavering in the Gem. The obvious explanation is that the editor did not think it possible for one man regularly to handle two series at the same time. A year later, when Greyfriars started, he knew his man better.

If Tom Merry had not gone to St. Jim's and St. Jim's not been transferred to the Gem, would St. Jim's have lasted and would the Gem have been the longest-lived of all the Hamilton papers.

My instinctive answer to both these "ifs" is no!

Clearly if the two world wars had not occurred, the history of boys' papers would have been vastly different from what it is. If there had been no war, it is unlikely that Hinton would ever have become the editor of the Boys' Friend. Hinton was an enthusiastic Hamiltonian. Because Hinton became war-time editor of the Friend, Rookwood was created. And, because Rookwood was created, Hamilton had less time to devote to the Gem and Magnet.

Hamilton Edwards had been editor of the Boys' Friend for many years. For some reason or other, he left the services of the Amalgamated Press in 1912. We don't know exactly why, but he sent elaborately printed letters to all his authors and colleagues to let them know that he was going. If he had stayed on, it is quite unlikely that Rookwood would ever have become the mainstay of the Friend.

Through the courtesy of Bob Blythe, I have been privileged to browse over some of the letters sent and received by E. S. Brooks just before the first world war. In one of them, the editor of the Gem urges Brooks to give more warmth to the St. Jim's characters when using them, and to make them more in line with the originals.

In passing, the use of that word "warmth" struck me. In some ways it was warmth which was lacking in Hamilton's own characterisation in the Magnet's closing years.

But to go back to the letter. Most of us would commend the editor who wrote to Brooks in that strain. Surely we should have had much better substitute stories if that editor had remained at the helm. But only a year or two later, Pentelow was writing some tales for the Magnet and Gem, and most readers would agree that his style and Hamilton's were poles apart.

All the same, one can go back to the very early Gem - for instance, No. 100 which contained "Kildare of St. Jim's" - and find just an occasional sub story which was as harsh as a cinder track and as cold as an ice-box. And one recalls that appalling Boys' Friend Library of St. Jim's - "The Silent Three."

It seems odd that the editorial office passed "Kildare of St. Jim's" and "Silent Three," yet a year or two later admonished Brooks about a lack of warmth in his St. Jim's writing. Probably it was a different editor.

If the mould from which Coker was produced had been broken after the great Horace was created - or if Horace had not been

successful - we should probably never have had to endure Grundy of St. Jim's, Gunner of Rookwood, and that other chap.

The second world war was, of course, the great guillotine. It destroyed the world of boys' papers as we knew it. If war had not come in the autumn of 1939, there is no reason to think that the Magnet and the Gem would not have continued for many years more. The Magnet certainly would have done. There would have been no stiff-covered Bunter books.

The Gem, possibly, was less hale and hearty than the Magnet, but it was a paper of enormous tradition. It might have faded out in the next year or two - it might even have been amalgamated with the Magnet. But it was a resilient old paper, and giant circulations were not necessary in those days to keep a paper going. More than likely the Gem would have bounced back, as it had done before, and it might have gone on for many more years.

There is no limit to what might have happened if ---. All the way down the years, there are so many things that might have taken place - if.

If we accept Whittier's mournful comment that the saddest words in our language are "it might have been," we can cheer ourselves up with the thought that there is something to be said for the words "it might have been worse."

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#### CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

CHARLES CHURCHILL: I cannot agree with you that Handy is just a crib of Grundy and Coker. He is much more of a diverse character than either of the latter.

In all the recent talk about blaming Handforth for the closing down of the Lee, so many people have missed the vital point I think. The failure of the Lee was due to the switching of the main interest from Nelson Lee and Nipper who were the stars, in the old series, to others including Handforth. Handy was a good character in the early days, when he was a supporting one. Later on he seemed to be the main character and Lee and Nipper took something of a back seat. Handforth was very good in smaller doses, but when he was the star week after week one tended to tire of him.

You seem to agree with me by saying the best of the Lee appeared many years prior to 1933 and is the very point I make.

Re the blaming of the author, I fail to appreciate why this should be so. Surely authors have to more or less follow a line

laid down by the Editor. Author and Editor no doubt would get together from time to time to decide policy. I seem to remember this mentioned in "Between Ourselves," although I cannot put my hand on it at the moment. I'm positive Brooks said somewhere "the Editor and I have been putting our heads together" - etc. etc.

I am rather vague as to when the different Editors took over, but it is significant that the Lee did not fail while under the direction of the Editor in power before 1930.

BILL LOFTS: Staff members of the Amalgamated Press have told me that it was the policy of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY in the late 20's and early 30's to plug Handforth in the stories as much as possible. This order came from a Director who took the view that as Bunter had practically made the MAGNET by his amusing brilliant characterisation, likewise Handy could boost the NELSON LEE LIBRARY to a healthy circulation. It is possible that because of this policy, readers who may have tolerated Handy in small doses took exception to having him in large chunks, and began to dislike him. Although editors are far from blameless, and have to take the blame when a paper goes wrong, E. S. Brooks has always blamed the editorial policy on the end of the N.L.L. There are two sides to every question, and until we hear the other side and then weigh up the evidence, I think we should not take sides. Certainly from all accounts, the writings of E.S.B. in the last few years of the Lee leave much to be desired. Therefore it is logic to assume that readers at that time completely ignorant of editorial matters, dropped the Lee because of its poor writings. E.S.B. must take a large share of the blame.

LEN WORMULL: I am on the side of Peter Hanger in thinking that 1925 deserves a place in the Golden Age of the Magnet. The first Rebel Series, Bunter Court, and the Loder Captain Series, show Hamilton at his superb best. They have long been favourites of mine. Had the year produced only one outstanding series, I would have acquiesced. But not with three. However, I fully agree with your remarks on padding in the later Magnets. I well remember the irritation felt having to skip columns of tedious conversation. It is true that there were many fine stories towards the end but, as Roger Jenkins says, after 1935 it ceased to be truly great.

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# NELSON LEE COLUMN

CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD

## E.S.B. AND THE "MAGAZINE PROGRAMME"

As it has been seen, from the letter from E.S.B. to his brother, Arthur, Edwy's first story to be published was "The Phantom Volcano" in Yes or No in 1909. However, all copies at the British Museum were destroyed during the war so there's not much we can discover about this paper. Still, we have the original manuscripts, and a copy will be made available to club members in the not too distant future.

In view of the impossibility of throwing any light on "Yes or No" we must turn our attention to the next best thing. And what could be more appropriate than his second story to be published, "The Plague of Weeds." As we have seen, this was published in the Magazine Programme. So let's look at this paper. But first a few background details.

The Grand Theatre, Swansea was, in 1909, and may still be, one of the biggest theatres in the town. Between 1905 and 1909 the manager was Edwy's eldest brother, Edward Oswald. During his reign many famous actors appeared. Among those that I, at least, recognised were Owen Nares, Martin Harvey, and Montague Love. Obviously well known in their time were the following, some of whom you may recognise, Edward Compton, Bertram Wallis, Laurence Irving and Edward Lytton. Lovers of Gilbert and Sullivan will also be interested to learn that the D'Oyley Carte Company's first touring company appeared there with Sydney Granville and Henry A. Lytton.

Among the plays that have a particular interest for us are two Sexton Blake's and two Sherlock Holmes plays. The Sexton Blake plays were "Sexton Blake Detective" with Murray Yorke as S.B. and Will Glaze as Tinker. This was in August 1907, the other appeared in August 1910. This was "Hush Money, or the Disappearance of Sexton Blake." Leigh Courtney and Harry Hartley played the parts of S.B. and Tinker respectively. The Sherlock Holmes plays were "The Speckled Band" with Julian Rose as Holmes and Bellenden Clarke as Watson, and "Sherlock Holmes" with H. Hamilton Stewart as Holmes and Eric Morden as Watson; both were presented in 1910.

E.O. Brooks finally left the Grand Theatre, for pastures anew in the film world. Before he left, however, a special performance

was put on in his honour. A notice in the Magazine Programme has this to say:-

Monday Dec. 20th 1909

Grand Anniversary Night

To commemorate the completion of the 5th year of Edward O. Brooks' management of the Grand Theatre, and to form a complimentary testimonial to him as Lessee and Manager.

Interesting as all that might be to the Theatre historian, we have yet to come to the Magazine Programme and E.S.B.'s contribution.

For five years, between 1906 and 1911 the Grand Theatre issued the Magazine Programme of 16 pages, and sold it at 1d. at each performance. From the first, apart from advertisements and details of the play and cast list it contained an article of general interest. However, in 1909/10 Edwy's brother, Arthur, was editor and so it came about that Edwy, who was not having much success with getting his stories published, was offered the chance of earning some pocket money by writing a short story for the Magazine. This was "The Plague of Weed," and it appeared in four weekly parts, between April and May 1909. His imagination worked overtime in this story, which told what happened to Swansea when a bottle containing a new and amazing plant fertiliser gets broken. The resulting vapour gradually spread in the wind all over Swansea. Before the inhabitants knew what was happening, giant weeds began to sprint up, ordinary flowers grew to enormous sizes and the trees just weren't true!

In spite of efforts by the authorities, the spread of flora was too fast and so, very shortly, instead of a flourishing town there was a flourishing jungle. Needless to say, the professor turns up trumps with an antidote, and gradually the town returns to normal.

The story must have gone down well because the whole story was repeated in one issue, the week following the last episode.

As a result of the success of this story, Brooks was asked to write another serial of six parts. This was entitled "The Golden Jaguar" an adventure concerning the theft, not of an early acquisition of Lady Docker, but of a gold statuette of a member of the cat family.

After this, just for variety, a six part serial appeared

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written by Merrick E. Maynard called "The Lucky Smash" which was a boy-meets-girl romance, and in case you're wondering how Merrick E. Maynard got into this article, and in case you hadn't guessed, it's E.S.B. in disguise.

By this time, Edwy was well established and so he was able to commence a series of humorous stories around an eccentric character called Claude Crankimoor. This series started in February 1910 and went on for 23 weeks until July 1910.

Around the same period, and in addition to the above, he was also contributing a small 600 word series of articles, all of which had as its subject - laughter, and all used the word "laughter" in its title, i.e. "Laughter at the Seaside," "Laughter on Ghosts," etc. For this series he used the nom-de-plume "Merryfellow" and immediately following, he acted as "London Correspondent" in which he reported on happenings in the capital, and signed himself Llundain Gymdn!!

After Claud Crankimoor came another long series of humorous short stories built around two tramps, Jeremiah Janks and Mouldy. For this series, which lasted for sixteen episodes, E.S.B. used the pen name of Edser Rivers!!

We are now in November 1910 and with the end of these humorous short stories came a serial of seven parts called "The Test," a story of highwaymen.

Another serial of six parts, an adventure yarn, this time set in Africa, followed entitled "The Cave of Spiders." From some notes I have found, Mr. Brooks intended to write four serials on the same lines, i.e. adventures in Africa, but for some reason they never materialised. The pen name this time was C. Gordon Chambers.

Edwy's last contribution to the "Magazine Programme" was the "Three Avengers," using once again the nom-de-plume of Edser Rivers. This serial ran from March until June 1911 and with volume 4 No. 28 dated 17th June 1911, E.S.B. severed his connection with this magazine. By this time, of course, he was well established in the "Gem," writing "The Iron Island." Although his writing for the "M.P." had not been rewarding financially, it had been a most useful training ground and served as a good apprenticeship to the much harder world of boys' papers in general. Arthur maintained his interest in Edwy's work. Many years later it was he who suggested the formation of the St. Frank's League. He died tragically in a car crash in 1937.



They were the greatest of friends, and Edwy always remembered with gratitude the opportunity his brother had given him in those very early days when he was struggling hard to earn a living by his writings.

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Excellent photographs of Edwy Searles Brooks, suitable for framing, are available from Mr. Bob Blythe at 10/6 which includes postage and packing. Mr. Blythe's address is 40, Ellesmere Rd., London, N.W.10.

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### REVIEW

"BILLY BUNTER'S CONVICT"

Frank Richards  
(Merlin Books 2/6)

This is a reprint of Schoolboys' Own Library No 211, and is a pruned version of what is generally known as the Eric Gilmore series and which appeared in three Magnets of early 1928. It is an excellent story, and makes pleasant reading, especially for those who are unacquainted with the full-length original.

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AM I OUT OF STEP?

Asks Len Wormull

There can be no denying that ROVER AND WIZARD has made history. The last of the old brigade, united in victory, and still spurning the picture-strips. All very commendable, good value for money, and a credit to all concerned.

If I cannot shout hurrah it's because I am still puzzling out what sent them to the top. But then I am biased. Try as I would to like the Thomson papers, we were clearly not made for each other. And my bone of discontent was those school stories. Ugh! They kept driving me up the wall and over into A.P. territory. They weren't really school stories at all, just a lot of near-morons larking about against a school background. You probably know the types, but here's a few of them: Squinty Walker, Spoofer Taylor, Dodger Wilson, Wily Watkins, The Stormy Orphans. They ate into the pages like locusts, piling crudity upon crudity. Every few weeks more of their breed would arrive to perpetuate the potty pranks.

Japes? They hadn't a clue! Take this random sample from ADVENTURE, 1931: These two Ginger Nuts of Monksdene College

# BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

27, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22.

## PEDRO HITS THE HEADLINES

from Gerry Allison

Under the heading "Disgruntled Bloodhound" the Yorkshire Post this week had the following - written by Northerner II:-

"ONE of the TV programmes I don't see as often as I should like is the Sexton Blake serial. It comes on at 5.20 on Monday evenings, when I'm chained to my desk and the leg-irons are beginning to chafe.

But I have managed to catch two or three episodes, and the character who fascinates and at the same time puzzles me is Pedro, Sexton Blake's bloodhound.

In one episode Blake's assistant, Tinker, along with Pedro and a girl, was trapped in a dark tunnel. Suddenly the girl gave a scream. "Something," she told Tinker tremulously, "ran over my feet."

"Rats," explained Tinker succinctly.

Pedro's response to a word which I should have thought would make a bloodhound's blood boil was absolutely nil. No hint of excitement animated his sad-sack features. No twitch of the pendulous ears betrayed that he'd even heard what Tinker said.

Are rats, I asked myself, beneath a bloodhound's contempt, then? Do bloodhounds leave such small fry to terriers?

On further acquaintance with Pedro I realised that his lack of response is a permanent feature of his behaviour. Blake and Tinker do their best to get him into the act. "Let's go, Pedro!" they bark, or, "After him, Pedro!" but its water off a duck's back.

If Pedro troubles to give them a glance its a weary, bored, disenchanted glance, which I interpret to mean: "Do me a favour, chaps. Knock it off, I'm just not in the mood."

In short, although Pedro is in the serial he is not of it, and I've been pondering the reason for his almost total lack of interest in all the excitement that goes on around him.

It may simply be that he's fed to the teeth with the tiresome mechanics of film-making. They involve hours of hanging about on the players' part while the cameramen, lighting experts,

sound-mixers and the rest of the technicians get ready to start shooting. Human actors can pass the time by manicuring their nails, reading thrillers, doing cross-words, answering their fan-mail and drinking pink gins. But these hobbies are not open to a bloodhound.

He just has to lie around until he's actually needed on the set, and who can blame him if, by that time, his boredom is beginning to show?

An alternative theory is that Pedro is a Method actor of the morose Marlon Brando breed. When Tinker barks: "Let's go, Pedro!" the hound's apparent lack of response may be a masterpiece of restrained and subtle acting.

We could perhaps appreciate this better if the director had the wit to give us a close-up of Pedro's face, and let us see the emotion which he is expressing with his eyes alone.

However, I think I've devined what makes Pedro tick. As he conceives his role in the Sexton Blake outfit he is entirely mis-cast. He doesn't see himself as one of your feverishly active, track-'em-down, seize-'em bloodhounds. He sees himself as the canine counterpart of Mycroft Holmes, of whom brother Sherlock said:

"You wonder why it is that Mycroft does not use his powers for detective work. He is incapable of it."

"But," said Dr. Watson, "I thought you said ----!"

"I said that he was my superior in observation and deduction. If the work of the detective began and ended in reasoning from an armchair, my brother would be the greatest criminal agent that ever lived. But he has no ambition and no energy. He would not even go out of his way to verify his own solutions."

That is Pedro's kind of detective. He thinks he ought to be sitting in Sexton Blake's armchair reasoning, whilst Blake and Tinker do all the leg-work.

The way things are now, he feels he's leading a dog's life and makes no bones about showing it. It's high time the script-writers gave Pedro a fair crack of the whip."

. . . . .

The above article so amused me that I wrote to Northerner II, and sent him a copy of the Sexton Blake Library which carries a fine portrait of Pedro as a front cover. (No. 71 New Series, "The Bloodhound's Revenge" by W. Murray Graydon, dated 30/11/26). It was from our club library, and happens to be in perfect condition,

with the staples removed, the pages re-bound, and the covers protected by transpaseal.

I suggested that Northerner II might like to compare the appearance of Pedro today with his looks in 1926.

Well, I received a most appreciative letter in reply, which began:-

Dear Mr. Allison, Bless you for sending me "The Bloodhound's Revenge." Took me right back.....

The letter finished - "Have you seen in tonight's Evening Post that your President is coming to England this year? For the opening of the new musical "Odds on Jeeves."

That I thought was a very nice quid pro quo, but the matter did not end there. Two days later, a further article appeared in the Yorkshire Post - the title was "The Bloodhound's Revenge." Look out for a reprint of it in next month's Collectors' Digest.

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BLAKE ON TELEVISION

By Deryck Harvey

Rediffusion's television series featuring Sexton Blake has had its critics, and Laurence Payne has been suggested as one of the actors least likely to take the title role. But is it possible any longer to portray the Great Detective successfully on screen?

Personally, I doubt it. It could be that Blake's very own Baker Street image is against the dash he should cut to ascend the audience popularity ratings. Too many viewers may see him as a dated hero, reappearing perhaps too soon after the reign of the spies and special agents.

The Great Detective's appeal has always lain in the fact that he is an "ordinary man's" hero, a fellow who uses his powers of observation and intelligence to a remarkably acute degree. Partly, the basis of his popularity has been his readers' identification with their idol.

This is exactly the point. The spies and secret agents have taken the adventure yarn several stages farther beyond the realms of possibility. Whereas Blake has always largely depended upon his plausibility, contemporary heroes are deliberately incredible and incredulous.

Ronald Marriott, Rediffusion's producer, and his team, have cannily set the new series in the 1920s, where Blake is less

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obviously to be seen competing with the newcomers. The danger here was that the series would appear not only a period piece but a museum piece as well.

Let me declare at once, as a younger Blake enthusiast, that I feel this danger to have been overcome quite cleverly. The fact that the series is set in period seems positively one of its strengths; not only are the characters more credible, but so is the formula that contains them.

The real difficulty of depicting Blake on screen is that he is unlikely to measure up to one's mental image of him, conjured from so many books. Mr. Payne's portrayal gets better the more you watch it, but if he cannot shape up to a legend, that is hardly an actor's fault!

His detective emerges as a man of intellect and tolerance far more than a man of action. Necessarily, on screen, Blake has to be his own narrator, detailing each problem before spelling out its conclusion. This tends to hold the action back.

A surprise of the series has been the undoubted success of Roger Foss' Tinker. Simply, it works: yet it is next to impossible to imagine one of today's super-heroes with a Cockney youth - or any youth at all - for his aide. Thankfully, Tinker will never be sophisticated.

But generally, and this is particularly true of television, a character can only be as good as his script. Max Oberman's four-part serial, "The Great Tong Mystery," which ended in December, was noticeably very much better than that which got the series under way a few weeks previously.

I seem to remember Blake fighting the fiendish Chinese (as opposed to the respectable Chinese) on other occasions; and in a pre-war film, "Sexton Blake and the Hooded Terror," which I was lucky enough to see earlier this year, the arch villain was similarly named the Scorpion.

No, it is not the period, nor necessarily the stories, that make it (perhaps) impossible to bring Blake to life on television. What baulks may be the longer-standing enthusiast's preconception of the Great Detective, probably mingled with nostalgia for many pleasant reading hours long past.

Well, I, for one, do not believe in living in the past, and Blake has never done so. After 70 years, several generations of Blake enthusiasts must have formed their own impressions of the fellow. I hope that future generations have the chance of doing so, both in books and on the television.

THE MAN WHO MADE SEXTON BLAKE

By C. A. J. Lowder

(continued)

Let us say that Blyth was a well-respected writer, who used detective themes to advantage in his work - for, certainly, if we take my five tales as in any way representative of his output, Blyth seems to have more of a predilection than most of his colleagues for the hero who has been wrongly accused of some crime, even if it not always a detective, as such, who in the end sorts out the wrongdoer from the innocent.

But detectives, in the late '80s and early '90s of the last century were very well received in even the politest society. It was the era of Fergus Hume, Conan Doyle, Lawrence L. Lynch, Dick Donovan, James M'Govans, and many more. Doubtless the enterprising Editor of the Marvel saw in his mind's eye the gold that could be mined from this particular source.

By 1893 Sherlock Holmes had appeared in three books, with a second series of short stories still running in the Strand Magazine; "Dick Donovan," a very popular success of the time, had written a number of tales, more or less fictional, centred around himself; Bracebridge Hemyng's Jack Harkaways, pere et fils, were ensconced in the public's affections.

Obviously, the thing to do was to create a series. Not a serial, with ending - but an emulation of the Holmes saga that could, if necessary, be carried on ad infinitum, or as long as it remained popular. And, of course, popularity could always be boosted by making the detective - such, because of his appeal, was the obvious choice - into a real person.

So - "Some time ago we arranged with Mr. Sexton Blake, the celebrated detective..." So - "Long ago and with irresistible acclaim the world gave Gideon Barr, the famous detective..." What could be simpler?

We can say, then, that Blake was created for a market, and that, to a certain extent, he was based on Sherlock Holmes.

But based on Holmes only in that Conan Doyle had proved that such a series could justify itself, and the Editor of the Marvel was keen on, so to speak, cashing in on the former's triumph - a not unreasonable desire on his part.

However, to say that Blake was nothing more than a carbon copy of Holmes would be foolish in the extreme. The man who ran the Marvel was Editor enough to realize that such a reproduction, if it was ever envisaged, could only end in disaster for Blake. And

a swift one at that. The public can only take in a certain amount of overlapping.

It is probable that, at this stage in the Editor's reading of the case, the idea of two, or more, chroniclers for his pet detective, first came to mind. For two or three different styles of writing would convincingly demolish any reader's grouse that the only thing "different" about Sexton Blake was his Christian name. But that, again, is conjecture.

I do think it probable, however - extremely so, in fact, even with the scanty evidence at our disposal - that Blake was "made to last."

How else can one explain the continual references to him in the text of the Editor's weekly column? Of course, this can, I suppose, be accounted for by the fact that, in those days, anything that could be brought in to increase the popularity of a character, and consequently improve the sales of the paper in which he was appearing, was considered fair game. But the references to Blake are too numerous for this explanation to hold much water.

Nelson Lee, who was to continue in his career for another 38 years, never had as much publicity - and he, too, was a Marvel creation, and a recognizably good one at that. Gideon Barr, out of the same stable, at the same time, with the same glare of lights upon him, probably didn't even survive the decade. And what ever happened to the rest of the detective force of the Marvel - Andrew Foster, Donald Clifford (the "Sea Detective"), Arthur Raymond, and others too numerous to mention? Well, some ended up at the altar-rail when the case had finished - but this fate did not happen to all. Most just appeared for one issue, then faded into oblivion.

And the only reason for this - that I can give - was that the Editor of the Marvel simply was not interested. He had his own particular "white hope" - Sexton Blake.

Perhaps, on the understanding that we must not probe too deeply, it might be as well to take a brief look at the mind - the soul, if you wish - that drives the average Editor.

Because of his very position, he can be said to be of a breed apart from the normal journalist or writer. He continually has to justify his existence. And to do this he has to have an original mind; he has to be always on the lookout for new ideas which he can fashion to the requirements of his own particular paper or journal - to make it better than the rest. (to be continued)

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

JOHN McQUADE (Didsbury): I would like to say how much I enjoy reading Collectors' Digest, especially the sections on Charles Hamilton, Danny's Diary, and the News of the Clubs.

BILL LOFTS (London): I am somewhat puzzled as to what exactly Christopher Lowder is getting at in his article. There is certainly no mystery about Harry Blyth or his writings. Indeed; I have gathered enough information about him through the years to almost write his biography. Briefly, before his Harmsworth writings he was a crime-reporter, editor, and publisher, having his own Harry Blyth's Christmas Annual each year. According to the official history of Sexton Blake in the records of FLEETWAY PUBLICATIONS, W. H. Back a former Director was the man who put Sexton Blake right on his path to fame. Not only did he use him first in the U.J. as a weekly feature, but he was the man who suggested and brought out the famous SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY in 1915. Whilst I agree that Deryck Harvey has good points on the merits of Sexton Blake on T.V., it cannot be too strongly emphasised that this programme is a children's programme. According to Fleetway, and the T.V. contractors, it is highly successful, and lots of further series are contemplated. Personally, as an adult, I find Blake is too short, Tinker too big, and Mrs. Bardell completely miscast, dear old Pedro being nothing more than an ornament.

P. N. JENKINSON (Harrow-on-the-Hill): I read with interest the article on the two Merlin Bessie Bunter books. Having just read "Bessie Bunter of Cliff House School," before I read the two Merlin books, I also noticed the big character change in Bessie Bunter, because of the different writers. I did not like them very much.

Miss E. B. FLINDERS (Hitchin): I hadn't come across the Cliff House stories in the Merlin books. As a little girl I took the "School Friend" every week. The world of Cliff House was more real and much nicer than the real world. It was these stories made me want to illustrate school stories. I was already working for the Amal. Press when "Cliff House" was reintroduced into the 'Schoolgirl.' I was very disappointed that so many characters were changed. As you know Mr. Ransome wrote most of the first series and John Wheway the second, but although the second lot of stories were written with more efficiency they lacked the feeling and humour of Mr. Ransome's. I like to think it was me that

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brought Jemima Carstairs back into the stories. Three people wrote about this character. She started her career at Morcove. It was her father, Captain Carstairs who was the famous playwright and the Morcove stories were about one of his plays. In the end Jemima got rather badly burned rescuing it from the school furnace. Her father took her away from Morcove and sent her to Cliff House. She was my favourite character there - lazy, clever and humorous. Mabel Lynn was always the best actress and Barbara Redfern was a good all-rounder. It seems to be a pity to alter the characters like this. It is much better to have a new school altogether than offend all the old readers.

FRANK CASE (Bramcote): It occurred to me that the following extract from a review in the "New Statesman" of Feb 23rd, might be of interest.

'He reads them all day. Dozens of them. Dirty things.'

'Where are they? Bring them down,' said my father. I went upstairs and came back with about twenty or thirty grubby "Magnets" and "Gems."

'Good godfathers' said my father, not touching the pile, for he hated dust and dirt. 'I give you your Saturday penny, and that is what you are doing with it. Wasting the money I earn. I suppose you think you are so superior because you have a father who has his own business, and you spend right and left on muck like this.'

'I borrowed them. A boy lent them to me.'

'A man is known by the company he keeps,' said my father. And getting up, his face greenish with disgust, he threw the lot in the fireplace and set fire to them.

From 'A cab at the door' by V.S. Pritchett

A partial explanation, no doubt, of why surviving 'grubby "Magnets" and "Gems"' fetch such prices today --

A passing thought: upon re-reading the above, it strikes me the writer's father was rather inconsistent; as he hated dust and dirt, he would not touch the papers, but he apparently had no compunction about throwing them in the fire. By remote control, possibly --

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SALE: Gems, N. Lees, S. O. Libs., S. Blakes, Marvels, Boys Friend Libs., Bunter Books, Annuals. S.A.E. please. No callers.

F. BOTTOMLEY, 48 DOWNHILLS PARK ROAD, LONDON, N.17.

# NEWS OF THE CLUBS

## NORTHERN

### Meeting held March 9th, 1968

Elsie Taylor opened the meeting - deputizing for the chairman - called away suddenly by the serious illness of his mother. Also Jack Wood acted for the secretary who is still enjoying a temperature of 96% in Australia. Lucky lass!

After the minutes and the month's correspondence had been dealt with, the librarian had some interesting news. Following a letter of his in the Yorkshire Post, protesting against a reference in a cricket article to 'the fevered imaginations of contributors to GEM and MAGNET,' Gerry was visited by a reporter.

A long and excellent article on the club, with a good photo of the librarian appeared in the Yorkshire Post on Friday, February 23rd. Over two dozen letters resulted, bringing two new club members. A lady in Headingley offered us the use of her 'large elegant drawing room for our meetings.'

Finally, the B.B.C. telephoned Gerry, and asked if he would appear on their programme 'Look North.' As Gerry's doctor advised against this, Geoffrey Wilde has stepped into the breach, and a programme is to be filmed with books from the club library, and from Geoffrey's own collection.

We then got down to the evening's programme. Item 1 was called JUST A MINUTE. Members drew a slip giving a topic on which they had to speak for 60 seconds. Some were hobby subjects - "Why I Enjoy School Stories," or others such as "Would I Find Retirement Boring." At the end every member voted for the three talks they thought the best. Winners were (1) Elsie Taylor - 'My favourite composer', (2) Tom Roach 'A Detective Story I Remember'; (3) Harry Lavender 'Comic Papers'.

Then followed a word game where each member provided a clue which had to be built up letter by letter. Example: A FAT BOY YOU COULD EAT. Gerry Allison won, and Ron Hodgson and Myra Allison tied for second place.

After much needed refreshments and conversation, the last item was a very amusing article from a local paper entitled "Real Boys' Friend Stuff." This described the romantic rise of Leeds United, with a vivid description of the Cup Final at Wembley on May 8th, written in the style of the Boys' Friend Library. This brought

the meeting to a hilarious end. Next meeting Saturday April 13th.  
The Annual General Meeting.

NORTHERNER III

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MERSEYSIDE

Meeting held Sunday, March 10th.

The highlight of this meeting was the visit of Tom Porter. Tom had taken the opportunity of his visit to Liverpool to have a look at our Cathedrals before coming to the meeting. I was pleased about this, not just because of the Cathedrals, but I was a little afraid that the sparse attendance of our meetings might make him feel that his journey was a waste of time. I ought to have known better of course. Tom realises our position, and he himself is such a good O.B.B.C. man that his mere presence at a meeting is sufficient to make it worth while holding that meeting. I think he must be the most travelled member of all the clubs. If it was ever decided to appoint a roving ambassador for the O.B.B.C. then I have no doubt that Tom Porter would qualify for the job.

O.B.B.C. matters in general were discussed. We all agreed that for any club to succeed its members must not only be loyal but also tolerant. Some meetings are bound to be disappointing. As Tom himself put it, if he had been discouraged by a bad meeting he would have left his club years ago.

Tom brought his usual quiz along and this was won by Jim Walsh with Pat Laffey and I sharing second place. Tom unfortunately had to leave early to catch his train back to Birmingham. I would like to thank him on behalf of all our members for coming. He is, and always will be, a very welcome visitor.

I would like to refer to our February meeting. Unfortunate circumstances prevented the sending in of the report. It would be wrong, however, to pass it by without mentioning that we had the pleasure of Frank Case's company once again. Frank is never considered to be a visitor in the normal sense of the word. He is one of our best members and it is bad luck for those of us on Merseyside that he should be living so far away.

We were also pleased to welcome Mr. Cunliffe of St. Helens who is a Thomson papers fan and also had a good collection of comics, some of which we had the pleasure of seeing. I hope that in time he will become one of our regular members.

Bill Gally in his quiz took us on a celestial journey. I am afraid, however, that most of us were lost amongst the galaxies and it was good to get back to earth to Frank Unwin's always popular criss-cross quiz. Unfortunately time prevented us from completing this.

The postman brought us all a pleasant surprise in the shape of Frank Unwin's newsletter. There is no doubt that when Frank gets to work he can produce the goods and his latest effort was every bit as good as any previous Foghorn.

The next meeting will be on SUNDAY, APRIL 7th at 6.30 p.m.

BILL WINDSOR

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MIDLAND

Meeting held February 27th, 1968

The attendance was lower than for some time; only eight were present.

There was a spate of correspondence from absent members and Bill Morgan though absent donated the raffle prizes.

The Anniversary number this month was unusual - The Thriller No. 421 dated 27th Feb. 1937, and the Collectors' item was also unusual for it was Peg's Paper No. 228, a 1923 issue of a well-known girls' paper. Both these items were brought along by Tom Porter.

It was an informal evening and Ivan Webster did a few jingles on the piano at the start of the proceedings.

A film presented by George Chatham on "The Ponsnett Railway" was shown with appropriate musical background. This was a fascinating film because of its local interest and the meeting appreciated very much George Chatham's effort in bringing it along. There will be another film at the March meeting on the narrow gauge railways of Wales.

There was an excellent talk on his collection of press cuttings, letters from hobbyists, etc. Ray has an unusual approach to the hobby and in this talk quite lived up to his reputation. It reminded members of Harry Broster's Black Book and Jack Corbett's scrap book. It is to be hoped that Ray will give us another talk and show us another selection of cuttings in the near future.

There is a change from the arranged programme next month when the treasurer was to have been in charge of the proceedings.

Instead the meeting will be an informal one and the film already

mentioned will be shown. This will be on 26th March at the Birmingham Theatre Centre.

J. F. BELLFIELD  
Correspondent.

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LONDON

There was a note of sadness at the Cricklewood meeting on Sunday, March 17th when the chairman, Len Packman, told of the passing of Francis Brooks, another link with the past severed. Mrs. Brooks had been very helpful to the club re her late husband, Edwy Scharles Brooks', manuscripts etc. Thanks to Len Packman, a suitable sheath of flowers was sent on behalf of club and another on behalf of Len and Josie Packman, Bob and Laura Blythe.

Librarians, Roger Jenkins and Bob Blythe told of continued good progress in both their respective sections.

Don Webster, Bob Acraman and Bill Hubbard agreed to form a committee to arrange for all future programmes. Members to submit ideas well in advance for possible inclusion. This after a lengthy discussion.

Frank Vernon-Lay had brought copies of new Merlin paper-back "Billy Bunter's Convict" and stated another Greyfriars story was in the offing plus two more of Cliff House. Whilst on the subject of Merlin books, Bob Blythe stated that there was a possibility of some Nelson Lee ones being published in the future.

"What I detest About Hamiltonia" was the title of a paper given by Roger Jenkins. This was thoroughly enjoyed and members comments will be given at the next meeting.

With Don Webster taking the chair, Eric Fayne, Len Packman and Bob Blythe were unanimously elected Vice-Presidents of the club.

Bill Norris, the host, conducted a fine quiz. The first, second and third places were filled by Eric Lawrence, Roger Jenkins and Don Webster.

From "Magnet" number 1415, "The Sleuth of Greyfriars" Ray Hopkins read a couple of very humorous chapters. A sequel to this reading will take place next month when the two pairs, Potter and Greene, Church and McClure will be the subjects of a debate and discussion. Marjorie Norris read an item from a recent issue of "The Evening Standard" and Len Packman read the two newspaper items that Gerry Allison had sent. All pertaining to the hobby.

A very fine programme has been arranged for the Dollis Hill

meeting on Sunday, April 21st., Bob and Laura Blythe being the hosts. With votes of thanks to Bill and Marjorie Norris, our Cricklewood hosts, for splendid hospitality, it was homeward bound once again.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

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AM I OUT OF STEP (cont'd from p. 17)...

(described as aristocratic) were always dreaming up wonderful (?) wheezes. They leave school on some pretext and return as new boys disguised as African Zulus, complete with war-paint and spears. In the classroom the ~~master~~ is spear-prodded into watching a caricature of himself being drawn. And some think Bunter's African prince impersonation far-fetched! Arise, Sir William Wibley!

HOTSPUR was the better proposition. Put out as a school paper in the last days of the NELSON LEE, a change came o'er the scene. Although firmly anchored at Greyfriars, I recall breaking bounds for RED CIRCLE, Hotspur's No. 1. school story. Dead-Wide Dick and his friends proved very popular and various newcomers to the school added spice to the yarns. Full marks here. The balance of school tales were centred around mysterious masters: The Invisible Schoolmaster; The Master in the Purple Mask; The Teacher from Dartmoor. When it later featured schoolboys from the Stone Age, with loin-cloths and clubs, I knew it was time to go.

Once a path had been cleared through the jungle, so to speak, there was much to enjoy. ADVENTURE did a good job with Dixon Hawke and his assistant, Tommy Burke, by far the best of the Thomson creations. Another favourite was Zero The Silent, a human fly with suction pads. ROVER and WIZARD had their own aces like Captain "Q" the Winged Crook; Morgyn The Mighty; Bomba; Cast-Iron Bill; Big McCann; Wolf of Kabul. There was little to distinguish SKIPPER, but it gave away some fine little books.

Their "bitsy"-style presentation probably explains the paucity of articles on the Thomson theme. The same applies to other papers along these lines. It is no coincidence that Sexton Blake, Nelson Lee, and Hamiltonia (the life-blood of C.D.) were all stories you could get your teeth into. Not forgetting, of course, that they are stamped "Amalgamated Press" - a name unbeatable for quality and craftsmanship.

How, then, did the Thomson Five ride to stardom? My crystal ball shows a good main course freely laced with trivia...easy to read stories making few demands on the reader...a super-abundance

REAL BOYS' FRIEND STUFFfrom Gerry Allison

"The rise of Leeds United" wrote Eric Stanger in last Saturday's Yorkshire Post, "is romantic enough to have come straight from the pages of the Boys' Friend Library ... it follows the same bottom-of-the-league-to-the-top, rags-to-riches theme."

As a former addict of these fourpenny thrillers I agree that Leeds United's rise is romantic enough. But is it sensational enough to qualify for Boys' Friend Library standards?

As an example of what I have in mind take "Good Enough For England" which Richard Randolph wrote for the library in 1927 - B F L No. 97. It was a story featuring the visit of the Australian Test cricketers to England.

You will gain a fair idea of its dramatic contents when I tell you that the cover picture showed a villain throwing a dagger at the young hero.

This was brilliantly caught by the Australian fast bowler, Gregory, one of the finest fielders of the day. However, Boys' Friend Library cricketers took skulduggery of this kind in their stride. The dastardly dagger-throwing episode was dismissed by one of the English players with the cool comment: "I say, that's a big thick."

I don't know who Leeds United opponents will be in the Football Association Cup Final at Wembley on May 18th (Eh? Of course Leeds will be there!) but it would give me the thrill which the Boys' Friend Library used to give me if Eric Stanger's report of the match read something like this:

Diabolical bids to nobble the Leeds team and wreck their chances of winning the cup came within an ace of success but were foiled by the unceasing vigilance of gimlet-eyed manager, Don Revie.

It was he who spotted in the dressing room that skipper Billy Bremner was wearing two left boots - a fact Bremner had overlooked owing to pre-match tension but which would swiftly have crippled him when he took the field.

After a search the missing right boot was discovered hidden in a locker. His suspicions aroused, Mr. Revie examined the chewing-gum he was about to issue to his players. A strange odour assailed his keen nostrils. "Strychnine!" he gasped, and hurled the gum into a fire-bucket full of water.

A fresh supply of gum was obtained and tested on one of the ball-boys (without ill effect) before it was issued to the players.

Thoroughly convinced that someone was out to baulk Leeds of the cup, Mr. Revie kept a sharp eye open for the next move. He had not long to wait.

After a skirmish in front of the Leeds goal the ball was kicked into the crowd. It was caught by a man in a long black cloak. He seemed to fumble with it before he threw it back on the field.

A sixth sense told Mr. Revie what was afoot. The man had hidden the real ball beneath his cloak and substituted one filled with - what?

As the Leeds goal-keeper, Gary Sprake, placed the ball and prepared to take the goal-kick, his manager, deaf to the astonished roar of the huge crowd, raced on to the field, scooped up the ball and carried it to the referee.

A faint hissing noise was coming from it. "Laughing gas!" cried Mr. Revie. "If Gary had kicked this ball, it would have exploded in his face and he would have slumped insensate to the ground."

"I say," said skipper Bremner, "that's a bit thick."

It only remains for me to add that Leeds went on to win the cup by nine goals to nil.

from the Yorkshire Post.

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AM I OUT OF STEP (cont'd from page 30)...

of obnoxious characters...a frivolous, happy-go-lucky approach. Or am I still out of step?

All in fun, you Thomson cads. Whatever the explanation, you certainly have the last laugh, and I just can't wait to hear your side of the story. But, oh dear, THOSE school stories!!

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S.O.S. WANTED: No. 53 "Girls' Friend Library" titled "Twins of Twineham" by Mabel St. John, (or loan of same for fee), also "Young Folks Tales" "Mabel's" "Betty's" only.

40, FOWEY AVENUE, REDBRIDGE, ILFORD, ESSEX.

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R E V I E W

Frank Richards  
(Merlin Books 2/6)

"BILLY BUNTER & THE CROOKED CAPTAIN"

This story is a portion of the famous Da Costa series which featured in 9 Magnets in the summer of 1928. The series was brilliantly written and one of Charles Hamilton's greatest. All should find this section from it most agreeable reading.