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STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

No. 272

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AUGUST 1969

Vol. 23

2/3

SUNK AT SEA.

By CHAS. HAMILTON.

Dick thrust forward his oar, and knocked the mate back. Phil and Duncan sprang into the longboat.

No. 270

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STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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W. H. GANDER

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Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

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The Man at the Wheel

NO QUESTION OF COLOUR

A reader, whose letter features in this month's The Postman Called, refers to an occasion in 1926 when the editor of the Lee warned St. Frank's League members to ignore "begging letters from dusky merchants of the Gold Coast."

This has stirred my own memory buds. I feel fairly certain that the Lee editor was justified. I recall receiving my first letter from the Gold Coast about that time. Quaintly worded, and rather charming, it asked for a Bible to be sent. My mother was touched by it all, bought a nice little Bible, and we sent it off to the gentleman of the Gold Coast. Within a few weeks, that gentleman was writing again. This time he asked for a gold watch. Needless to say, no watch was sent, but in the next few months I received very many begging letters from the Gold Coast.

It is possible that some readers of my own generation may have had similar experiences. I do not know where the letter writers had

obtained my name and address, but it might have been from one of the Companion Papers. Evidently somebody, who had been pestered in the same way that I was, wrote to the editor of the Lee and his comment in the Lee columns was the result.

THE HA'PENNY CHANGE

Recently, in a TV interview, the Prince of Wales observed that progress is necessary if we are not to stagnate, but that he saw no point in change merely for the sake of change. We ourselves have said the same thing more than once in these columns.

In the history of the old papers, more often than not, changes were made which seemed to precipitate their end. In modern times there have been plenty of changes which seemed pointless, and the country has accepted those changes with something of a silent resentment. Few people seem to have been very enthusiastic over the use of the 24-hour clock, the two-tier postal system, the very dark winter mornings, and measuring our temperatures in centigrade. The scrapping of the old road signs, replacing them with new at enormous expense, seemed somewhat needless, especially when the country is reputed to be hard up.

I find myself unable to cheer wildly over the forthcoming decimalisation of everything, though I admit that this may be due to the fact that my schoolmasters found me hopeless at mathematics and my great bane was the metric system.

And now, by the time you are reading this issue of C.D., the humble halfpenny will have gone for good in the wake of a good many other things. As the decimalisation of our currency is not due yet for nearly two years, I cannot see why the halfpenny should have been scrapped at this stage. Only the powers-that-be can explain what it will accomplish beyond pushing up the ever-increasing cost of living.

As we say good-bye to the ha'penny, let us think of what it would have bought in the days when the world's greatest papers were young. For a mere ha'penny one could have posted a postcard which was ensured of rapid delivery - and one could have bought the Gem, the Magnet, the Union Jack, the Boys' Friend, the Marvel, and plenty of other story-papers which were packed with reading. Not to mention some of the superb old comics - Lot-O-Fun, Merry & Bright, the Funny Wonder, and lots more, the like of which they could not produce today at twenty times

the price.

The old papers have receded far into the rosy land of memories, and now the ha'penny which once bought them has followed them into history.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR LETTERS

There has been an exceptionally heavy mailbag this month, and a great many readers have written to me about "Walker" and other items in last month's Digest. We can only quote from a few in our letter column, but I am very deeply appreciative of the kindness of all who wrote.

People often say nice things about our editorials, and that gladdens my old heart. Readers do not always agree with what I write, of course. It would be a very unenterprising editorial if they did. But those who disagree always write more in sorrow than anger, and there are no bad feelings.

Mr. Geoffrey Wilde of Leeds writes: "Haig and his crew may, as you say, have been heroes to their own generation (such as managed to survive their murderous incompetence) but so were Hitler and Napoleon. They have been proved beyond any doubt to have been incompetent butchers, directing costly attacks in utter ignorance of front-line conditions, refusing to listen to the advice of the men on the spot, arranging raids to suit the time of the mess dinner rather than to minimise the suffering of the serving soldier. By comparison, how well the reputations of the leaders in World War 2 have stood up, though there has been ample time for the hero-worship of the moment to have evaporated."

Mr. Mackenzie Davidson of Muchalls writes: "I am fully in agreement with Orwell, but that doesn't in any way affect my love for the old papers which is a thing apart from the most valid criticism."

We don't all agree with one another, but we are a happy band of pilgrims. Bless you one and all for your letters.

THE EDITOR

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PLEASE DO NOT DELAY IN SENDING ALONG YOUR ARTICLES FOR COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL OF 1969

DANNY'S DIARY

AUGUST 1919

Mum and I spent a week, in the middle of the month, with an old school friend of hers who lives just outside Blackpool at a place called Little Bispham. Mum's old friend is named Winnie Everden, and her husband was killed in the war, so now she thinks she may take in paying guests during the summer months. Of course, Mum and I went as ordinary guests - Mrs. Everden said that she didn't dislike boys, which was why I went - but I'm sure Mum insisted on paying for our keep.

We had a lovely time, and Blackpool is quite a gay place, even though the war hasn't been over for so long. They have a wonderful tramway system, with heaps of cars of all shapes and sizes, and I rode about on them a lot.

Little Bispham is not served by the Blackpool trams, though. It has the Blackpool and Fleetwood Tramroad which runs a long way along the coast from Fleetwood to North Station in Blackpool. Mrs. Everden says that Blackpool Council is making offers to take over the Fleetwood cars, but nothing has come of it yet. I liked riding on the toast-racks, and got to know some of the conductors.

There are lovely sands, and the bathing machines are very much like those I saw once at Yarmouth. The tide goes out a good way, and they have horses which pull the machines near the water. The water was rather cold, but it was nice and sunny most days.

One night we went to the Palace Variety Theatre and saw G.S. Melvin who is a scream - he does some of his songs dressed as a lady - and T. E. Dunville who is very funny indeed. After we had booked our seats, Mum found that she had been given D.10 and D.12. She was annoyed, thinking we would be separated, so she went back to the box-office. She found out they book seats like that - all the odd numbers on one side, and all the even numbers on the other. Mrs. Everden said all the Blackpool theatres have that system of booking. The seats were rather dear - 1/9 each and no half-price for me.

The cinemas don't have continuous performances like we do at home. Just two shows daily at 2.30 and 7, and you can book your seats by paying 3d extra. We saw the big new Mary Pickford film "Daddy

Longlegs" and it was lovely. We took Mrs. Everden with us to see that. One afternoon we went to a matinee and saw Norma Talmadge in "De Luxe Annie" which was also good.

Naturally we went up the Tower. It fairly took my breath away going so high, and Mum was a bit nervous when the wind blew. She didn't care much about going down in the lift, but I told her to close her eyes and count up to ninety. It costs 6d to go up the Tower (3d for me).

There is another Boys' Friend 3d Library out, about Cedar Creek. It is called "The Parting of the Ways," and it consists of stories which were in the Boys' Friend not long ago.

The Boys' Friend has been pretty good this month. First Rookwood story continued the Mornington - Captain series. In "Jimmy Silver's Way" Jimmy backed up Morny, and prevented Smythe & Co. from going to play cricket at Greyfriars. The next two stories were good fun. They were "Fagging for the Fifth" and "Turning the Tables" and told how the new captain brought Hansom and Co. to heel.

The next tale "Jimmy Silver's Trial" was not by the real Owen Conquest at all, and it didn't make very good reading. It was a long tale about how Jimmy got disgraced.

With the final tale "The Giddy Goats" we were back with the Mornington - Captain series, and Morny made the punishment fit the crime for the smokey sweeps among the juniors.

Cedar Creek was good all through. In "At Close Quarters" the mysterious bandit, Five Hundred Dollar Jones, turned up and held up Cedar Creek School. Next week, in a tale called "Held Up," 500 Dollar Jones was still going strong, and a gambler named Poker Brown turned up in Thompson town. Final of this series was "Run Down." Beauclerc feared that his father had gone back to his old gambling ways, but in the end Mr. Beauclerc exposed Poker Brown as the bandit, 500 Dollar Jones. A fine series.

Now the chums were planning to go to the Pacific for a holiday beside the sea, but Beauclerc could not afford to go. So Bob Lawless planted a fairly valuable stone for Beauclerc to find, but Beauclerc smelt a rat and was angry. However, Mr. Beauclerc had a reward for the capture of 500 Dollar Jones, so Beau was able to go after all.

This tale was "The Stunt that Failed." Final of the month was "Away Westward" in which the chums set off for the Pacific, and came across a scoundrel who went under the names of Mr. Johnson and Captain Carker.

While we were in Blackpool we saw Suzanne Lenglen, the young French girl who did so well at Wimbledon this year. She appeared at a large Blackpool store to demonstrate tennis equipment and to sign autographs. I am not all that keen on tennis but it was fun to see her. She is not really a beauty and she talks very excitedly.

In the Nelson Lee the series has gone on about the St. Frank's boys in Africa. On the way home, after lots of adventures in West Africa, the yacht, the Wanderer, is on the rocks of a remote island. After more excitement, the boys arrive back at St. Frank's late for the new term, and they find there is a sinister new boy named Alexis. The stories this month were "The River of Fire," "Castaway Island," "The Prisoner of the Cavern," and "The Sea of Doom." There is a new serial by Robert W. Comrade entitled "In Trackless Space," about a voyage to the moon.

At home we saw some good films. The best was Charles Ray in "String Beans," and William Farnum was good in "The Man Who Repaid."

The Gem has been just great this month, going on with the lovely caravanning series. With the first tale of the month Mr. Macdonald, the old artist, was back to do the illustrations. "Trimble on the Track" was good fun all the way. Next week, in "Foes of the Fifth," Tom Merry & Co. fell foul of Cutts & Co.; Gussy fell out with his chums; and finally Gussy went as a guest at St. Leger Lodge. Gussy wouldn't believe that Cutts wanted to get him gambling and lose a lot of money, and in "Looking After Gussy," the Co. had to go to the rescue of the swell of St. Jim's. Charley, the stable-boy, had been doing what Cutts told him, but Cutts, in a temper, thrashed Charley, and Tom Merry helped the poor boy.

In "Charley and the Caravanners," Charley joined up with Tom Merry & Co. until they left him with Lord Eastwood who was going to give Charley a good job.

Last tale of the month, "Stranded" was great fun. The caravanners came on Coker & Co. of Greyfriars. Coker had arranged to play

cricket with a village team.

This caravanning series still goes on next month. It's great!

Another weak month in the Magnet. In "Bunter's Aunt Sally," Wibley and his cousin did some impersonating.

The best of the month was "The Hero's Home-Coming." Mr. Lascelles was coming back from the army, and a broken-down actor named Montgomery Snooks swathed himself in bandages and pretended to be Mr. Lascelles. He had been bribed by Skinner.

Then came two tales in which ten Greyfriars boys toured the battlefields of Belgium and France. The trip was arranged by Johnny Bull's uncle. It was an empty affair. Nothing happened except the tour.

Last of the month was a mixed-up affair named "Bunter's Typing Agency." The editor of the Gem and Magnet wanted more contributions from the Greyfriars Herald, and Bunter got a typewriter on easy terms. It was all a bit dumb.

* * * * *

THE GREEN BICYCLE MYSTERY

In the extract from Danny's Diary which we printed last month, Danny made reference to the famous real-life Green Bicycle mystery. It has jolted the memories of several readers, and Mr. Cockroft of Keighley kindly sent us the account of the case as written up by Marjoribanks in his "Life of Sir Edward Marshall Hall." A brief summary of that old mystery which intrigued the public mind 50 years ago may not be out of place.

In the evening of July 5th, 1919, the body of a young working girl named Bella Wright was found in a lonely country lane near Little Stretton in Leicestershire. She had been shot. She had left her uncle's home, nearly three miles away, in the company of a man riding a green bicycle, with whom she seemed to be on friendly terms. There was a hue and cry for this man, but the affair dropped from the headlines and was almost forgotten until, in February 1920, the tow-rope of a barge, passing down a canal near Leicester, raised the frame of a green bicycle. The maker's name on the outside of the machine had been erased, but the frame had a secret mark and it was found that it had been purchased in 1910 by a man named Ronald Light. Also taken from the canal were

a holster, almost conclusively identified as belonging to Light, and old-fashioned ammunition such as had been found near the spot where Bella Wright had died.

Light, a schoolmaster at that time, had been shell-shocked during the war. He was arrested, and at the trial he was defended brilliantly by Marshall Hall.

After a considerable amount of evasion, Light admitted that he had been the man with Bella Wright, but claimed that she was alive and well when he left her. Hall convinced the jury of the likelihood that the girl had been accidentally shot by someone taking pot-shots at birds, and Light was found not guilty.

The verdict was undoubtedly the right one. The evidence, damning though it was, was purely circumstantial. Fifty years later it is obvious that Light was lucky in being defended by so able an advocate as Hall. To this day, nobody knows for certain why Bella died.

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DEATH OF TOM DOBSON

Collectors' Digest deeply regrets to record the untimely death of Tom Dobson of Victoria, Australia. Tom was struck by a car while riding his bicycle, and died shortly after being admitted to hospital.

Tom was a delightful personality and a loyal pen friend. He had been a collector for 25 years, and a C.D. enthusiast since the very beginning. He was 63 years of age at the time of his death, and leaves a widow and three grown-up children.

The hobby can ill afford to lose stalwarts like Tom Dobson. His death will come as a sad shock to many friends all over the world.

OUR SERIAL. P. G. Wodehouse's joyous satire, written 60 years ago. Britain is invaded, but, as usual, she is not ready.

THE SWOOP

By P. G. Wodehouse

When the papers arrived next morning, it was seen that the situation was even worse than had at first been suspected. Not only had the Germans effected a landing in Essex, but, in addition, no fewer than eight other hostile armies had, by some remarkable coincidence, hit on that identical moment for launching their long-prepared blow.

England was not merely beneath the heel of the invader. It was beneath the heels of nine invaders.

There was barely standing-room.

Full details were given in the Press. It seemed that while Germany was landing in Essex, a strong force of Russians, under the Grand Duke Vodkakoff, had occupied Yarmouth. Simultaneously the Mad Mullah had captured Portsmouth; while the Swiss navy had bombarded Lyme Regis, and landed troops immediately to westward of the bathing-machines. At precisely the same moment China, at last awakened, had swooped down upon that picturesque little Welsh watering-place, Llllgxpllll, and, despite desperate resistance on the part of an excursion of Evanses and Joneses from Cardiff, had obtained a secure foothold. While these things were happening in Wales, the army of Monaco had descended on Auchtermuchty, on the Firth of Clyde. Within two minutes of this disaster, by Greenwich time, a boisterous band of Young Turks had seized Scarborough. And, at Brighton and Margate respectively, small but determined armies, the one of Moroccan brigands, under Raisuli, the other of dark-skinned warriors from the distant isle of Bollygolla, had made good their footing.

This was a very serious state of things.

Correspondents of the Daily Mail had wired such particulars as they were able. The preliminary parley between Prince Ping Pong Pang, the Chinese general, and Llewellyn Evans, the leader of the Cardiff excursionists, seems to have been impressive to a degree. The former had spoken in pure Chinese, the latter replying in rich Welsh, and the general effect was almost painfully exhilarating.

The nearest approach to any resistance had been at Margate. When the war canoes appeared on the beach, it was rumoured among the Bank Holiday crowd that they were being presented by Charles Frohmann, who was endeavouring to revive the ancient glories of the Christy Minstrels. Suspicion was aroused by the absence of banjoes and tambourines; and when the foremost of the invaders dexterously scalped a small boy, suspicion became certainty.

In this crisis the trippers of Margate behaved well. The Mounted Infantry, on donkeys, did much execution. A hastily-formed band of sharp-shooters, armed with three-shies-a-penny balls and milky cocos troubled the advance guard considerably. But superior force told. After some brisk fighting, the excursionists fled, leaving the beach to the foe.

By tea-time on August the First, nine strongly-equipped forces were firmly established on British soil.

* * * * *

Such a state of affairs, disturbing enough in itself, was rendered still more disquieting by the fact that, except for the Boy Scouts, England's military strength at this time was practically nil.

The abolition of the regular army had been the first step. In the first place, the Socialists had condemned the army system as unsocial. Privates, they pointed out, were forbidden to hobnob with colonels, though the difference in their positions was due to a mere accident of birth. They demanded that every man in the army should be a general. Comrade Quelch, in an eloquent speech at Newington Butts, had pointed, amidst enthusiasm, to the republics of South America, where the system worked admirably.

So the army was abolished, and the land defence of the country entrusted entirely to the Territorials, the Legion of Frontiersmen, and the Boy Scouts.

But first the Territorials dropped out. The strain to being referred to as Teddy-boys in the music halls was too much for them.

Then the Frontiersmen were disbanded. They had never been themselves since being attacked by the Manchester Watch Committee.

So in the end England's defenders were narrowed down to the Boy Scouts, of whom Clarence Chugwater was the pride, and a large civilian population, prepared, at any moment, to turn out for their country's sake and wave flags. A section of these, too, could sing patriotic songs.

Countless letters poured into the offices of the London daily papers. Space forbids more than the gist of a few of these.

Miss Charlesworth wrote: "In this crisis I see no alternative. I shall disappear."

Mr. Horatio Bottomley, in John Bull, said that there was some dirty work going on, and that the secret history of the invasion would be published shortly. He himself preferred any invader to some K.C's he could name. He wanted to know why Inspector Drew had retired.

The Daily Express, in a thoughtful leader, said that Free Trade evidently meant invaders for all.

Mr. Herbert Gladstone, writing to the Times, pointed out that he had let so many undesirable aliens into the country that he did not see that a few more made much difference.

Mr. H. G. Pelissier urged the public to look on the bright side. There was a sun still shining in the sky. Besides, who knew that some foreign marksman might not pot the censor?

Judge Willis asked: "What is an invasion?"

A writer in "Answers" pointed out that, if all the invaders in the country were piled in a heap, they would reach some of the way to the moon.

Far-seeing men took a gloomy view of the situation. They laid stress on the fact that the counter-attraction was bound to hit first-class cricket hard. For some years gates had shown a tendency to fall off, owing to the growing popularity of golf, tennis, and other games. The desire to see the invaders as they marched through the country must draw away thousands who otherwise would have paid their sixpences at the turnstiles. It was suggested that representations should be made to the invading generals with a view to inducing them to make a small charge to sightseers.

In sporting circles the chief interest centred on the race to London. The papers showed the positions of the various armies each morning in their Runners and Betting columns; six to four on the Germans was freely offered, but found no takers.

Until the moment when the enemy were at her doors, England had imagined that she was on terms of friendship with her neighbours. The foe had taken full advantage of this, and also of the fact, owing to a fit of absent-mindedness on the part of the Government, England had no ships afloat which were not entirely obsolete. Interviewed on the subject by representatives of the daily papers, the Government handsomely admitted that it was perhaps in some ways a silly thing to have done; but, they urged, you could not think of everything. Besides, they were on the point of laying down a Dreadnought, which would be ready in a very few years. Meanwhile, the best thing the public could do was to sleep quietly in their beds.

And all the while the Invaders' Marathon continued.

Who would be the first to reach London?

The Germans had got off smartly from the mark and were fully justifying the long odds laid upon them. That master-strategist, Prince Otto of Saxe-Pfennig, realising that if he wished to reach the Metropolis quickly he must not go by train, had resolved almost at once to walk. In a couple of days it was seen that the army of the Fatherland was bound, barring accidents, to win comfortably.

The progress of the other forces was slower. The Chinese especially had undergone great privations, having lost their way near Llanfairpwlgwnngogogoch, and having been unable to understand the voluble directions given to them by the various shepherds they encountered. It was nearly a week before they reached Chester, where,

catching a cheap excursion, they arrived in the metropolis, hungry and footsore, four days after the last of their rivals had taken up their station.

The German advance halted on the wooded heights of Tottenham. Here a camp was pitched and trenches dug.

The march had shown how terrible invasion must of necessity be. With no wish to be ruthless, the troops of Prince Otto had done greivous damage. Cricket pitches had been trampled down, and in many cases even golf-greens dented by the iron heel of the invader, who rarely, if ever, replaced a divot. Everywhere they had left ruin and misery in their train.

With the other armies it was the same story. Through carefully-preserved woods they had marched, frightening the birds and driving keepers into fits of nervous prostration. Fishing, owing to their tramping carelessly through the streams, was at a standstill. Croquet had been given up in despair.

Near Epping the Russians shot a fox...

The situation which faced Prince Otto was a delicate one. All his early training and education had implanted in him the fixed idea that, if he ever invaded England, he would do it either alone or with the sympathetic co-operation of allies. He had never faced the problem of what he should do if there were rivals in the field. Competition is wholesome, but only within bounds. He could not very well ask the other nations to withdraw. Nor did he feel inclined to withdraw himself.

"It all comes of this dashed Swoop of the Vulture business," he grumbled, as he paced before his tent, ever and anon pausing to sweep the city below him with his glasses. "I should like to find the fellow who started the idea. Well, Poppenheim?"

Captain von Poppenheim approached and saluted.

"Please, sir, the men say 'May they bombard London?'"

"Bombard London!"

"Yes, sir; it's always done."

Prince Otto pulled thoughtfully at his moustache.

"Bombard London! It seems - and yet - ah, well, they have few pleasures."

He stood awhile in meditation. So did Captain von Poppenheim. He kicked a pebble. So did Captain von Poppenheim - only a smaller pebble. Discipline is very strict in the German army.

"Poppenheim."

"Sir?"

"Any sign of our - er - competitors?"

"Yes, sir; the Russians are coming up on the left flank, sir. They'll be here in a few hours. Raisuli has been arrested in Purley for stealing chickens. The army of Bollygolla is about ten miles out. No news of the field yet, sir."

The Prince brooded.

"Between you and me, Pop," he cried impulsively, "I'm dashed sorry we ever started this dashed silly invading business. We thought ourselves dashed smart, working in the dark, and giving no sign till the great pounce, and all that sort of dashed nonsense. Seems to me we've simply dashed well landed ourselves in the dashed soup."

Captain von Poppenheim saluted in sympathetic silence. He and the prince had been old chums at college. A life-long friendship existed between them. He would have liked to have expressed adhesion to his superior officer's remarks. The words "I don't think" trembled on his tongue. But the iron discipline of the German Army gagged him. He saluted again and clicked his heels.

The prince recovered himself with a strong effort.

"You say the Russians will be here shortly?" he said.

"In a few hours, sir."

"And the men really wish to bombard London?"

"It would be a treat to them, sir."

"Well, well, I suppose if we don't do it, somebody else will. And we got here first."

"Yes, sir."

"Then --"

An orderly hurried up and saluted.

"Telegram, sir."

Absently the Prince opened it. Then his eyes lit up.

"Gotterammerung!" he said. "I never thought of that. 'Smash up London and provide work for unemployed mending it. - Grayson (Home Secretary).'" he read. "Poppenheim."

"Sir?"

"Let the bombardment commence."

"Yes, sir."

"And let it continue till the Russians arrive. Then it must stop, or there will be complications."

Captain von Poppenheim saluted, and withdrew.

* * * * *

Thus was London bombarded. Fortunately it was August, and there was nobody in town. Otherwise there might have been loss of life.

(THERE WILL BE A FURTHER INSTALMENT OF THIS STORY NEXT MONTH)

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WANTED: Boys' Friend Library Nos. 243, 422, 423, 350, 155, 68, 731, 564, 440, 544, 393, 468, 448, 265, 268, 241, 258, 260, 246. Schoolboys Own Library Nos. 229, 128, 82, 81, 356, 391, 393, 666, 369, 126, 185, 186. Sexton Blake Library Nos. 645, 242, 244, 217.

B. J. WILSON, 25 TEIGNMOUTH RD., BROCKHURST, GOSPORT, HANTS.

WANTED: Nelson Lee (OS) 130, 160; Wizard 498, BFL 442, Magnets 1175/6/7, 1180, 1228, 1236, 1246, 1360, 1362, 1364 and others between 1000 - 1360; Bullseye, several between 1 - 66 also 67, 69, 81, 89, 90, 103, 106 on; Rover, Adventure, Wizard, Hotspur 1930 - 36. For exchange Gem 1473, about 25 Magnets between 1343 and 1664, and some Bullseyes.

SUTTON, 41 SWALECLIFF AVENUE, MANCHESTER, 23.

WANTED: Magnets 1080 - 82 - 89; 1352 - 53 - 78; 1404 - 9 - 12 - 66; 1511 - 14; 1656 - 82. Gems 1654 - 1659 - 60 - 63. Exchanges available. WANTED: C.D. Annual 1947 and S.P. Collector Nos. 28 - 29 - 81 - 94.

W. TITTENSOR, 18 PARKWAY, DAIRYFIELDS, TRENTHAM, STOKE-ON-TRENT, STAFFS.

DISPOSAL: Around a 1,000 Fleetway and Thomson Books:- "Battle Picture Libs.," "War Picture Libs.," "Air Ace Libs.," "Commando Libs.," 6d. each. Champion Anns.:- 1951, 1953, 1955, 7/6 each. Schoolgirls' Own Ann.:- 1926, 1927, 1928, 7/6 each. Golden Ann. for Girls, 1927, 7/6. School Friend Ann. 1956, 7/6. Hardback books by P. G. Wodehouse, John Finnemore. Post extra on all items. Details:-

J. R. SWAN, 3 FIFTH AVENUE, PADDINGTON, LONDON, W.10.

REVIEW

THE REBELLION OF HARRY WHARTON. Frank Richards. (Howard Baker Publishers 42/-)

What can one say about the 2nd Rebel Series which has not already been said time and time again? It is Frank Richards at his very best. Running to about 300,000 words, it is one of the finest school novels ever written. Plenty of people assert that it is the finest of all.

Characterisation is superb. It is the story of a splendid boy who has the human weaknesses of obstinacy and impetuosity, and of a splendid schoolmaster who strays from being really just when circumstances work against him.

Production, as in the case of the recent Egypt Series, is impeccable. This giant volume is a "must" for any readers who do not already possess the original series, and, no doubt, for plenty who do.

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PLEASE DO NOT DELAY IN SENDING ALONG YOUR ARTICLES FOR COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL OF 1969

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 137. THE MAGNET LOVE STORY OF 1920

When I first read the Magnet's love story of 1920 - the Schoolboy Film Stars Series, - it never occurred to me for one moment that Charles Hamilton had written it. I regarded it as a lousy series in a year of lousy stories.

Years later, I found that Roger Jenkins thought it a genuine series, albeit not a good one.

Soon after the war ended, John Shaw had compiled a list of substitute stories of the Magnet and Gem. This list did not include the 1920 Film Star series, which showed that Mr. Shaw believed this series to be written by Charles Hamilton. In a very early edition of Collectors' Digest Annual this list by Mr. Shaw was published. Herbert Leckenby, introducing the list, wrote: "It will be cordially agreed that John Shaw knows more about the stories than anyone." For some years, in fact, Mr. Shaw's list was accepted as something of a Hamilton bible.

Also in that very early C.D. Annual appeared an article by John Geal entitled "Magnet Masterpieces." Of the Film Star series Mr. Geal wrote: "Elsie Mainwaring, the film star, is making a school film. The Greyfriars juniors, some seniors and the Cliff House girls are included, as a genuine background. This takes place at Hawthorne Park on the coast. A love affair between Elsie and Wingate causes trouble, and many exciting twists to a good tale." In passing, Mr. Geal's "Magnet Masterpieces" included some substitute series, including Wally Bunter - Form Master.

In his famous History of the Magnet, Roger Jenkins had this to say about the series: "The only series Charles Hamilton wrote for the Magnet in 1920 was about the schoolboy film stars in Nos. 660 - 664. A party of Greyfriars fellows, under the care of Mr. Quelch, went to stay at Hawthorne Park where Mr. Cyrus Hunker was making films. This was an odd melodramatic sort of series, with Wingate in the lead. How he fell in love with the actress, Elsie Mainwaring, is recounted in a manner which harks back to red Magnet days. This was indeed the last of the love stories in the Magnet."

Some years later still, Mr. W. O. G. Lofts gave us his list of

substitute stories. Magnets 660 - 664 were not included in this list, thereby indicating that these stories had been written by Charles Hamilton.

Recently, in May of this year, I wrote in this column an article on the Schoolboys' Own Library, criticising the editing of that monthly. I commented: "The story of film stars and Wingate's love affair filled 5 Magnets. It boiled down into one S.O.L. It was nothing to write home about in the Magnet. In the S.O.L. it was a poor thing."

Contributing to the Controversial Echoes on this theme, Mr. Philip Tierney wrote: "As for 'Schoolboy's Honour,' the condensed version of the Wingate love affair story, I think it was absolute piffle from the first paragraph to the last. I am still not convinced, despite what the experts say, that it was Charles Hamilton himself who wrote it."

Mr. Tierney's remarks rang a bell for me. I have now read the series again, not without difficulty. I can say now that I fully agree with Mr. Tierney. I don't believe for one moment that Charles Hamilton wrote this story. I feel the same about it now as I did long ago.

In trying to weigh matters up fairly, we must admit that Charles Hamilton was far from at his best in 1920. It was a bad year for both the Gem and the Magnet. Hamilton wrote only a few stories for each paper. In the Gem he did not appear at all until September, when he contributed the Dirk Power series. This was not a first-class series, but the reader is never in any doubt that he is reading genuine Hamilton material.

Quite the reverse is the case in the film-star series, and I am puzzled as to how it ever came to be accepted as Hamiltonian. It appeared in a year which was a sea of substitute stories, and it is similar in construction and dialogue to plenty of substitute tales of the period.

This series, like so many substitute stories, started off on the wrong foot by providing the plot with a framework which was completely unbelievable. In the middle of term, the Head, without, apparently, making any enquiries at all, gave permission for 50 boys of Greyfriars to go to live at a "cinema school" on the coast for many weeks, in order to make films. The whole thing is quite incredible.

How different was the approach to the Hollywood Series of happier days! A small party went to the States for an educational tour, under the charge of a parent of one of the boys. The boys assumed, quite rightly, that the Head would never have agreed to their appearing in a film, but Mr. Fish, for his own purposes, contrived that the boys should believe that the Head had actually given permission.

Even more unlikely in the 1920 series was the fact that Miss Primrose also gave permission for a contingent of her girls to go to live, in term time, at this "cinema school." The girls were under the charge of Miss Locke. Note how the author introduces the girls: "--the juniors waved their caps to Marjorie Hazeldene and Miss Clara and Barbara and Mabel Lynn, and Philippa Derwent and the rest." Can you credit that Charles Hamilton ever included such an oddly constructed sentence in one of his stories?

Furthermore, there was no purpose in dragging the Cliff House girls into this mix-up. They play no part in the story at all.

The swift passing of time in this series was no Hamilton characteristic. Nor was the cramming of details, essential to the plot, into a few lines as is done on several occasions. Nor, in fact, were the loose ends which occur.

Another incredible item was that an American producer, in 1920, should have been making a film on the English coast with Wingate as a cowboy.

I now give a synopsis of the plot of the series. It is impossible to be brief in this synopsis, from the fact that action is so thick and fast. The dialogue, at times, was "corny," but I make no attempt to "send up" some of the stilted writing. The tale was written 50 years ago, and it is easy to guy the dialogue of most romances written as long ago as that. Here, then, is the synopsis:

Mr. Cyrus Hunker is a film-producer with a cinema school on the coast at Hawthorne Park. Mr. Hunker wants a party of about 50 boys to go to Hawthorne Park, where "there is ample accommodation of every kind. A master will be sent with the party, so that the usual studies will not be entirely neglected. Volunteers may give their names to their form-masters." (So announced the Head.)

The party comprising most of the Remove, Temple & Co. of the Fourth, Coker and Co. of the Fifth, Hobson & Co. of the Shell, and some of the Sixth including Wingate, Gwynne, and Loder, sets off in charge of Mr. Quelch on a double-decker bus.

"A head popped up the ladder at the back of the bus.

'Boys!'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Oh, it's Quelchy! Yes, sir!'

'Not so much noise, please!'

'Don't you care for music, sir?'

'Certainly I do, Cherry; but I do not care for a tuneless, discordant noise!' snapped the Remove master."

Out in the country, the bus overtook a large motor char-a-banc. The char-a-banc is crowded with Cliff House girls, and 'the juniors waved their caps to Marjorie Hazeldene and Miss Clara and Barbara and Mabel Lynn, and Philippa Derwent and the rest." The girls, too, are on their way to Hawthorne Park, in charge of Miss Locke.

Later on, Wingate meets Miss Elsie Mainwaring, the film star. "'You know me?' she said, with a smile.

Wingate's colour deepened.

'Only from the pictures,' he said. 'I've seen you on the films, Miss Mainwaring. I-I always go to the pictures when you are on the screen.'"

Mr. Hunker hands round cigarettes to the boys and girls. Mr. Quelch protests.

"'Oh, I smoke, sir!' said Billy Bunter manfully. 'I - I'm rather fond of smoking, sir!'

'If you smoke, Bunter, it will be my painful duty to administer severe correction with a cane.'"

During the next few days, the juniors decide that Wingate has fallen in love with Elsie. More than a week goes by, and a football scene is filmed.

Another week goes by, and then Wharton comes on Wingate and Elsie together.

"'Your face has often been clouded,' said Wingate. 'I - I've thought for some time something was troubling you. Isn't it true?'

'It is true,' Elsie replied with a sigh. 'There is something that does trouble me, but -- but --'

'Can't I help you?'

'I fear not!'"

The next day Mr. Hunker casts his film. Wingate is a cowboy rustler, and Loder is the hero. Elsie is to be in a runaway trap, and Loder is to rescue her.

The next day (how days fly at Hawthorne Park!) the film is to be shot. Loder loses his nerve, so Wingate rescues the terrified Elsie.

"'I shall never forget this!' she said, and she pressed his hand, and left him, with a tremulous smile."

Two or three days pass, and then Elsie is missing. There is consternation at the Cinema School. Bunter announces that Wingate has been trying to borrow money.

Wharton comes on Wingate who is on the way to the station with a bag in his hand.

"'I meant to slip away quietly,' said Wingate. 'You needn't mention that you've seen me.'

'But - but --' exclaimed Wharton in dismay.

"He understood the matter clearly enough. It was Elsie Mainwaring who was drawing Wingate away from Hawthorne Park, as she had drawn him there in the first place."

Back at the Cinema School, Mr. Hunker is in a rare tantrum.

"'What has happened?' exclaimed Mr. Quelch, coming up breathlessly.

'I've been robbed!' roared Mr. Hunker. 'A hundred pounds has been taken from my desk.'

'It is quite impossible that a Greyfriars boy --' began Mr. Quelch haughtily."

The first story ends "with black suspicion in the minds of the schoolboy cinema stars."

The next day, with permission from Mr. Quelch, the Famous Five set out to search for Wingate. Mr. Hunker gives them a week, after which he will send for the police.

Meanwhile, Wingate has (by some means unexplained) traced Elsie to Flitchester. "He must find her - he would find her."

In a dusky street in Flitchester, Wingate rescues a policeman who is being attacked by three toughs. Wingate's crashing fists get to work.

A fight promoter, Jeff Blake, is impressed.

The scene changes. In a dingy garret a villain named Vernon Carson has found Elsie. He presses his unwelcome suit.

"'It is not every man of my standing who would give his name to a convict's daughter.'"

Mr. Carson has discovered Elsie's father in hiding.

"'Then all is lost' moaned Elsie."

Then she hears the ringing voice of George Wingate of Greyfriars. He rescues Elsie, and Carson flees.

Elsie explains to Wingate that her father had to make a sudden journey, and she has no money left. It has taken Wingate a week to find Elsie. He decides to take her to his own lodgings, as his sister.

In the darkness, on the way to his lodgings, he hears a well-known voice - that of Bob Cherry of the Remove. Wingate sees a group of boys, and he darts into an alley to hide.

Their voices come to him through the darkness.

"'He's got to come back and clear his name.'"

The voices die away. Wingate is puzzled by the words he heard. He seeks out Jeff Blake, and it is arranged that, for a tenner, Wingate shall fight the Chicken.

The Famous Five, in their turn, rescue Elsie from Carson. They see her going in to see the fight, and they go in, too.

Elsie, horrified at seeing her George being knocked about, rushes into the ring. George collapses into her arms.

The next day Wharton is by Wingate's side when he opens his bruised eyes. Wingate learns of the theft of the money, and Elsie says 'You must go back at once.'

The next day there is a cheer at Hawthorne Park when Wingate returns to clear his name.

Bunter now has plenty of money. He is anxious to leave Hawthorne Park. He wants change for a ten-pound note.

The filming is resumed, and Elsie's fear of Carson makes her acting natural. Carson steals a letter, written in Morse, from Elsie. The Famous Five have planted the letter for Carson to pinch. It contains an insulting message to Carson - in Morse.

Carson takes from Bunter the money which Bunter had "found." In the meantime, Wingate gives Carson a thrashing. A detective - Mr. Beaky - is called in. Beaky finds the money - up Wingate's chimney. Mr. Quelch is upset

"'Unhappy boy!'

'You believe me guilty, then?'

'What can I believe?' groaned Mr. Quelch. 'Unhappy, unhappy boy! What drove you to this act of madness?'"

Wingate winced.

Mr. Quelch leaves the room wearily, and Wingate asks himself some rhetorical questions.

Bunter, at last, tells how Carson took the money from him, and at the end of that story Carson shakes his fist in impotent fury, and strides off into the darkness.

In the next tale, Carson phones Elsie from Seacliff. Elsie's father is at Seacliff. Elsie gives a moan.

Wingate meets Mr. Mainwaring - "a worthy father of Elsie." Carson threatens, 'I shall take a bitter revenge.'

After a good bit more melodrama, Wingate and Carson fight once more, but this time Carson has a revolver. The revolver goes off four times.

'I am not hurt,' says Wingate - but Carson is lying in a crimson pool.

Carson confesses that he stole the money for the theft of which Mr. Mainwaring had been sent to prison.

"I forgive you!" whispers Elsie, and the cold hand of the film actor was held in Elsie's as his life ebbed away.

In the final chapter, Wingate took his farewell of Elsie.

In the past I have made it clear that I am not unduly impressed by evidence gained from the literary analysis of isolated items in stories. But, from first to last, this film series never "feels" like a Hamilton story, and there are any amount of places where one gets what Gerry Allison would describe as "the crunch."

Take "It is quite impossible that a Greyfriars boy --" began Mr. Quelch haughtily. I am quite sure that Hamilton, in all his long life, never made Quelch speak "haughtily."

And "What can I believe?" groaned Mr. Quelch. "Unhappy, unhappy boy!" If that's Hamilton, then I'm a Dutchman.

I am not an expert on the substitute writers, but I incline to the view that this series came from Mr. Samways. The sentimental relationship between Wingate and Elsie is reminiscent of the many Samways tales about the Toff and Marie Rivers.

The series teems with rhetorical questions. Hamilton rarely used them. Samways stories had plenty.

There is a good deal of the characters' thoughts being expressed in words. This style of writing is found in Samways - rarely in Hamilton. ("He must find her - he would find her" reminds one irresistibly of the closing chapters of that post-war hybrid "Just Like Bunter.")

The use of Miss Locke, in charge of the girls, is another pointer. Miss Locke was a Hamilton creation, but, so far as I recall, she had been discarded in red cover days. Hamilton constructed the Cliff House cast for the School Friend. There was no mention of Miss Locke. Yet she appears briefly in this film series, as does Philippa Derwent (the latter a Pentelow creation).

Mr. Samways would have enjoyed the red cover Magnet as a boy. It would probably have been his golden age of the Magnet. It might account for Miss Locke turning up here.

There is one fly in the ointment. If Mr. Tierney and I are right, and this series has erroneously been classed as Hamiltonian, then how comes it that Mr. Lofts did not find it in the official records of the substitute stories. I wonder whether perhaps Mr. Lofts <u>did</u> find it

credited to a substitute writer, and, knowing that Collectors' Digest Annual had credited it to Hamilton, decided that the records must be wrong in this case, and omitted it from his own lists.

No doubt Mr. Lofts will let us have a few brief observations in due course as to the official records. In any case, it will not affect my personal view. Mr. Tierney is not convinced that Hamilton wrote this series. I am convinced that he did not.

* * * * *

CONCERNING "A MIDNIGHT MYSTERY"

Bill Lofts writes:-

An enterprizing sub-editor who was responsible for the GEM reprints could have easily used his imagination with 'A Midnight Mystery.' Instead of dealing with the theme of food-hoarding in war time which was outdated, he could have had the farmer burying a dead pig, which belonged legally to another farmer. The reason for his secrecy, being simply that he was at loggerheads with him, and when he had accidentally knocked down his 'pig' whilst driving his farm-wagon, he thought it best to dispose of it secretly in view of the extremely strained circumstances.

I know the name of the GEM editor responsible for the reprints (not C. M. Down) and it was unfortunate that he lacked any imagination or ideas in these problems. As he is still alive, it would be tactful not to mention his name.

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BLAKIANA

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

SEXTON BLAKE IN 'THE PENNY PICTORIAL'

by Walter Webb

They were days of fear, suspicion, and unrest. The swords of a major European Power were rattling ominously in their scabbards. The King of England had but two years to live, and, in a few months, Jack Johnson would become the World's Heavyweight Boxing Champion by beating Tommy Burns in the 14th round at Sydney Stadium, Australia, in one of the bitterist battles in the history of the ring. Not yet had films emerged from their crude state of silent animation; nor yet had the hem of the feminine skirt begun its gradual ascent to regions which were to afford the imagination of man the minimum effort. It was during this period that Hamilton Edwards, editor of PENNY PICTORIAL, decided to publish a series of short Sexton Blake stories of some 5,000 words, or so, in length.

It was a strange world into which Blake found himself transported. For there was no Tinker. There was no Pedro. No Mrs. Bardell. Not even Baker Street. This presentation of a very lonely figure carrying on his profession in rented rooms in the heart of a big city gave a depressing picture of Blake, even though, on occasions, the gloom was dispersed somewhat by the introduction of a character named Bathurst, and a most presentable belle of Edwardian society named Lady Marjorie Maxwell. Bathurst was described as a friend, and seemed to be connected with a newspaper, whilst the Lady Molly had decided views of depriving Blake of his avowed bachelorhood. A commanding manner, an imperiously beckoning finger, sometimes made Blake appear something of a weakling as he bowed to her wishes, but by no means did her ladyship get everything her own way with him.

When these stories were published they were said to be quite new and up-to-date. Blake, having been ordered to rest by his doctors, has temporarily forsaken Baker Street, and is living during the period of these episodes in a quiet little house in Surbiton, amusing himself by

flower culture, the cottage having been lent to him by an old friend, a Mr. Dove, a retired official from Scotland Yard, whilst that individual was away on the Continent.

The first story in the series was called "Missing!" and the opening chapter showed Blake, pruning-knife in hand, busy with his roses in the front garden. Why the author chose to give the house the name of Aston Villa would have been obvious to any reader of that period, for the famous club were going great guns in both cup and league at that time. Inevitably, the telephone-bell rang, and Blake, expecting the worst, passed out of the sunlight into the hall to answer its summons. Naturally, it was Scotland Yard at the other end, and so began Blake's first case in his new surroundings. Soon he forsook his rural surroundings to rent rooms in the centre of the City.

The stories were a mixed bag, with the good outnumbering the bad, and the indifferent outscoring both. Only on the rare occasion was an attempt made to run a series on the lines of those in the UNION JACK. Then, commencing 6th November, 1909, and carrying on until Christmas, came an unbroken run of eight stories featuring Marcus Hume, a criminal lawyer, who, throwing up his practise, joined the ranks of those he formerly defended so skilfully. He was a completely bad hat was Marcus Hume, sporting a monocle, but bereft of any sporting qualities of any kind. In Blake's view, even imprisonment was too good for him, and it gave the detective much inward satisfaction to bring the master-criminal to his knees and ruin him completely. This was a good series, in which Blake was helped in his campaign against Hume by Bathurst and Lady Molly.

The origin of these stories is somewhat problematical, for in their brevity, they did not lend themselves so easy of identification as did the longer efforts in U.J. But, as a result of much research, I am confident that the man who wrote nearly all the stories over a period of four years contributed regularly to ANSWERS, PENNY PICTORIAL, and many other adult papers run by the Amalgamated Press. He was Cecil Hayter, and on competion of the Sexton Blake series he began another, this time introducing his own detective, Major Derwent Duff, and his Chinese factotum, Chin-Chin.

It is difficult to pin-point the other writers who were called on

to help Hayter when he was unavailable. The controversial Michael Storm was certainly one, and brought one of his own characters - Rupert Forbes - into one of the stories, and I feel certain that it was his hand that conceived both Marcus Hume and Lady Molly. Among the other writers who may have contributed the odd story were Stacey Blake, Sidney Gowing, T. C. Bridges, A. C. Murray, Henry St. John Cooper and Dr. J. W. Staniforth. They were all regular P.P. contributors of that period.

There is a puzzling aspect about the Marcus Hume stories. The last three were certainly written by Hayter, but the preceding five were in a far more leisurely strain to the latter's usually racy style. This was the time of Storm's now famous disappearance from the Street of Ink, so it may well be that having left the Marcus Hume series hanging in the air, so to speak, Hayter was left with the job of finishing them off.

The alleged Blake stories by Henry St. John Cooper are still undiscovered, but "The Case of Squire Falconer," published in No. 495 has something of his style of narration about it. Hitherto, Cooper's only known reference to Blake was in a book published in hard covers by Sampson Low in the twenties, when he referred to Blake twice in a crime and mystery novel, entitled "The Red Veil."

Of the other writers who were commissioned, one introduced a man named Simmons, who filled the role of Blake's manservant. Another, a little more specific, gave Blake as having chambers in Messenger Square, wherever that thoroughfare may have been, and of possessing a bungalow at Shorebridge. Of the artists, Leonard Shields illustrated the early stories, but he soon gave way to R. J. Macdonald, which gave quite a strong MAGNET and GEM flavour to the proceedings. Thereafter, Mac did nearly all the drawings, with Harry Lane and J. Louis Smythe contributing a set here and there.

To conclude, In view of their absence from the SEXTON BLAKE CATALOGUE, the question of whether these stories were of sufficient importance as to have been included arises. Personally, I think they should have been, particularly in view of the fact that much abbreviated versions of early U.J. stories reprinted in the POPULAR were considered important enough to be listed. After all, these were original stories,

and ran non-stop for four years, which proves that they must have been very popular with the readers of that generation, and should a revised edition of the S.B.C. be contemplated in the future, I think they are worthy of inclusion.

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CONFESSIONS OF A BLAKE ADDICT

by Roger Sansom

The earliest Blake stories I read were those given in picture-strip form in the "Knockout" each week - and I believe these continued to appear until comparatively recently. The stories as I remember them were not unduly distinguished. They were single cases of the spot-the-one-simple-discrepancy variety, such as appear as makeweights in the recent "Valiant Book," and occasionally filled a similar role (but in words) in the last-series S.B.L.

The first specially-interesting Blake story to take my fancy featured in a "Knockout Annual," which must have been about 1956, making me eleven. In pictures again, but in a very different style from those in the paper, as some stories in comic annuals have a way of being. All I remember now about this yarn clearly enough to set down, is that there was a giant in it called Igor. The artwork was particularly interesting, being dark-shadowed and very much vintage Baker Street.

About the same time I read the famous tribute by Dorothy Sayers, touching on the Arturian nature of the Blake saga, part of which subsequently became a permanent frontispiece to the Library.

And then my grandmother sent me my first full-length Blake (we were living abroad at the time). It was "Requiem for Redheads" by W. Howard Baker. Although I didn't know it then, Howard Baker had only recently brought about the more external manifestations of the Blakian Wind of Change.

The next Blake I was to read dated from before the Changing. A school-friend lent me "The Mystery of the Outlawed Black" by Rex Hardinge, an archetypal African adventure from this excellent author.

Then, in a bookshop in Limassol, I found the (reasonably) current S.B.L. issues - "Act of Violence" by Peter Saxon, and "Murder with Variety" by William Arthur.

With benefit of hindsight - "Act of Violence" inaugurated the period of the great Blakian war stories, which was shortly to produce the magnificent "Last Days of Berlin." In 1965 I reread "Act of Violence" under the old Consul imprint as "The Dogs of War," featuring Mr. Saxon-Baker's rather puzzling derivative Richard Quintain, Blake's brief contact with the girl he meets in his search written up into a sex-interest for "Quintain!"

"Murder with Variety" was a routine whodunnit (with echoes of Trevor Story's "The Season of the Skylark") written by a one-story Blake man, William Arthur - possibly the W.A. of W.A. Ballinger/ Baker??

Mock-Literary Digression

For I wish I had the time and scope to do a really intensive study of Mr. Baker in his various writing personae, such treatment as others have afforded Charles Hamilton. He is a very fine thriller writer, versatile, always readable, certainly ubiquitous, incredibly prolific, occasionally facile, more than a little mysterious. I have even in wilder moments considered the theory that every one of the latter-day Blake authors, except Jack Trevor Story and Wilfred McNeilly perhaps, is actually W.H.B.

Certainly much literary digging needs to be done on the authorship of the post-'56 S.B.L. Authors of latter years have ranged from the highly individual J.T. Story to the mass-produced Desmond Reids, which name appears to be an umbrella for all sorts and conditions of writers in the Howard Baker factory. There are Reids that I would swear from internal evidence as they say, are by W.H.B., but there seems to have been at least an attempt to clothe the shadow in an Ulster personality. In two paperbacks of recent year, Reid has featured in bouts of authorial schizophrenia, sharing the honours with Peter Saxon, and with - of all people - Pierre Quiroulle. A picture of "Desmond Reid" appeared in S.B.L. No. 501, which would conceivably be a younger W.H.B. - compare the case of the Peter Saxon portrait. Meanwhile, Mr. Reid has been busy outside S.B.L. - I have a Western published under that name, Press Editorial Services, naturally.

And what are we to make of Arthur Maclean, who has always seemed to be a real person, although not known to me outside the saga?

At any rate, when Saxon and Maclean appeared as characters in "Savage Venture" (Ballinger), Maclean's name was altered to Macdean, presumably on the grounds of the "real-life" author being real. And yet we have Maclean's "Dark Frontier" (which introduced Craille) appearing as - of all things - a "Danger Man" paperback credited to W. HOWARD BAKER.

Handy reference guide to the (rewritten) works of W. Howard Baker:
(reference the Sunday Times article reprinted here a few weeks ago)

Richard Quintain "insurance investigator" and a wartime secret operative
equals
Rikki Castain, jazz musician
equals
John Drake, Danger Man
equals
Sexton Blake.

Julie Wellesley, Quintain's gamin-like assistant
equals
Julie Wellesley, Castain's equally gamin-like girl-friend
equals
Marion Wellesley, Quintain's (presumably un-gamin) secretary
equals, of course, Paula Dane or
Marion Lang, as occasion demands.

Slim Mercer equals Tinker

Bill Kerby equals Bill Kirby equals Splash Kirby

Fenner equals Craille (in both Quintain and Drake)

Most fascinating of all, in "The Cellar Boys" which is a rewrite of "Espresso Jungle, S.B.L. 435) Tinker's role is redistributed most ingeniously between Julie, Kerby and Superintendent Dodds, otherwise Grimwald. The list is endless. Sometimes the incidental characters are renamed, sometimes not.

Never mind. If Quintain is the most perfunctory character in literary history (and it is interesting once again to compare Jack Trevor Story, who has published complete rewrites of at least two of his Blake

novels) Baker is still one of the best writers of tough thrillers that I know. And his "Drums of the Dark Gods" (distantly based on a Blake) must be one of the most exciting stories one has ever read.

You will gather that I have learned quite a bit about my favourite folk-hero and his chroniclers since I first subscribed to the legend in 1956. So many stories, so many landmarks. And a sixty-year back-log to catch up with eventually. Characters have come and gone - yes, why did old Venner turn into Dukelow? Different media - the Donald Stuart scripts for radio which were charmingly ingenious and stood in the same relationship to the modern saga as Eric Parker's drawings (and this is not sarcasm), but totally at variance with William Franklyn's lightly boiled performance. And, oh, Mr. Stuart's treatment of Craille!

And then of course there is the consciously "period" television series, as a result of which Blake is again detecting in the pages of a comic. In seventy years, the wheel has gone full circle many times.

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NELSON LEE COLUMN

EARLY STRUGGLES

THE "BOY'S REALM" & "PLUCK"

by Bob Blythe

As is well known, E.S.B. wrote quite a few yarns for the "Boy's Realm" in 1919 and again in 1925 and 1927. In 1910, however, he was unknown, and getting a story published in the "Boy's Realm" was hard work, as the following correspondence shows.

It was through the good offices of Arthur Marshall, editor of the "Boy's Friend" that he got an introduction to Rex Haydon, editor, at this period, of the "Boy's Realm." Whilst trying to get a story published in the "Boy's Friend" he decided to try his luck with his new contact, Rex Haydon.

Brockley Road.
20th July, 1910.

Dear Mr. Haydon,
You will find enclosed the 1st chapter and synopsis of "Cliffords Great Jape," which, I hope, is the sort of thing you're wanting.
I will let you have the sports story if possible, to-morrow.
Faithfully yours, etc.

Brockley Road,
22nd July, 1910.

Dear Mr. Haydon,
Enclosed please find 1st chapter and synopsis of "Rivals of the Air" the sports

story mentioned in my last letter.
Does "Cliffords Great Jape" strike you as being suitable? I hope so.
Faithfully yours, etc.

After due consideration, the editor replied with words of hope for Edwy.

Fleet St.
July 24th, 1910.

Dear Sir,
I have read the opening chapters of your two stories "Clifford's Great Jape" and "Rivals of the Air," and beg to return them to you herewith. The former yarn I fear I cannot accept because we have already had a story on exactly the same lines.
With regard to the flying yarn, however, this is in the main quite alright. But you must not make the villain the twin brother of the hero. He may be a cousin if you like, but not a nearer relation. Under these circumstances I think it would be well for you to abandon the relationship altogether, and make it a coinsidence that the villain so much resembles the hero. This will of course mean the elimination of the heart to heart talk between the two, but there is no reason why the hero should not overpower the villain and make good his escape.

Sincerely yours,
REX HAYDON

Further correspondence concerning "Rivals of the Air" is missing, but it was eventually published in No. 442 dated 19th November, 1910.

Encouraged, no doubt, by having a story accepted, he lost no time in offering a further story.

Brockley Road, S.E.
August 2nd, 1910.

Dear Mr. Haydon,
As promised I have pleasure in handing you herewith first chapter and synopsis of "The Variety Entertainment" - of Pelham School.
Faithfully yours, etc.

Stories of Pelham had quite a long run in the "Boy's Realm" at this time, although I have no means of knowing whether they were all by one author or not. Certainly one of them wasn't, as the next letter shows.

Brockley Rd.
August 10th, 1910.

Dear Mr. Haydon,
I have pleasure in handing you herewith the completed MS of "The Variety Entertainment" with alteration as suggested by you on Monday.
Re the next Pelham tale have had ideas:
Ghost at school.
J.N. or C. get marooned on island.
Joke about hidden treasure - jape on C. & Co.
I could let you have a synopsis for either of the above suggestions. If you will let me know I should be glad.
Faithfully yours, etc.

Unfortunately, I cannot prove when "The Variety Entertainment" appeared, for the title does not occur in any "Boy's Realm in 1910 or 1911. However a story called "Billy Flips' Benefit" was printed in

No. 434 dated 24th Sept., 1910, the plot of which could easily have had E.S.B's title. The other three plots mentioned by him may, or may not, have appeared - the correspondence is missing for a year. If anyone has the "Boy's Realm" for 1910/1911 and cares to read the Pelham School stories, and can trace the ideas mentioned by E.S.B. I would be very pleased to hear from him.

The correspondence with Rex Haydon as editor of the "Boy's Realm closes with these three letters which speak for themselves.

Stonham Parva.
August 8th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Haydon,
Will you please let me know if the enclosed Synopsis will suit your requirements? I thought it best not to write the first chapter until I learned whether the idea had already been used or not.

Yours sincerely, etc.

Fleet St.
August 19th, 1911.

Dear Sir,
I think that the enclosed should make quite a good complete for the Boys' Realm. If you care to write it up I shall be glad to give the yarn my consideration.

Very faithfully yours,
REX HAYDON

Bures, Suffolk.
January 13th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Haydon,
Running through some papers a day or two ago I came across the synopsis of the enclosed 6,000-word school story - which you had commissioned me to write several months ago. I must really apologise for the long delay. Somehow - I think it was in getting an extra lot of "Brotherhood of Iron" copy in to Mr. Hinton - I overlooked the synopsis until this week, when I immediately wrote it up. I hope it will still be acceptable. In any case, may I send you in some more synopses - which, if approved, I shall, needless to say, write up and turn in with celerity?

I am, Dear Mr. Haydon,
Yours very truly, etc.

Whatever story Brooks submitted, it couldn't have been received with enthusiasm for, as I say, there are no more letters concerning the "Boy's Realm."

However E.S.B. had not finished with Rex Haydon, for almost immediately we find Edwy writing to him as editor of "Pluck."

Bures, Suffolk.
February 1st, 1912.

Rex Haydon, Esqre.,
"Pluck Library."

Dear Mr. Haydon,
How does the following strike you for a Spearing yarn: I am not going into details

but just set down the idea of the plot:

A certain man has been badly injured, and he is in a sub-conscious condition; he cannot speak or write. Yet his friends are eagerly awaiting the time when he can, for he has an important secret to reveal - a secret which is worth thousands of pounds. Two scoundrels know of this, and decide that they shall be the first to hear the secret. But how can they do it? There is only one way, and they make very elaborate arrangements. The nurse who attends the injured man is in league with the villains. So, in the prologue, they drug the injured man and get him out of the house into a motor-car. In this they travel several miles and place their victim in a room in another house; but the room is an exact counterpart of his former one. Therefore, when he awakes he suspects nothing. There is the same nurse, and one of the villains disguises himself as the usual doctor. In this way the injured man is allowed to get well as though he had not been kidnapped. (The villains could not have kidnapped him in the ordinary way because the knowledge would possibly have made his illness much worse - and he would certainly never reveal the secret to his captors.) As it is, however, he knows nothing; the whole thing is a pretence. One of the villains is clever at disguises and he appears before the injured man several times a day as different characters. In the first chapter, of course, would be described how the kidnapping was discovered, and Spearing would be commissioned to take up the case. Then he would get on the track, etc.

Of course, the above is only a bare idea, but if you think it suitable, I will write the prologue and first chapter and send it along with a full, chapter-by-chapter synopsis.

I am, Dear Mr. Haydon,
Yours very truly, etc.

Will Spearing yarns, of course, had quite a vogue about this time, both in "Pluck" and the "Union Jack," and this particular story is interesting because credit for all Spearing stories is given to N. Goddard. Here's one at least that wasn't written by him, for it eventually appeared under Edwy's own title "Marjorie Drummonds' Secret" in "Pluck" No. 405 dated 3rd August, 1912 and occupied half the paper, 14 pages out of 28.

MORE OF BROOKS' EARLY STRUGGLES NEXT MONTH

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NEWS OF THE CLUBS

MIDLAND

Meeting held 24th June, 1969.

The now standard total of eleven members was present at this, our midsummer meeting. We were due for one of Ray Bennett's always interesting talks on comics and other non Hamiltonian papers. He was not able to be present however, but we had instead some interesting items by Tom Porter.

Tom has had quite a number of interesting letters lately from several of our postal members, and he quoted some very interesting as well as amusing extracts from some of these letters.

Tom followed this with a reading from SOL 349 "Chums of the Open Road." An intensely amusing account of a brush between the Rookwooders and his Serene Highness, Horace Coker of Greyfriars.

Then for the first time for quite a while we had a game of Greyfriars Bingo. The two rounds played were both very enjoyable and exciting. Norman Gregory, our Treasurer, often used to win in the past and tonight was no exception, as he won the second game. But very much to his surprise, the present writer won the first.

Tonight's anniversary number was Magnet No. 437, dated 24.6.16., thus 53 years old. The Collectors' item was BFL No. 200 1st Series, "Canvas and Caravan," by Robert W. Comrade, (E.S. Brooks). Both kindly exhibited by Tom Porter from his great collection.

EDWARD DAVEY
Chairman and Secretary.

* * * * *

NORTHERN

Meeting held Saturday, 12th July, 1969.

It was a beautiful summer evening when members met, two, Chairman, Geoffrey Wilde and Vice-Chairman, Jack Wood, coming from the Test Match at Headingly. Tom Roach popped in to say, as it were, that he could not come - 'company' having arrived at home unexpectedly, but twelve were left when the Meeting opened after the Library Business (which had been conducted by the Secretary with selections sent along by her brother, Gerry).

After the Minutes and Finance Report orders were taken for the next Magnet facsimiles, the Wharton Rebel No. 2 series. Exciting times these for hobbyists with these lovely mint copies coming out - like a dream come true.

After a short interval of chat and correspondence (including news from Bill Winter of Blackpool) the Last Magnet was taken up, tonight by Geoffrey Good, for the last but one reading. It was quickly apparent that a first-class reader had joined our ranks and applause at the end showed our appreciation of Geoffrey's lively and dramatic style.

The refreshments were served by the three ladies present - June Arden, Elsie Taylor and Mollie Allison, and after them the last named produced a word puzzle. The words of the fourth paragraph of the first story in the Magnet Egypt Series had been arranged alphabetically and the task was to re-arrange them back into the original order - if possible. This proved harder than one might have expected, but when the Magnet paragraph was read out, many had framed correct sentences, but no one had them all in correct order.

The final item was given by Geoffrey Wilde, who had devised the compulsory words and phrases for our last writing effort. Geoffrey had a story he had written about a Sorcerer's Box containing a piece of witch hair (with remarkable properties). This story contained specified words, etc., he had set for his boys at school, and had been written because one of them declared "It's not as easy as you think, sir!" It was a very gripping plot, enhanced by delicious humour, and Geoffrey had his audience alternately gasping and chuckling.

And so another happy evening concluded.

Next Meeting, Saturday, 9th August, 1969.

M. L. ALLISON
Hon. Secretary.

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LONDON

There was an excellent attendance at the Kingsbury home of Bob and Louise Blythe on the occasion of the July meeting. The president of the club, John Wernham, had made the journey from Maidstone and when he addressed the gathering, he spoke of his next opus, due for distribution next December.

John wondered if the idea of reprinting facsimile Magnet series and stories originated from his previous efforts. Remember "A Strange Secret?" However, Frank Vernon-Lay brought along copies of the second Wharton the Rebel series of which those who required

the volume were able to avail themselves. Thus it seemed an irony of fate that a famous Hamiltonian series should be distributed at this home of Nelson Lee. But we are an old boys' book club and one and all were satisfied.

Bill Lofts gave an excellent talk entitled "We don't know it all," and after the discourse, there was a discussion on the subject. Bill told of many characters outside the readers of the "C.D." and the clubs that were very well versed in the old boys' book lore. Thus the excellent sales of the facsimile reprints.

Next on the entertainment list was Bill Hubbard's "Cricket in the School Stories" quiz. This fine topical summer competition was won by the chairman, Don Webster. Eric Lawrence and Winifred Morss tied for second place.

But the highlight of the meeting, in my opinion, was Ray Hopkins' discourse on Morcove School as culled from several issues of "Schoolgirls' Own." Very good entertainment indeed, thoroughly enjoyed by the company present.

The next meeting will be at Friardale, Ruislip, alias Rylcombe, the home of Bob and Betty Acraman, on Sunday, August 17th. Kindly inform if intending to be present.

Sunday, September 14th, it is proposed to have an outing and meeting at Hove, Sussex. Will those who are interested, kindly let me know?

Thanks to hosts, Bob and Laura and to those who made a long journey, terminated the meeting.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

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The Postman Called

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

K. J. BONUGLI (Bedford): Concerning your remarks on the interjection "Walker!" in the July C.D., I think I can throw some light on the expression's origin. As you say the term is a shortening of "Hooky Walker," who was apparently a prevaricating hook-nosed spy, one John Walker, who lived at the end of the eighteenth century. The term has been rare since about 1900, although I believe it was comparatively common in the mid-nineteenth century. It is even to be found in Charles Dickens' novel "A Christmas Carol" published in 1843, ("Buy it" said Scrooge, "Walker!" said the boy).

PETER WALKER (Nottingham): Your article in this month's Collectors' Digest concerning the Gem with the title "Walker!" was of particular interest to me, for two reasons. Firstly, I bare that name myself, and secondly, it was one of the first Gems I ever bought.

I recollect that the name itself means a forester. I cannot recall that I have ever heard anything about it meaning " an expression of extreme incredulity." However, I certainly would not like to dispute this.

Memory is a trifle vague now, but I think it is possible that I

bought this particular issue amongst several others, including "Darcy's Deal" as back numbers around 1920. In those days it was often possible to pick these items up on second-hand bookstalls for ½d. each. I was at school at that time, and your further references to "Land of Hope and Glory" make me realise that this stirring tune was sung with great fervour at my school in those days. Days which bring back worthwhile memories of the weekly thrill of the crisp clean Magnet on Monday, Gem on Wednesday and Penny Popular on Friday.

The strains of that Elgar tune, and the smell of the new Magnets and Gems are memories that no modern cynic can take away from me.

VIC COLBY (N.S.W. Australia): It is wonderful to note that, despite all the changes of which one is conscious on every hand, the good old C.D. remains true to itself and to the beloved old papers that it represents.

JOHN TOMLINSON (Burton-on-Trent): Nick Carter, the American tec., was popular reading. I remember a series of silent-films about him (perhaps Danny knows the actor's name?). His assistants were Chick Carter and "Miss Patsy." (Patsy was a male character in the original stories.) Our book-shops now exhibit "Nick Carter" stories at 3/6, but what a change! They are "adult" reading, full of violence, murder, and obscenity, if the one I glanced through is a good example of the lot (and I expect it is). Threequarters of the paper-backs in the shop I looked round seemed to be filth, and people who observe us reading St. Jim's say we are in our "second-childhood." I prefer to be in my second-childhood to a suspicion of having a mind like a sink.

LEN WORMULL (Romford): YE GODS - to think that the Nelson Lee was guilty of anti-colour way back in 1926!

This little bit from the St. Frank's League columns of No. 23, 1st New Series (Handforth's Flag Day) made me sit up and take notice: 'Should members receive begging letters from dusky merchants of the Gold Coast, they are advised to ignore such communications.'

Shall we quietly draw a veil?

BRIAN SAYER (Margate): Walker, Hookey. "That's all Hookey Walker."

It's all nonsense. The story told is that a London firm engaged a clerk named Walker, the possessor of a large and hooked nose. His task was to watch the workmen, and should they not fulfil their toll of work, to report them to his principals. His complaints, conveyed by the firm to the men, were received with so much incredulity that the firm, for the sake of peace, had to get rid of Mr. Walker. Since when anything incredible reported is greeted with the shout of "Walker," or "Hookey Walker." And every Walker born of woman is fated to have the nickname "Hookey," just as each clark will be called "Nobby."

The source of this is a slim but entrancing book called "Crowther's Encyclopædia of Phrases and Origins" by Edwin Radford who, according to the preface, for some years edited the "Live Letters" column of the Daily Mirror. The book is a wartime edition (1945) and is of some interest to me in that it was printed in Margate, for John Crowther Ltd.

C.D. continues to give great pleasure - my particular favourite is "Let's be Controversial."

(Grateful thanks to all the large numbers of readers who have written in on this theme. - ED.)

BILL LOFTS (London): I feel certain that Ethel Le Neve died in Surrey only a short while ago (S. Gordon Swan, July C.D.) and probably could trace back to the newspaper cuttings about it. Most authors of the PENNY PICTORIAL Sexton Blake yarns have now been traced through an old stock book being found. These will be revealed some time in the future.

I agree with Len Wormull in principle regarding editors. Many editors had their own cliques of favourite authors, and it was almost an impossibility for another author to break into that field. Even John Creasey could not get established in the Sexton Blake Library, and George Rees found his excellent yarns rejected for all sorts of stupid points.

I remember W. B. Home-Gall telling me that in the 20's, after reading some of the awful 'substitute' stories, he felt that as an enthusiastic Greyfriars and St. Jim's reader, he could do much better. He found that his efforts were rejected by Noel Wood-Smith (the chief sub-editor) for all sorts of reasons, and yet stories which had all these supposed faults were still being published. The plain fact was that there was many a racket going on of writers hogging the market.

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