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COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL.
24

No.
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A WORD FROM THE SKIPPER

TELEVISION AND "MODERN BOY"

Last month on our back page we reproduced the cover of a Modern Boy for Christmas 1937. The subject of the picture was Television, which, at that time, meant little or nothing to most of us. Modern Boy was a paper always ahead of its day and age.

For many years after 1937, the TV set was the toy of the well-to-do. So far as I recall, I did not see a TV set in operation until some time after the war ended. It must have been 1950 at the earliest before most of us had our own sets - and life has never been the same since.

TELEVISION AND "THE PENNY POPULAR"

At the present time, a new Vera Lynn show has been running on TV for some weeks. In each week's programme she is supported by a different long-haired Pop Group. To me, this seems odd planning. People who enjoy listening to the singing of Vera Lynn are unlikely to be delighted

by Pop Groups, while pop fans are probably not enamoured of Miss Lynn. Possibly the editor hopes to attract viewers of both groups. I think there is a danger that he might repel both.

It reminds me of the very early Penny Popular, when the editor sought to attract three different types of reader by starring, in the same issue, Sexton Blake, Tom Merry and Jack, Sam and Pete. I have mentioned before that they made odd bedfellows.

Still, the Penny Pop programme ran unchanged for 5 years, so apparently it wasn't a failure. Possibly Vera Lynn and the Pop Groups will turn out to be whisky and soda rather than oil and water or chalk and cheese.

1970

At the time of writing, Christmas is just on the threshold, and it is a time of year when one looks back. During 1969 the Digest has never looked back though it has been looking back, in one sense, all the time. The year has brought me thousands of wonderful letters from readers. My main regret is that it is not humanly possible to write in reply to everyone.

By the time this issue is in your hands, 1970 will have started. Let us hope that it will be another splendid time, hobbywise. I wish all my readers the very best of everything for the New Year. Happy days to you all.

THE EDITOR

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First of all may I wish all readers of this section of Collectors' Digest a Very Happy New Year?

I would like to thank all those of you who so kindly sent me contributions throughout the past year. If you continue to support BLAKIANA in the same way in 1970 as you did in 1969, I shall be very happy!

Thanks to Derek Adley, Bill Lofts and Walter Webb, I now have the records of every Blake story in the DETECTIVE WEEKLY; also - with the exception of one title in each - the Blake titles in PENNY PICTORIAL and ANSWERS WEEKLY. The missing titles are: Penny Pictorial issue No. 429, dated 17.8.1907, and Answers Weekly issue No. 1126, dated 25.12.1910. If anyone can let me have either or both of these titles I would be most grateful.

I am hoping later in the year to have some more Sexton Blake Catalogues printed. They will also contain the additional information concerning the above-mentioned papers. I hope to have more to say about this next month.

JOSIE PACKMAN



SEXTON BLAKE TV SERIES IN NEW ZEALAND

By O. W. Wadham

The following article on the Sexton Blake serial on TV is from the pen of the TV critic of the New Zealand SUNDAY NEWS, published in Auckland. It is good to read that one modern TV writer has such unstinted praise for the famous detective.

SEXTON'S GOT ALL THE CLUES

I should like to say a word in praise of my favourite screen detective - "Sexton Blake"
"Sexton Blake" was never intended for an adult public. He began

his career in the pages of a boys' magazine. His exploits are obviously meant for the eyes and ears of children, and yet I vastly prefer him to most of the heroes who grace the later hours.

The producer of the "Sexton Blake" serial never takes advantage of the fact that he is dealing with Boys' Own paper stuff, never plays for a giggle from the gallery. He presents the stories absolutely straight. Their greatest charm is their complete dignity, their utter seriousness.

The stories are both hearty and ingenuous. Their naivety is presented with a flourish. They are set in an earlier part of the century, but their feeling is surprisingly modern. From under the cloche hats and out of the antiquated telephones comes dialogue which sounds strictly up to date.

The words are beautifully timed and spoken. Blake himself is handsome and urbane. The crime is all nice, clean stuff that couldn't upset anybody.

Children of assorted ages love "Sexton Blake." It satisfies but never patronises. It is as wholesome as a crime serial could possibly be, and a good deal more healthy in its attitudes than many of the travesties that pass for cartoons these days.



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

By S. Gordon Swan

WHAT SPECIAL MAGIC attaches to the name of Sexton Blake that has enabled the character to survive for nearly eighty years? During that time other detectives have made their bow, many of them in well-written stories by good authors; but all of them exited after a brief reign, some disappearing when their originators died. Blake's own creator, Harry Blyth, died only a few years after the detective's debut in December, 1893, yet Sexton Blake lived on.

The Man from Baker Street's nearest rival, Nelson Lee, who was "born" in the year following Blake's first appearance, carried on the good work until the 'thirties, and for something like twenty years most of his adventures emanated from the pen of one man, Maxwell Scott, who also wrote of Blake. Much credit is due to this painstaking writer, who plotted out his stories in detail, and it seems a pity that

his creation did not survive until the present era. Perhaps this is partly due to the fact that, when Lee arrived at St. Frank's, the detective became submerged in the schoolmaster and the schoolmaster eventually was subordinated to the schoolboys.

No doubt much of the popularity of Sexton Blake was due to the variety of the stories which, even in the earliest days, incorporated detective exploits, mystery, romance, high adventure and exploration in strange countries. Yet even this does not account for the great boom which followed Blake's revival in the *Id. Union Jack* after he had been dropped from its $\frac{1}{2}$ d. predecessor. (Even in this hiatus the detective was appearing in two serials in the $\frac{1}{2}$ d. *Marvel*.)

After Blake's resuscitation in the U.J. he stalked through the pages of the *Boys' Realm*, the *Boys' Friend*, the *Boys' Herald*, *Answers*, the *Penny Pictorial* and the *Boys' Friend Library*. At one period he must have been featured in five or six periodicals simultaneously. There were at least two plays touring the country: *Sexton Blake, Detective*, which was based upon Murray Graydon's Christmas story, *Five Years After*, and another called *Hush Money, or the Disappearance of Sexton Blake, Detective*. The advertisements announcing the performances of these plays in different cities are to be found in *Union Jacks* of that era.

The type of men who wrote the yarns helped greatly to establish Blake's reputation. I remember as a boy reading of the disparaging remark that *Union Jack* stories were written by the office boy. This ridiculous, unfounded assertion must have been made by prejudiced critics who never attempted to test the quality of the stories by reading them. They were written in the main by knowledgeable men who had considerable experience of the world.

Take for an instance Stanton Hope, who was responsible for a number of *Sexton Blake Libraries*. If you read his autobiography, *Rolling Round the World -- for Fun*, you will understand why he was able to convey such realism in his tales of Blake in various parts of the world. He had undergone many of those experiences himself. Among other jobs, Hope worked in a sawmill in Canada, sought gold in Alaska, toiled on the land in Australia, served on several ships, was at Gallipoli and what was then known as Mesopotamia, visited India, Japan and China. What a wealth of material he was able to bring to his yarns of the famous detective!

Then we have G. H. Teed, another globe-trotter if ever there was one. In a U.J. of the nineteen-twenties the editor published a letter from this author, written after four years' absence from the pages of that periodical. In it the writer mentions that he has just completed his second tour of the world, including some of the countries he missed the first time round, and states that he has accumulated a store of plots and incidents to incorporate in future stories. And it was after his return that readers were treated to some of his best work. A different style of writer from Stanton Hope, G. H. Teed managed to project glamour and mysticism into his stories as well as straight-out, red-blooded adventure.

We come next to another traveller in Rex Hardinge, whose chief love seemed invested in Africa and who wrote some splendid tales of that great continent. He also revived those sterling characters, Sir Richard Losely and Lobangu, originally created by Cecil Hayter. But Rex Hardinge was responsible for some highly ingenious stories of pure detection which mark him out as a versatile author.

W. Murray Graydon had travelled, undoubtedly, but whether he had visited all the countries he wrote about is hard to decide, as he contrived to convey the atmosphere of those locations very well, and his descriptions of the capitals of Europe and of remoter cities seem remarkably authentic. If he was a little naive in his yarns laid in England, it was more than atoned for by the glamorous backgrounds of the episodes which took place in foreign countries.

There is insufficient space here to deal with all the men of experience who penned Sexton Blake stories, but mention should be made of S. Gordon Shaw, who wrote with firsthand knowledge of Canada - as did L. C. Douthwaite; Stacey Blake, who had the traveller's touch in his narratives; Coutts Brisbane, who imparted to his stories an acquaintance with different parts of the world; Arthur Paterson, whose association with Sexton Blake covered only a brief period but who dealt with out-of-the-way places in some of his contributions; and H. Gregory Hill and Anthony Parsons, who introduced the colour and mystery of India into their yarns.

No office boys, these, but men who had knocked about the globe and were able to further the career of Sexton Blake from the depths of

their experience.

These stalwarts, then, and those others who wrote tales of sheer detection - Jack Lewis, Gwyn Evans and their like - were in a great measure responsible for the longevity of the great detective. But there is something else, some inexplicable quality, that special touch of magic of which I spoke earlier, which has sustained Blake through two world wars and a great depression and helped him to survive into this space age. And it is this elusive factor which will carry him on for generations to come.

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REVIEWS

MINI-SKIRT MURDERS

Martin Thomas

SLAUGHTER IN THE SUN

Stephen Christie

(Howard Baker Publishers Ltd. at 18/- each)

Both these stories are well-written and entertaining. They strike us as being the best offerings in the Sexton Blake saga for quite a long time.

"Mini-Skirt Murders" will almost certainly be the most popular with long-standing Blake fans. Martin Thomas, who writes with all his accustomed verve, sees to it that the most loyal are not the most neglected. With Mr. Thomas there is none of the irritating tarradiddle of switching from Tinker to Edward Carter and back. Tinker is Tinker and he plays a substantial part in this novel. And Pedro, the most loved animal in fiction, stars and shines. A modern Jack the Ripper taxes all the ingenuity of Blake, Tinker and Pedro in a story which is told with a welcome absence of earthiness. Martin Thomas at his best.

"Slaughter in the Sun" is also written with restraint, and is well-plotted. Set in Ceylon, it provides some novel backgrounds, but Tinker is not featured at all. In this story, there are a couple of reminiscences, attention to which is drawn in footnotes. I am all for reminiscence which is heartwarming for the older reader. But I dislike footnotes which make the reminiscences seem artificial.

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 142. WRITTEN TO ORDER

As the years slipped by, we have occasionally come across one or another of our little circle describing, probably by assumption, some certain story or series as having been "written to order." This has usually been a method of finding an excuse for some tale, by Hamilton or Brooks, which has been below standard or has failed to please a majority.

In other words - you found fault with the story. It wasn't the author's fault. He was given orders to write it by his editor. Don't blame the author; blame the editor.

In my view, to excuse a story on the grounds that it was "written to order" is complete nonsense. It is endowing the writers with a literary sensitivity which they did not possess and could not possibly have possessed.

We have deep affection for the favourite authors who brightened our boyhood. We greatly enjoy studying the various phases of their careers. Nevertheless, the work they did was regarded by everybody as being completely transient. It was of the mass product variety - the sausage machine type - churning out masses of words, - words which in the normal course of things will be read today and put in the dustbin tomorrow. Such work was possibly considered very near the bottom of the literary barrel.

For a man who was ready to work like a demon, and one whose stamina and imagination were above average, it paid very well indeed. But not one of them ever thought for a moment that he was writing anything that would last. Charles Hamilton was astounded in 1945 to find that there were plenty who remembered and who treasured. In fact he said so.

It just happened that Hamilton had remarkable gifts. Those gifts enabled him to earn a living far superior to most of those who were engaged in the same profession. It is not for us, this month at any rate, to weigh up those gifts and to decide whether or not he wasted them. It is a question whether he would have done better in any other

sphere of literature. I doubt whether anything else would have paid better financially.

It is, in fact, Hamilton's amazing flair for writing which has given all the old papers - not only the papers for which he wrote - respectability, and lifted them out of the hack class. Without his flair, there would have been no O.B.B.C., no C.D., and no Nelson Lee Column. And, if his detractors believe otherwise, they would believe anything.

The actual writing was clearly no problem to men such as Charles Hamilton and St. John Cooper who were accustomed to churning out an average of 50,000 words a week, year in year out. Providing they had their plots or the skeletons of plots there was no difficulty. The nightmare crunch must have come when the supply of plots ran dry at the source - and, with so many stories to provide each week, that nightmare must always have been just round the corner.

Anything provided grist for the mill. It must have done. It's sheer commonsense. "The Willoughby Captains" probably suggested the Kildare-Monteith theme, from which stemmed many other similar series; "The Black House on the Moor" was rather barefacedly lifted from Conan Doyle; the real-life Archer-Shee case was used without any pretence for a Magnet couple; the Marie Celeste mystery suggested "The Hidden Horror." This trend was much more clearly defined in the early Magnet and Gem, but even in the later Magnet we find "The Man With the Glaring Eyes," loosely based on a real-life affair.

I feel quite certain myself that Hamilton wrote at his very best when the outlines of his plots were provided for him. I very much doubt whether he wrote anything "to order." And if anyone tries to tell me that such-and-such a series was a minor failure because the editor provided the plot and ordered it to be written, I just don't believe it.

Hamilton was a genius in his own sphere. He could write convincingly on anything, whether it was school life, adventure, the Wild West, the South Seas, or crime. He even tried his hand at the slapstick stories about Will Hay at school at Bendover. Written to order, my foot! I feel sure that he was on to any plot suggested to him, like a good dog on a bone.

Some writers, and E. S. Brooks was one of them, would have been happy to forget their association with writing for boys' papers,

once they had established themselves with a slightly more classy type of literature. Possibly they liked to forget the days when plots from any source provided manna from heaven to prevent their going hungry - or their typewriters clicking to a standstill.

I don't know who coined the phrase "Written To Order" in connection with our favourite authors. The coiner must have been very naive indeed.

REVIEW

"BILLY BUNTER
OF BUNTER COURT"

Frank Richards.

(Howard Baker 42/-)

This facsimile reprint of eight Magnets from the summer of 1925 is the earliest of the series so far used in these re-presentations. Oddly enough, it seems modern from its brash, untidy editing, with chunks of the main story mixed up with competitions, supplements, and editorial announcements. Until one realises that the frills were mainly delightful reading matter whereas in today's papers the main dish comprises garish masses of advertisements.

The competitions, intriguing sets of pictures hiding the names of cricketers of forty years ago, bring an almost startling breath of fresh air to 1970, so accustomed to competitions which are merely forms of large-scale gambling in which competitors pay for the privilege of placing "x's" in spots which have allegedly been selected by some panel.

The Bunter Court yarn can hardly fail to satisfy. It is a famous story, in many ways the most clever, plotwise, that Charles Hamilton ever wrote. It is very amusing indeed, and the shameless and undisguised contrivance adds to the fun. How a schoolboy manages to entertain his friends at a superb mansion for many weeks without spending a penny of his own money, yet doesn't end up in Borstal, is told in a way that must have added vast numbers to the Magnet's following in its day. It is an interesting Bunter, though it is not the Bunter we knew a year or two later.

The volume is sharp and clear and a treasury of joy for readers

of any age. The narrow margins - possibly due to the reproduction coming from guillotined copies - gives the impression of a treasury even more packed than it really is. But it's a mighty store for the Hamilton fan.

FOR SALE: Lovely items for the Collecting Connoisseur. In brand-new binding in red with gold lettering, with Magnet title-page, Magnets Nos. 37 "The Greyfriars Chinee" and No. 38 "The Cheerful Chinee" - wonderful copies beautifully bound together: £4.5s. Also, in similar binding, Magnet No. 143 "The Head of Study 14" and No. 144 "Billy Bunter's Minor," (bound without original Red Covers, and interior condition not so good): 45/-. Also, similar lovely binding of the Magnet "classic" "The Hidden Horror," (No. 239) bound without red cover, average copy: £2. Also, similar binding in red with gold lettering: Magnets 354 "The Black Footballers" and 355 "Fagging for Coker:" very good copies, bound with red covers and Magnet title page: £3.10s.
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Come back with us, nearly to the turn of the century - to a new boy whose name was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, to a new hero whose name was Jack Blake. Back to a day of zinc milk-cans, gas-lights, and muffin-men - long before the Magnet was thought of -

STAUNCH CHUMS AT ST. JIM'S

Jack Blake sat on the table in No. 6 study in the School House. He was wrapped in thought; a most unusual state for him. Herries was wrestling with a Latin exercise; Digby was engaged in the still more important business of roasting chestnuts. The latest addition to Study No. 6, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House, was diligently polishing his eyeglass.

Blake's preoccupation was so profound that even the tempting offer of roasted chestnuts did not arouse him.

"What's the matter with the image?" queried Digby. "Wake up, ass! What have you got in your silly cocoanut?"

Jack Blake waved his hand chidingly.

"Silence, caitiff! Don't worry your uncle when he's thinking things out. Hallo! Roasted chestnuts! That's where I come in."

Herries looked up from his work.

"Don't talk, you two, or I shall get into a tangle. Hallo, what are you up to now?"

Blake flicked his exercise to the floor.

"Perish all that rot when there's business on hand," he said severely. "You can fag your brain over that presently, and if you're good I'll help you. I've been thinking."

"Did it hurt?"

"Don't be funny, my son. The New House have been bucking up a good deal lately, and it's time we put them in their place. We've got an opportunity now we've never had before."

"How's that?"

"The housemaster over the way, old Ratcliff, has managed to catch a cold, and

he's keeping to his room for a bit. I had it from a New House kid. And Monteith, their prefect, is away."

Herries and Digby looked interested.

"I saw him go out on his machine with Webb of the New House," went on Blake. "Now do you grasp the situation? The housemaster is nursing himself in his room. The head prefect is out for some hours. The coast is clear. Once aboard the lugger and the girl is ours - I mean, now is the time to make Figgins & Co. sit up."

Herries looked doubtful.

"There are still plenty left to sail in if we start rowing the Rats in their own quarters," he said.

"Ass! We're going to pay a visit to Figgins & Co's quarters while they're not there. We're going to prepare a pleasant little surprise for them."

"I see," grinned Herries. "I'm game, if you are. Have you thought out what we're going to do?"

"Of course I have. Two of us will be enough to do the trick. I'm going, of course. I want one volunteer."

"Here you are!" said Herries promptly.

"Here you are!" said Digby, like an echo.

"I should be happy to accompany you," said Arthur Augustus, screwing his monocle into his eye. "I would weally take it as an honah."

"You wouldn't be any good!" said Herries.

"Give him a chance," said Blake. "He licked Kerr, you know; and he can't help being an ass --"

"I stwongly object to such wude expressions."

"If you all want to come, toss up for

it."

This was agreed to. Herries produced a shilling, and chance decided in favour of D'Arcy. Herries and Digby growled and submitted.

The quadrangle was deep in the winter dusk as Blake and his companion crossed it towards the New House. Three figures in running flannels glimmered for a moment in the gloom and vanished. Blake grinned. He recognised Figgins and Co. doing their usual evening sprint round the quad.

"Come on, D'Arcy!"

Luck and the winter dusk favoured them. They reached the Fourth Form studies undiscovered and Blake tried Figgins's door. It opened to his hand, and the School House juniors entered, and Blake closed it. It occupied but a moment to light the gas.

Blake looked round the room, and saw the various belongings of Figgins & Co. scattered about in a state of disorder. He shook his head solemnly.

"This is a shocking business," he said. "Don't you think so, Algernon?"

"I weally don't know why you call me Algernon," said Arthur Augustus; "and the woom is no more untidy that our study in the School House, is it?"

"That's nothing to do with it. It's shocking untidy, and I'm going to set it to rights before our dear schoolfellows return. Now, if I pour this bottle of ink into Figgy's football boots it will be an improvement, and it's bound to please him."

"Weally, I should not think --"

"Then there's their grub. Shocking little gluttons, ain't they?" said Blake, opening the door of the cupboard. "These jam tarts look all right, but a little red ink will improve their colour. They look better now, don't they?"

"Ha, ha! Figgins won't think so."

"There's no pleasing some people. If I pour this syrup over the pigeon-pie it will give it a flavour. Now empty the teacannister on top of it. Here's some coffee. That may as well go on the heap."

Arthur Augustus joined in to help with the improvements.

The havoc the two juniors wrought in a short space of time was remarkable. They sorted things and they mixed things, and in ten minutes the room looked as if it

had been subjected to a dozen spring-cleanings rolled into one.

Blake surveyed the ruins with a pleased smile.

"Do you think Figgy will be pleased, Aubrey?" he demanded.

"He is sure to be, deah boy. If they come in and find us here, I don't think we shall be pleased," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Perhaps you're right. This is where we bunk."

Blake turned out the gas, and they left the room.

"Oh, I say, I forgot!" muttered Blake. "We must leave something to let 'em know we've been. Cut along, sonny! I'll join you."

D'Arcy, who never questioned Blake's orders, hurried on, while Blake turned back into the room. He lighted the gas, and, dipping his finter in the ink, scrawled on a sheet of paper: "With the Compliments of Study No. 6." He pinned this message over the mantelpiece.

Then he quitted the study and followed D'Arcy. The latter had already left the New House, and was streaking across the quad for home. Blake hurried down the stairs, but fortune was against him, for he was only half-way through the corridor when he heard someone ascending the lower stairs. He halted in dismay.

It was too late to return. Blake turned to the nearest study door. In a moment he was within the room, and had closed the door. He waited with beating heart in the darkness. To his dismay, the footsteps halted at the door.

A hand was on the handle; the door opened before he had time to think. He stepped back, and someone came in, in the darkness, and struck a match. In the flickering light Blake saw the face of Lucas Sleath.

The New House senior was pale, and he looked haggard as if from worry and lack of sleep.

Blake looked at him in amazement, and the senior caught sight of him at the same moment and uttered a startled cry.

"What are you doing here?"

"Nothing," said Blake.

He stood watching Sleath warily as he lighted the gas. He knew that he had at

least a licking to expect, and he did not mean to take it quietly if there was a chance to bolt.

Sleath was treasurer of the school clubs, and at his election to the post a short time before Blake had done all he could to defeat him and bring about the election of the rival candidate, Darrell, of the School House.

There was no love lost between Sleath and Jack Blake. And, besides, Sleath was the special chum of Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, who hated Blake.

All things considered, Blake had taken about the worst possible step for himself in taking refuge in Sleath's study, and now he was looking out for trouble.

Contrary to his expectations, the senior did not reach out at once for a cane. In the light of the gas Sleath stood looking at him oddly, his face still white and strained.

"What were you doing here?" he repeated in a strangely calm voice.

"Nothing. I dodged in because I heard you coming. I've been paying a visit to Figgy's study," replied Blake cheerfully.

"I did not see you in the corridor."

"I dodged in when I heard your toot-sies on the stairs."

Sleath was still looking at him in the same strange way.

"I don't believe you," he said coldly. "You are the worst boy in the School House, Blake, and I believe you came here to play some trick upon me."

"Well, I didn't, and only a cad would doubt a fellow's word."

Sleath flushed with anger.

"Whatever you came for, you're going to have a licking."

Blake watched him warily.

Sleath reached out to grasp him by the collar. In a flash Blake ducked under his arm and bolted for the door. Sleath seized him before he could escape, and boxed his ears right and left.

"You beast!" gasped Blake.

He hit out, and Sleath received one or two that made him gasp. He dragged Blake to the door and sent him spinning into the corridor. Two or three study doors opened, and fellows looked out to see what the disturbance was about.

Blake picked himself up. He was hurt, but he had his wits about him. He bolted down the corridor, and descended the stairs two or three at a time.

Fortunately he met nobody in his wild career. In a few minutes he was safe in Study No. 6 in his own House.

"Hallo, you've been in the warst!" exclaimed Herries, as Blake burst into the study, his face flushed, his hair tousled, his collar hanging loose.

Blake sank into a chair.

"Did Figgins & Co. get you?" asked Digby.

"No! It was that beast Sleath," gasped Blake. "I dodged into his study because I heard someone coming up the stairs. It was the Sleath beast himself, and he spotted me there. It was lucky for Algernon he got clear. He was only just in time."

"Never mind," said Herries consolingly, "it's all in the day's work. Tell us how you fixed up Figgin's quarters. From Gussy's account, you've mixed things up a bit."

"I left 'em our compliments," said Blake.

He took out his handkerchief to mop his brow. From the handkerchief a coin rolled, and fell clinking on the floor.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Herries. "Why, you image, you said you were stony this morning, and here you go chucking half-sovereigns about."

Jack stared at him.

"Half-sovereigns? You're dreaming!"

Herries picked up the coin. A half-sovereign it was, sure enough, and Blake looked at it in amazement.

"I didn't know I had it," he declared. "I'm blessed if I know where it's come from now. I say, Algernon, have you lost half-a-sovereign lately?"

Arthur Augustus shook his head. He was the only one in Study No. 6 to whom half-sovereigns were plentiful.

"I suppose I must have overlooked it somehow," said Blake. "I don't understand it, though. As we're in funds, kiddies, we'll go to the tuckshop and lay in a feed."

And the half-sovereign was forthwith "blued" in a royal feast.

(ANOTHER INSTALMENT OF THIS OLD 'CLASSIC' NEXT MONTH.)

NELSON LEE COLUMN

"A NEW YEAR WEDDING"

By William Lister

"With luck we ought to bring the wedding off for New Years Day," said Willie Handforth.

"Good gracious me!" ejaculated Mrs. Walter Blankley. These words turn the key to the plot of "The New Year Revellers" written for the N.L.L. 552 of January, 1926.

In those days a versatile author, writing for weekly periodicals, often made use of the particular holiday season to inject "atmosphere" into his yarn. And our Edwy Searles Brooks was very versatile with his pen.

New Year's Day - Easter - Whitsuntide - Bank Holiday - Guy Fawkes Night and Christmastide are often found worked into the St. Frank's stories over the years. It is not so noticeable today - authors rarely introduce the current holiday into their stories - but who can blame them?

In this modern world we hardly know "t'other from which." We now have Spring Holiday, and August Bank Holiday Monday came on the first of September this year. From what I gather very soon December 25th will cease to be Christmas Day - God forbid that they should rob us too of the merry sound of Xmas and substitute "Winter Holiday." Imagine saying "A Merry Winter Holiday," I think I should choke.

New Year, 1926, and a crowd of excited St. Frank's boys and Moor View girls at Lord Dorrimore's Castle (a favourite Xmas haunt) find themselves planning a New Year Wedding, unbeknown to those concerned. Mr. Bruce, ten years earlier, had made every arrangement for his wedding on Christmas Day, only to have his fiancee's parents forbid the marriage at the last moment. He thinks she is dead but the St. Frank's boys know she is now a teacher at Moor View School - hence the plan to bring them together. By the time they had it all sorted out, we were heading for a New Year Wedding.

But now one turns back the pages of time to the year 1920, and opens the pages of the N.L.L. 239 of January 3rd, 1920. "New Year Heroes" narrated by Nipper. The whole story is based on a custom

peculiar to that season - New Year Resolutions.

And who among my readers has not made some of these in their time?

The illustrated centre page that seemed to be a feature of the 1920 to 1926 copies of the Nelson Lee, depicts the plot of the story. Drawn in four sections we have 1. Handforth refrains from using his fists. 2. Fatty Little resists the allurements of the Tuck Shop. 3. Somerton pays more attention to his attire. 4. Sir Monty pays less for his ties.

These four characters are egged on by Lord Dorrimore to make resolutions about their particular weak points, and in the keeping of them, fun is provided. As Fatty Little said: "New Year Resolutions were all very well, but they were most difficult to stick to," and Fatty had a feeling that the end must come soon!

I must confess, I am partial to seasonable stories and articles - I like to find the particular holiday I am enjoying injected into my reading.

So three cheers for the late Edwy Searles Brooks, not forgetting Charles Hamilton and several "Blake" writers who knew how to tickle our palates.

And just in case, by the year 1971, they have a fixed date for a Winter Bank Holiday, may I take this opportunity of wishing all my readers "A Happy New Year?"



ON THE QUESTION OF THE LEE COLUMN -

(Some final points of view)

MR. R. BLYTHE HAD NO INTENTION OF ADDING FUEL TO THE FLAMES - (but does it just the same).

Isn't it strange how this E.S.B.-F.R. controversy causes such heated comments from all and sundry? I honestly had no intention of adding more fuel to the flames, being content to have made my protest in the hope of others following.

And then what happens? Two letters in the December issue started the steam coming out of my ears! (and goodness knows what effect it will have on that staunch Leeite, Jim Cook, in New Zealand!).

So Gerry Allison, as a constructive contribution to the argument, states that his Lee borrowings amount to only 89! What does that prove? Either the Northern Club have a very poor "Nelson Lee" selection in their library or else, as I suspect, most Leeites up there have far more in their own collections than are in their Library.

For the record, the borrowings from the Lee Section of the London Club's Library from January to November this year averages out at 2896 at 2d. per copy. Q.E.D. Gerry?

And then there's T. Cockburn of Ayr. Because he doesn't know Nelson Lee, three pages for Leites seems very good. I don't know how long Mr. Cockburn has been reading the C.D. but does he not know that articles concerning Brooks writings have been appearing in every issue of C.D. since number 13 in 1948, and they haven't been appearing regularly for so long unless there is a considerable body of interest.

MR. R. ACRAMAN SAYS HAMILTONIANS DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY'RE MISSING!

Gerry Allison's unbiased comment surely make the very point under discussion that is the amount, the amount of space for the Nelson Lee column, as in relation to his current borrowing figures. The object of C.D. is surely to promote and further the interest in the "old papers." Hamiltonia, rather like the current plate spinning act is spinning well and needs no support, but not so, Nelson Lee. It must have made an impact otherwise it would never have run for so many years, but unfortunately "first love" has crept in, and as a result of this Nelson Lee is not spinning as well as Hamiltonia. Why is this? Simply because Hamiltonia fans are unaware of what they are missing. Therefore it surely is reasonable to propose that additional space should be devoted to Nelson Lee - to boost and further promote "Leesonian." An interest that "narrows down" rather than broadens the interests is surely self punitive for the reasons above. Only when, if ever, a Hamiltonia fan tells me that after reading all the "Ezra Quirk" the "Banishing of and return of Bernard Forest," "The North Estrian," "The Legions of Foo Chow" series he is unimpressed will I agree he has given the good old Nelson Lee a trial, and that there is no hope for him. Don't go by the odd way out copy you once read that made no impression on you, even the Magnet and Gem had its "neutral" and unliked stories. Read the "Saga" series and then decide fairly, when you have seen what you are missing. Gerry did, and I hope all Hamiltonia will enjoy this refreshing change, as Gerry and I did.

MR. R. M. JENKINS DEFENDS THE STATUS QUO!

It is a pity that James Cook, who wants more space for the Lee Column, should feel it necessary to swipe at Hamiltoniana in order to buttress his argument. It is even more of a pity that those who do not have any of the incessant trouble of editing and financing an amateur magazine should think that they know better than the editor what the majority of readers want.

Taking James Cook's criticisms first, I hardly think he can be serious in claiming that Charles Hamilton's large output is of no consequence. His other main argument is that Hamiltonians show too much awe in their articles, and this is an old chestnut if ever there was one.

It seems to me that there are three main types of article: factual research (such as Bob Blythe's editing of E.S. Brooks's letters); purely sentimental (like James Cook's imaginary visits to St. Frank's); and articles of literary criticism (like Let's Be Controversial) which assess the good and the bad, and arrive at a balanced judgement. I am quite convinced that over the years there has been more real criticism in the Hamiltonia section than anywhere else in C.D. Even when Charles Hamilton was alive, pungent criticisms were expressed, and anyone who cares to look through old copies can see that he objected to some adverse criticisms of many contributors - including me. On the other hand, criticism seldom rears its ugly head in the Lee Column, and when it does some Lee fan thinks it incumbent upon himself to bite it off, as in the case of Len Wormull. The tactic seems to be this: accuse the Hamiltonians of idolising Hamilton but never allow a whisper of criticism to disturb the shrine of Brooks.

With regard to the magazine as a whole, I find Gerry Allison's library statistics most revealing: nearly 74% of the borrowings are Hamiltoniana, and nearly 2% Lees. Even if you add together all items that refer to Hamilton, you will still find they come to less than 74% of the magazine. I do not claim that Hamiltoniana should have more space because, as I have said, I think the editor knows best. In any case, minorities have a right to be over-represented (which they already are in C.D.). On the other hand, I do not think myself that the majority should be asked to yield any more ground to the minority, and I for one write to defend the status quo.

MR. L. WORMULL HAS A HIGH OPINION OF C.D. AS IT IS.

Collectors' Digest in its present form is of the highest standards, and I for one would resent cuts or omissions. I was sorry to see Lee writer, R. Godsave, recriminate against the new serial on the grounds of lost space for Lee material. Like the first Gussy serial, this is a rare Hamilton item, and of interest to fans. Should Bob Blythe uncover a long-lost story of E. S. Brooks - and I hope he does - I feel sure C.D. would do the occasion full justice. I am all for more of everything, but let's not kill the golden calf, and enjoy what we have.

In reply to Jim Cook, I am surprised he condones R. Acraman's remarks in the Lee Column on Bunter's implausibility - yet decries mine! I embrace both authors because they share my hobby interests. We play at idolatory, which is, after all, the cornerstone of our hobby. Even so, C.H. has taken plenty of knocks from his supporters over the years. E.S.B. once said in Between Ourselves that he often printed more adverse criticism than the other kind. How sad that today's Lee disciples cannot share a little of his magnanimity, and admit that he, like Hamilton, was not without chinks in his armour. With reference to the "greatest," E. S. Brooks held his own against the full weight of Hamilton's output, until he seemingly tired of his creation. A fact which does not escape me.

MR. F. V. LAY SAYS IT'S QUALITY THAT COUNTS.

Although Jim Cook is a good friend of mine I do think his Open Letter which you published in the December C.D. is pushing his case considerably too far and I think that you as Editor and sole arbiter of what to publish should print in Your Editor's Chat, your comments on the issues involved. To me the sole criterion for any article to be published is quality - one good article is worth its weight in gold and the solution for the protesting Leeites is to write some really good articles not just space-fillers. Variety is the spice of life and I enjoy most, articles on subjects about which my knowledge is limited or non-existent. Very often such articles have opened up completely new horizons, but constant repetition of old themes is a bore, and too much insistence on so many pages for this and so many for that could be a strait-jacket for an enterprising editor.

MR. W. SHARPE SAYS "SEE IT IN PERSPECTIVE."

Although I have some degree of interest in the Lee Column, it has to be seen in perspective as a field which is more limited than either Blakiana or Hamiltonia. Whatever happens, please never regard "Let's Be Controversial" as having overstayed its welcome. It is the most thought-provoking section of C.D., and I have the utmost admiration for the mind that selects and explores such interesting topics.

Merely from a personal viewpoint, I do not find much interest in Danry's Diary, probably because I belong to a younger generation. If he were writing of the 30's I'd be fascinated.

MR. F. STURDY SAYS "SCRAP THE LOT!"

I am a Leeite but only for Lee as a detective. I am a keen Hamiltonian but I deplore the space given to that subject over the years. Why not a column on Robin Hood? Why not a space devoted to the Big Three - Friend, Realm and Herald? Why not a monthly section for Comics? I suggest the following changes:

1. Cut the Editorial. 2. Let's Be Controversial about something else. 3. Issue News of the Clubs separately at a small charge to those interested. 4. Cut out the contributions that merely give a re-hash of a story. 5. Cut out whimsy contributions like St. Frank's re-visited and the adult life of schoolboy characters.

WANTED: Good loose copies or volumes containing one or more of the following: Gems 801, 817, 826, 828, 832. Also Populars 401, 403, 407, 413, 415, 422, 441.

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6 p.m.

GREETINGS AND BEST WISHES TO ALL C.D. MEMBERS.

R. J. McCABE.

REVIEW

"BOY
WITHOUT A NAME"

Frank Richards

Museum Press.
£1 inc. p. & p.

This lovely volume contains at least 100,000 words of Frank Richards. The two stories included, "Boy Without a Name" and "Rivals & Chums" are considered to be amongst the very best work of the author's pre-Golden Age. Originally published in 1915, this is the first time these famous classics have since seen the light of day. They will be a treasure for every Hamilton fan, and the book is a real bargain at the modest price asked.

DANNY'S DIARY

JANUARY 1920

The editor of the Magnet is offering 50/- for complete, clean sets (Nos. 1 - 600) of the Magnet and the Gem. I wonder what he wants them for. You'd think they had them all up there at the Fleetway House.

Doug's new girl friend isn't half a bad sort, as his girl friends go - and most of them go very quickly. Her name is Hilda Essenhigh (he calls her "Hil," which makes her sound like a map), and she has pink cheeks, yellow hair, red lips, and a wart on her thumb. Doug was taking her up to the Alhambra, Leicester Square, where they have a special season for a big new film, and she said "Let's take Danny with us," which I thought very nice. Doug looked a bit shocked, but he agreed, so I said "Let's take Mum as well."

Doug said "Here! My name isn't Carnegie!" but Mum paid for her own ticket and mine, so we all went.

The Alhambra is a glorious theatre, and the film was the best I have ever seen. It was called "Broken Blossoms" and it is produced by D. W. Griffith. The girl was Lilian Gish and the boy was Richard Barthelmess. Hilda kept murmuring "Isn't he stunning, Doug?" It was awfully sad. Hilda sobbed most of the way through, and then Mum started, and at last I joined in. It was just lovely, and we all say we will go and see it again and again when it is released and comes to a local cinema.

The Boys' Friend is 25 years old this month, and to celebrate it they are running "Rodney Stone" by Conan Doyle as a serial. I suppose some boys may like it, but I gave it up after the first chapter.

Rookwood has been pretty good. "Carthew's Tea Party" was good fun when unexpected guests began to arrive. But the next week "Backing Up Bulkeley" was too silly for words and was not by the real Owen Conquest. The juniors learn that Bulkeley is short of money, so they write to the editor of the Companion Papers and he sends them a giant parcel packed with Magnets, Gems, Boys' Friends and so on - and the juniors set up a stall and sell the papers - in aid of Bulkeley.

Then a new series. "The Nameless Stranger" was an urchin who has lost his memory, but who is strangely like Smythe. Next, in "The Boy Without a Memory," Smythe is informed by his father that his cousin, Arthur Clare, has disappeared, and if he is found he will get a lot of the Smythe money. Tubby Muffin overhears this, and, in "Smythe's New Pal," Muffin starts to blackmail Smythe.

Cedar Creek has been good all through. It was Algy Beauclerc who was "Held to Ransom." Then, in "Algy's Way," he sent a letter begging for the ransom to be paid, but he cleverly inserted a message "Watch Bowers" into the letter. Dry Billy Bowers was the kidnapper.

In "The Todgers Touch" and "The Missing Heir," Chunky read a newspaper advert and became convinced that he was the missing heir of Arlington. Very funny. Finally, "Frank Richards' Ghost" was also Chunky, who tried to take Frank's place as a writer for Mr. Penrose.

This month I had two of the monthly fourpennies. There was "The Schoolboy Rebellion," a Boys' Friend Library collection of some of the Cedar Creek tales. And there was a good Sexton Blake Library named "The Case of the King's Spy" which introduced a new character named Granite Grant. At the finish, he got married, so I suppose we shan't hear any more about him.

Most of the month they have had very heavy snowfalls in Yorkshire, the Midlands and Wales. But none in the south. I almost forget what snow looks like and it's a shame that it neglects this part of the country.

Lord Haig, the Great War leader, has been touring Britain and getting wonderful receptions. He has been given the freedom of Manchester and Sheffield and a number of other towns.

There has been a long Vernon-Smith series in the Magnet, but not by the writer who used to write them. Doug says he reckons he's dead, but the paper has to go on. The stories were entitled "The Terror in Black," "The Bounder's Farewell," "Exiled from School," "Vernon-Smith's Return" and "Vernon-Smith's Victory." The Bounder, to raise money, pretended to be held to ransom with the aid of Bunter. He was found out, and had a row with his father. He left Greyfriars and went to work in the City. Through Ralph Locke, the Head's nephew, he went back to Greyfriars to be the Head's secretary (sounds a bit unlikely), and finally the clouds blew by. I read this lot, though I never

caught fire.

Some good shows at the pictures. Mabel Normand in "Sis Hopkins" was really good, and with it they showed Charlie Chaplin in "The Pawnshop." "Tommy Atkins in Berlin" was a full-length Mack Sennett, but not so funny as the short ones. Fairly good, though, Theda Bara in "Salome" was Very Vampish, and with this one there was a serial named "The Carter Case." Miriam Sabbage (who won the Daily Mirror Beauty Prize last year) was in "The Bridal Chair." She's not much of an actress. Mary Pickford was lovely in "Hulda from Holland" and W. S. Hart was terrific in "The Money Corral." Finally, Eddie Polo is Cyclone Smith in a new series, the first of which was named "A Prisoner for Life." And this is where we came in, Mum!

The Gem has been pretty dull this month. "Trimble Minor" came as a new boy to St. Jim's. Another new boy was Theodore Batchner who came along as "The Naturalist of St. Jim's."

Not so bad was "The Haunted Mill" in which Knox played a part. Then there was "Malcolm's Secret." Malcolm was a new boot-boy. Actually he had run away or been expelled from a school in the north, but he went back when the real culprit confessed.

But everything was piled on too thick in "The Fall of Mr. Ratcliff." The bank manager rang up the Head to tell him that Mr. Ratcliff was overdrawn at the bank. He had been swindled out of all his savings. Kildare found him in rags in London. Tom Merry ran an ice carnival in aid of Mr. Ratty. And in the end Mr. R. went back to St. Jim's. To think that the Gem was once the best paper in the world.

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

MIDLAND

Meeting held 25th November, 1969.

Henry Ford once said that History is Bunk. This statement is open to doubt; but assuredly the lucky thirteen present tonight will say that Superstition is bunk!

We began another pleasant meeting by welcoming new member, Mr. Robert J. Wareing of Codsall. Mr. Wareing is a long-standing enthusiast, especially interested in the boys' weeklies of the twenties.

A pleasant duty of the present writer was to move our thanks to Winifred Partridge for that enjoyable housewarming at her flat on November 15th. This vote of thanks was carried with hearty applause.

Tom Porter referred to correspondence, including a very interesting letter from Invercargill, in faraway New Zealand. From another enthusiast, Mr. A. Mervyn Branks.

Tonight's anniversary number was Magnet 198, dated 25th November, 1911, taking us back to an almost unrecognisable world.

Collectors' item was specially interesting, being No. 1 of Collectors' Digest Annual, dated 1947. The Who's Who included, gave details of Mr. Wareing's very large collection of old boys' books.

The main item tonight was a talk by our Treasurer, Norman Gregory. As was only to be expected from him it was both interesting and thoughtful. It was on the intriguing subject of the titles chosen for papers from the rising generation. Norman made a most interesting classification of these papers as follows:-

- Group 1 Patriotic.
 Union Jack, Boys of the Empire, Young Britain, etc.
- Group 2 Newspaper type titles.
 Boys' Herald, Boys' Journal, Boys' Friend, etc.
- Group 3 Self Explanatory.
 Boys' Own Paper, Boys' Cinema, Scout, Skipper, etc.
- Group 4 The rest.
 (The Editor or even the office boy may have given us
 some of them!)
- Vanguard, Champion, Eagle, Wizard, Magnet, Gem,
 Startler, Surprise, Lion, etc.

The latter the best of a bunch of beastly papers. The best title Norman thought, was "Boys' Own Paper," and the worst "Cheer Boys Cheer!" When a boy went to buy this latter a cynic standing by could well have said ironically, "Hip, Hip, Hooray!"

Naturally this interesting, forthright and amusing talk really roused the storm troopers; everyone took part in the discussion.

As Bill Morgan pointed out a Magnet attracts, and a Gem is a

jewel. Well this is what the publishers thought, but Norman is not attracted by Greyfriars. An Eagle soars, and the Vanguard leads; again a matter of opinion whether these papers were worthy of these titles. Still the meeting agreed that Startler and Surprise were a bit absurd. Ian Bennett drew attention to a definite modern tendency for monosyllabic titles. Fab, Wham, etc.

EDWARD DAVEY

Chairman and Secretary.

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NORTHERN

Christmas Party held Saturday, 13th December, 1969.

The weather is always anxiously watched at the second Saturday in each month in the winter, but we were in luck and, though damp, the dreaded fog did not stop any distant member attending. Lots of wives had accompanied their husbands and it was pleasant to see again Jessie Barlow, Doreen Hodgson, Violet Hunter and Marion Wilde, and to meet Mrs. Good. The long Club Room was warm and bright and cheerful with seasonable emblems. Several Christmas numbers decorated the scene. Twenty-two sat down to an enjoyable tea; the long table was well covered with trifles and home-made dainties to follow the first course.

After the meal, of course, there is always - the washing up! However, Geoffrey Good marshalled a team in the pantry to see to that. Then it was time for the evening's fun to start. First we had a film show by Harry Barlow. An old time melodrama with Laurel and Hardy as detectives soon brought spontaneous laughter and this was followed by the antics of Top Cat. Harry then switched to colour and we watched beautiful scenes from their German Holiday.

Now came the fast and furious fun of a Bunter Drive with the rattling of dice, groans or cheers as they fell, interspersed with stentorian shouts of "Bunter" as a winner completed a line. The final winners were Annie Allison, 123, second Elsie Taylor, 102 and Harry Barlow, 91. A quiet interval followed whilst Geoffrey Good read a chapter from a Christmas Magnet. The Famous Five at Wharton Lodge (not knowing Bunter was hiding in the attic) were puzzled by the

disappearance of sosses, muffins, chocs, etc., etc. As also were Wells and Thomas! The final game was Bingo with a Difference, put on by Jack Allison. Names, not numbers were on the cards and the calling was varied for each round. "Form!" "School!" "Bat!" "Yaroo!" all figured and the final round was for the Head's Greek Prize, and Jack handed out a toothsome prize to each lucky winner.

Time was flying, but we had a buffet supper, after which Geoffrey Good thanked the ladies for their work and all who had devised the entertainment and helped to make such a happy party. Each one went home with a souvenir prize.

Next Meeting, Saturday, 10th January, 1970.

M. L. ALLISON

Hon. Secretary.

LONDON

The last meeting of 1969 was held at the home of Bob and Laura Blythe, an appropriate place to hold the Yuletide gathering at this famous home of St. Frank's and Nelson Lee. There was an excellent attendance with a happy atmosphere of the festive season.

Three publications to gladden all hearts were discussed. The excellent "Collectors' Digest Annual" with the fine Highcliffe article by Roger Jenkins was further enhanced as the worthy president of the Club, John Wernham, had brought along 100 copies of his two famous "Boys' Friend Libraries," complete in one volume, "The Boy Without a Name" and "Rivals and Chums." Needless to state, they were all sold. The third book on sale was the Bunter Court facsimile series reprint of the "Magnet."

Don Webster in the chair, welcomed one and all; this included Tom Porter, Alan and Myra Stewart, Doris Doyle and John Wernham.

John Wernham addressed the gathering and hoped all would like his latest publication. Len Packman suitably thanked John on behalf of all present.

A greetings card from Stan Knight was displayed and there was a phone call from Ron Beck, wishing all a happy time.

Len Packman read extracts from a 1953 newsletter. The venues for next year were arranged. Nominations for the 1970 chairman are asked for. Roger Jenkins read a passage from "Magnet" number 1558, one of the Reynham Castle series.

Bill Lofts rendered a treatise on Will Hay. This was followed by a tape recording of one of the Will Hay sketches on B.B.C. radio in the 1930's. Brian Doyle was the recordist. Twenty-seven records were played over by Bob Blythe and it was Ray Hopkins who had the most correct answers.

Tom Wright rendered his talk on the Richards and Orwell controversy calling it "Fair Comment." All these items were enjoyed as was the excellent Yuletide feast put on by the Blythes.

Callover and locking up came all too soon and it was time to hit the trail, happy in the knowledge that we all had three fine volumes to read over Christmas and that we meet at Bob Acraman's "Friardale" home at Ruislip on Sunday, January 18th, 1970.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

THE ANNUAL

EDITORIAL COMMENT: In September, October, November and early December, I asked readers to send in their orders for the Annual. Our giant Year Book is a costly one to produce and it is just not possible to produce very many extra copies, beyond those already ordered and paid for, to allow for those readers who have postponed attending to the matter. As a consequence, every Annual had gone well before Christmas, and we had to write to many readers that they were now too late with their orders. This sort of thing makes us unhappy for two reasons. One, the more copies we can print, the better from the economic viewpoint; two, we deeply regret the disappointment to those who came too late. But we did warn you ---

WANTED MODERN BOYS - 20, 80, 113, 129, 138, 149, 153, 201, 260, 277, 284, 294, 306, 308, 314, 321. GEMS - 1224, 1239, 1248, 1277, 1278, 1279, 1280. EXCHANGE - CHUMS - 1922, 1923, 1925, 1931. KNOCKOUTS (400), SCOUTS (200). - Stewart, 290 Archway Road, London, N.6. 01. 348. 0076.

A YORKSHIRE Boys' Paper

By W. O. G. Lofts

Those readers who still maintain that a good healthy boys' paper, of the type that we read in pre-war days, would still sell well today, ought to have a perusal of the post-war boys' papers' records. What a dismal tale it shows! Of the round dozen or so that catered purely for boys, only one lasted just over a year, whilst most of the others only ran for a few issues.

To be fair, some of these left a lot to be desired in the way of quality, but others such as the Odhams "Boys' World" and the Fleetway Publications "Ranger" surely deserved a better fate. I can well remember a Director at Fleetway House discussing with me their attempt to revive the good old pre-war boys' paper in the shape of "Ranger," and the rueful shake of the head at its failure after the 40th issue. A big factor that must be taken into consideration today is that whereas in pre-war days a boys' paper could exist on only 75,000 copies a week, the costs today make the mighty firms not satisfied with less than say 200,000 copies a week. Boys' tastes have changed, and picture story papers are the only medium that sell this vast amount of copies. Publishers are in existence to make money, and one cannot blame them for only catering for papers that sell.

This introduction leads me to write and record one of these post-war efforts, which to my knowledge has never been mentioned before through the medium of C.D. though my friends in the Johnny Bull country of Yorkshire probably have come across it in their collecting.

The Spartan appeared in June, 1953, was of a size 5" x 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ " and price 3d. It was classed as a magazine for boys between the ages of 9 and 12, and was published with the object of providing wholesome reading for the young boys. It was edited by B. Hoyle and W. Barker, with an assistant editor, G. Suddards. Also on the advisory staff was a clergyman. The publishing address was at 16 Lister Lane, Bolton, Bradford, 2. As the publication appeared near the Coronation of our Queen, the whole of the inside cover was taken up with a loyal message of greetings.

Page two consisted of a letter from the editor, whilst page three had a short story of the paper's title "A Spartan." Page four was an article on Westminster Abbey, whilst pages five and six were an

introduction to fish feeding and keeping. I suppose the next item could be called the *pièce-de-résistance* "The Coral Island" adapted from the novel by R. M. Ballantyne, which ran to page seventeen. An item called "News & Views" followed, then another story by the Rev. John Harwood, entitled "The Great Adventure." More pages of a visit to a fire station, Sports Corner and a grand Coronation painting competition made up the total of twenty-five pages. It was not a bad effort on the whole, but it is difficult to see how it hoped to sell to the present generation of boys. Issue number two appeared on time in July, but the third issue dated August/September seemed rather ominous that the compilers were having difficulty in making a deadline. The serial "Coral Island" finished in this issue (they must have abridged it even more than some of the S.O.L's!) and they proudly announced that in issue No. 4, "The Fifth Form at St. Dominics" by Talbot Baines Reed would appear as a serial. Alas, the paper never did appear, and so another post-war boys' paper finished.

Whilst many post-war boys papers are to be collected quite easily, I have yet to see a copy of The Spartan outside the British Museum, and certainly would like to obtain one for my own collection. Perhaps my friends from Yorkshire can enlighten me as to where all the copies have got to.

"TALES OF ELIZA'S"

By Gerry Allison

In a recent letter to me, Jim Jeyes, a great stalwart of our hobby wrote - "Why do some authors remain famous and others, whom one would consider better, just write for a short time, and then fade?"

He was referring to Fred Swainson whose "Tales of Eliza's" (St. Elizabeth's School) in The Captain, both Jim and myself think to be amongst the most superior and powerful school stories ever written. Absolutely convincing masterpieces, with not a single missing heir amongst them.

Of "Acton's Feud," which appeared in Volume 3 of The Captain, and which was Swainson's first story, Richard Osborne has this to say in "Wodehouse at Work."

"The eighteen-year-old Wodehouse thought, and the octogenarian

Wodehouse still thinks, that the opening sentence of 'Acton's Feud' (Shannon, the old international, had brought a hot side down to play the School) is the best of any he had, or has, come across in school literature. A budding writer then, he read the story that followed, and realised that he had never read literature of that kind and that it was something new in school stories. He decided that he was going to write school stories like that himself - if he could."

So it is thanks to "Acton's Feud" which appeared in 1900, that we have Wodehouse's school stories, so often eulogized in the pages of "The Story Paper Collector," the "Collectors' Digest," and the "Collectors' Digest Annual."

But you will search in vain in any of these magazines for mention of Fred Swainson, who to this day remains an entirely unknown quantity.

His name does not appear in the "Who's Who of Boys' Writers" by Brian Doyle, nor in his article on contributors to The Captain in the C.D. Annual for 1963.

Bill Lofts has never discovered anything about Fred Swainson, whilst Bill Hubbard of the London club, once rang me up to ask if I would enquire of P. G. Wodehouse himself - the illustrious President of the Northern O.B.B.C. - if he could remember any details about his contemporary. Because from Volume 9 to Volume 19, The Captain published alternate school stories and serials by Wodehouse and Swainson. Photographs of both authors appeared in No. 100 of The Captain, July 1907, See page 379; and the previous page for a picture of T. M. R. Whitwell, who illustrated the stories of both writers.

Well, I did write to P. G. Wodehouse, but, alas, at 88 he is unable to recall any facts about Fred Swainson - which is perhaps not surprising.

A recent spell of four weeks in bed gave me an opportunity to read the three serials and twenty-one short stories contributed to The Captain by Frederick Swainson, and I must say what great enjoyment they have given me.

Some of them are what the Magnet described as 'powerful.' Take one short story in Vol. 7 - "Bignell's Mistake" when a scholarship boy with a North country accent comes to the school - he is from Cumberland. And a later story in Volume 8, "Drysedale's Friend" about

the same scholarship boy - now a House Captain. (Yes, the boys at St. Eliza's grew up!)

Perhaps Bill Hubbard might some day write us an article about the St. Eliza's tales, as a companion piece to his fine piece on "Tales of Wrykyn" - by P. G. Wodehouse. In the meantime, here is a list of the stories by Fred Swainson in my Captains - which run from Volume 1 to 21.

Volume 3	Serial	"Acton's Feud"
" 4	Short Stories	"Acton's Christmas" "After Worcester Fight"
" 5	Serial	"Smith's House"
" 6	Short Stories	"Acton's Rival" "Drysedale - Naturalist"
" 7	Short Stories	"Master & Fag" "The Eleventh Place" "Bignell's Mistake" "A Flannelled Fool" "The Paying of Swain" "Martyn's One Tune"
" 8	Short Stories	"Drysedale's Friend" "Fell and Ellis"
" 9	Short Story	"The Will and the Deed"
" 11	Short Stories	"A Question of Courage" "A Narrow Squeak" "The Purple Emperor" "Barbel" "Applied Science" "A Surprise for Drysdale"
" 16	Serial	"The Informer" (Harford School)
" 18	Short Stories	"On the Sands" "Maud's Watch"