

STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS DIGEST

2/6

No. 281

Vol. 24

MAY
1970



The **Bounder**

Bob White

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by
W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 24

No. 281

MAY 1970

Price 2s.6d.



A WORD FROM THE SKIPPER

VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE

Plenty of readers who write to me enquire plaintively as to why Billy Bunter and the Magnet always receive the spotlight. The answer, of course, is that Bunter is the most famous schoolboy in the world, and the Magnet is by far the most popular paper among collectors with long memories.

All the same, our wistful readers have a point. Following a great deal of reprinting of Greyfriars in the past decade we now have the Magnet facsimiles which have been welcomed with open arms and keen enthusiasm. Three of these volumes are already on our shelves, and two more are promised during the present year.

There are plenty of readers - most of us, perhaps - who could never have too many of them. Nevertheless, there is a risk that they could lose their charm if they become too common.

A large section of my correspondents - and I think I am on their side - would like to see a little more variety and Greyfriars given a rest.

Raymond Hopkins writes: "I wonder why someone doesn't reprint the first six original School Friend stories by Frank Richards."

I, too, wonder the same thing. We have a large following of those old papers for girls, among our readers - and even those who do not remember the School Friend would certainly buy a reprint volume of same for the novelty.

Another volume which I feel certain would enjoy vast success would be one containing reprints of, say, 6 Union Jacks. The U.J. is very, very difficult to obtain today, and it is much sought, not only by the old fans. I would suggest the first six copies after the U.J. was enlarged, including those two splendid Blake stories "The Case of the Bogus Judge" and "The Dog Detective." In my view such a volume, coming from the modern home of Sexton Blake, could not go wrong.

A volume containing a dozen Merry and Brights or Butterflies or Funny Wonders would seem to me to be set for a run as a best seller.

Such a volume occasionally would make a change from Greyfriars, and avoid a risk of satiety in the Magnet camp.

It is, of course, not for us to try to teach publishers their jobs. They know what their readers want. But we should love to see the present rising generation knocked sideways with a volume of the Firefly in its heyday.

THOSE COLUMNISTS

We have often commented on the columnists and professional writers who find magic in the name of Frank Richards, but who are so inaccurate and slapdash with their writing that, to us who know better, they are infuriating or unintentionally funny.

We hear now of an article, printed in an Australian paper, which describes the author living in poverty in East London during the war, in a room, overrun with cockroaches, without any furniture. The columnist adds that he believes Frank Richards died soon after the end of the war, and expressed the kindly hope that the author had better things in store.

I have not seen the article myself, but we are all accustomed to seeing rubbish written about Charles Hamilton from time to time, in the dailies or the magazines.

As is well known, the author earned very big money for a great many years. Such hardship as he may have endured when the main source of his income was cut off in mid-1940 can only have been relative. The report of his living in poverty and grime is quite preposterous.

PERCY

When I first came to live in Surbiton - and for many years after - there was a dentist named Mellish who lived in a large house. Some years ago the dentist retired, his house was sold and demolished, and in its place they have built a large block of flats. The block of flats is known now as Mellish Court, in memory of a respected dentist and of old sufferers who carried their aching molars up the hill towards the dentist's surgery.

I never set eyes on Mellish Court without thinking of Mellish of Gem fame.

Many readers, with their memories jogged by our classic serial, have written me in recent months with comments on Percy Mellish. Percy was the first of Hamilton's black sheep, destined to live on and on. In the early days which provided our serial, Percy enjoyed a prominence - he even seems to have had an eye on the captaincy at that time - which he was to lose later.

Shall we give Percy his due? Give three cheers for Mellish for the first time in well over 60 years. The next time I see Mellish Court I shall echo that cheer for Percy of the Gem. I hope that the next time I read the Gem I shan't think of the dentist.

The later black sheep in the Gem were unmemorable. But most of us have a soft spot in our hearts for Mellish.

THE EDITOR

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. Also GEMS 727 - 737 inclusive.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE ROAD, SURBITON.

DANNY'S DIARY

MAY 1920

There has been a most wonderful happening in the Boys' Friend 4d. Library. They have published a lovely story entitled "The Schoolboy Castaways" by Martin Clifford. It comes from the old Gem when it used to have a blue cover, and it is all about Tom Merry's trip to the South Seas. I have enjoyed every single word of it, but it spoils a reader for all the rotten tales now appearing in the Gem. The editor must be a bit of an ass, for it shows up the modern Gem so badly. But it's wonderful, and I have written to the editor to ask him to publish some more in the B.F.L.

There have also been two excellent stories in the Sexton Blake Library. One is called "The Case of the Strange Wireless Message," and it introduces a new character named Mademoiselle Julie. It is written by the author who wrote "The King's Spy" about Granite Grant, though he does not come into this story.

The other Blake was "The Great Diamond Bluff" and this is a winner all the way. A man called Hamilton Fane pretends that he has discovered a way to manufacture diamonds. It is a great tale.

Joe Beckett, the hope of British boxing, seems to be rather an also ran. At Olympia he was knocked out in the 3rd round by Bombardier Billy Wells. They say it will be the end for Beckett.

I may be a schoolmaster when I grow up, for it seems they will be very wealthy people. The scale of pay for men teachers in council schools has been fixed to start at £200 per year. Ladies will get about £160.

All this month the Gem has been illustrated by the artist named E. E. Briscoe. What on earth has become of Macdonald?

The month opened with two Talbot stories. These were "Talbot's Stolen Story" and "Brought to Light." A professor of literature, Prof. Fielding, comes to lecture at St. Jim's. Colonel Lyndon possesses a manuscript which he thinks was written by Edgar Allan Poe. The Colonel sends the story to Talbot to show to Prof. Fielding, and it gets stolen - by Crooke & Co.

Then came two more Talbot tales: "The Fighting Spirit" and "Well Won." Marie Rivers' father has lost his job, and needs money, so he tells Marie and Talbot that he is going back to a life of crime. To get the money, Talbot enters for a scholarship worth £100. Talbot wins, but as Redfern loses, it means that Redfern will have to leave St. Jim's. However, John Rivers gets offered a good post with the C.I.D., so Talbot gives up the scholarship, and Redfern is declared the winner.

Final story, "Foiled at the Finish," was about a French team, led by Monsieur Morny, which comes to St. Jim's to play cricket. So much for the Gem.

Dad took Mum and me to a matinee at the London Pavilion, and it was a lovely revue entitled "London, Paris and New York." The star was Nelson Keyes.

The Boys' Friend has been well up to standard as the best paper on the market. The opening story was "Exit Arthur" which was the final tale in the series about Arthur Beresford-Baggs, the heir of Sir Japhet. Sir Japhet was so disgraced by his family that he had to hurry Arthur away from Rookwood.

A good single story was "The Ragging of Morny" in which Mornington drew a cartoon of Mr. Bootles on the formroom door, and Erroll was blamed for it. The next two tales were "Tubby Muffin's Treasure" and "The Tribulations of Tubby," in which Tubby came across some counterfeit money, and proceeded to spend it.

Last of the month was "A Stolen Name" in which a rascal named Larry Tigg caught a Rookwood schoolboy out of bounds at night. The schoolboy gave the name of Jimmy Silver - and then Tigg thought it a good idea to try to blackmail Jimmy.

Cedar Creek opened with two tales about Chunky Todgers setting up as a detective. They were "Chunky Todgers - Detective" and "Detective Todgers' First Case." Then came an excellent series in which Bob Lawless fell in love with Clarissa Vere de Vere, the leading lady of a troop of travelling players who stopped to give a performance at the Assembly Rooms at Thompson. It was the lady herself who cured Bob by letting him know that she was a lot older than she looked. The tales were "Bob Lawless' Folly," "Bolted," and "In Chase

of a Chum."

I think sugar must be the dearest thing in the land. It has gone up by fourpence a pound and is now 1/4 a pound. Mum says it's a scandal.

We have seen some good films at the local cinemas, including Charlie Chaplin in "The Adventurer." Vivian Martin was lovely in "Mirandy Smiles," and Dorothy Gish, who is a favourite of mine, was spiffing in "Nugget Nell." Bryant Washburn, who has a dimple in his chin, was in "Poor Boob," and Francis X. Bushman was in "Romeo and Juliet." John Barrymore was in "Here Comes the Bride," and Geraldine Farrar was in a rather heavy film named "Joan the Woman." We have seen lots of Fatty Arbuckle comedies, and I always like Fatty. He used to make films for Mack Sennett, but he is in Paramount Comedies now.

Not a very good month in the Magnet, even though the old writer contributed one very good story. "The Prefect's Predicament" told of the Remove in detention, with Loder in charge of the class. "The Scholarship Company" was formed in the next tale by Linley, Penfold and Redwing. Then came "Bunter the Bankrupt" by the old writer, and I liked this a lot. Bunter, who has borrowed money right and left, decides to escape his troubles by going bankrupt with Peter Todd as his solicitor. There is a very funny chapter when Mr. Quelch, in the form-room, gives Mauleverer the idea that Bunter is dead.

Then two stories in which the decorators came in at Greyfriars, so the Remove were given a week's holiday as a result. The silly writer made Harry Wharton write to his "father," Colonel Wharton. We all know better than that. These two tales were "The Invasion of Greyfriars" and "Chums Awheel."

EDITORIAL COMMENT: "Bunter, the Bankrupt," mentioned by Danny this month, was Charles Hamilton's first tale in the Magnet for eight months. It is reputed to be the only story Hamilton wrote which he had to put on one side for a time as he could not decide how to finish it. Godness knows why! It is a simple, though original, little plot, and it can have presented no difficulties for an experienced writer like C.H. If he actually delayed the finish of it, it seems likely that the delay

was due to the fact that he had something better to do. In the 1969 C.D. Annual we reproduced the old poster advertising the Chaplin film "The Adventurer." We expressed the belief that the film was released under a different title in this country. However, Danny mentions seeing "The Adventurer" in 1920, so we were wrong.

The following are required to complete runs:-

MAGNETS: 1000, 1002, 1003, 1004, 1005, 1017, 1020, 1104, 1116, 1117, 1118, 1120, 1201. GEMS: 1221, 1234, 1235, 1238, 1239, 1240, 1243, 1244, 1245, 1246, 1249, 1251, 1253, 1258, 1259, 1260, 1262, 1263, 1274, 1276, 1277, 1287, 1288, 1289, 1290, 1292, 1294, 1295, 1296, 1298, 1299. Top prices paid for copies in good condition. Exchanges.

GEORGE LONGMAN, 8 PATHFINDER TERRACE, BRIDGWATER, SOMERSET.

xx

Are you contemplating the reduction or disposal of your collection? Top prices paid. LARGE selection for sale including Hamiltonia - Magnets, Gems, Populars, Heralds, etc. Modern Boy, Marvel, Pluck, Boys' Friend, S.B.L., Nuggets, Detective Weekly, Champion and most of the old boys' journals and annuals. These include Chums, B.O.A., Young England, G.H.A., Captain, C.D., Strang, Modern Boy, Champion and a host of others. Please state wants.

NORMAN SHAW, 84 BELVEDERE ROAD, LONDON, S.E. 19.
Evenings 01 771 9857

WANTED - Magnets between 1000 - 1364, Bullseyes, Big Five, Boys' Magazine. For exchange:- Magnets, Lees, Bullseyes, SOL, GHA, SOA, BOPA, Captain, etc. Westerman, etc., h/back, Crime Fiction.

SUTTON, 41 SWALECLIFF AVENUE, MANCHESTER, M23 9DN.

xx

MAGNETS WANTED: 1926 - 1940, would purchase complete collection.

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

BLAKIANA

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

THE MASTER CRIMINALS

by S. Gordon Swan

FOR FIFTEEN YEARS Sexton Blake battled with sundry crooks of varying degrees of intelligence. These, as far as I know, were single encounters, with the villain receiving a knockout in the last round. But in 1908 there occurred an event which was to have a considerable effect upon the Baker Street Saga. In that year Michael Storm created George Marsden Plummer, a criminal who was destined to survive two world wars and even rear his head in the drastically re-organised modern stories.

Like many people to-day, this master crook wanted too much too soon, so he tried to get rid of the obstacles between him and the inheritance of a wealthy estate. In this aim he was foiled by Sexton Blake, who unmasked the renegade detective and had him installed in a prison cell. This was not the end of it, however. Plummer looked around his cell and decided he would not stay in it for long, a resolve which he kept.

From the ending of *The Man From Scotland Yard* one may conclude that Michael Storm intended to continue the Plummer story, but it was some time before a sequel appeared and then there was to be a long series of tales about this character with the agate-green eyes who smoked Green Larranaga cigars.

He was not a loner; he frequently worked with accomplices. One of these was Rupert Forbes, who appeared on his own in a *Union Jack Christmas Double Number* and a short story in the *Penny Pictorial*. But Forbes died and Plummer took up with another scoundrel, John Marsh. It is interesting to note that, in some episodes, Marsh overshadows Plummer: he appears cooler-headed, more subtle in his scheming. Marsh, in his turn, dropped out when he reformed, and Plummer was left to go his way alone, with the occasional help of his valet, Gustave, a character who disappeared from the scene somewhere

along the way.

The man with the green eyes must have been popular because he was also to be found in *The Dreadnought* and there was a series of short stories about him in *Pluck*; in addition there were several films in which he was featured. When Michael Storm ceased to write about him in 1910, there must have been a demand for his return, for his nefarious career was carried on by Norman Goddard and John W. Bobin. Goddard was killed in the Great War and Bobin eventually passed Plummer over to G. H. Teed, who provided him with a female partner in the shape of the exotic Vali Mata-Vali.

During this period for some reason Walter Edwards wrote two stories of G.M.P. and had the audacity to kill him off in the second one. G. H. Teed was given the task of resuscitating him and did so without explaining how he came back to life — a task which was beyond his or anyone's powers as Walter Edwards had disposed of him in too definite a manner.

Throughout World War 2, and many succeeding years, we heard no more of Plummer until Arthur MacLean revived him in a "modern" Blake. It would not be surprising if he were to bob up again some day; he is very tough to kill.

It is difficult to assess the reason for Plummer's popularity. He was not as colourful a character as other villains who have graced — or disgraced — the pages of the *Union Jack*. It may be that he captured the imagination by being the first in the field of recurring criminals, and there is no denying that Michael Storm's stories were well written.

His success spurred other authors to follow his example. W. Murray Graydon presented Laban Creed, a scoundrel with an attractive and interesting daughter named Torfrida. The latter figured in several stories and then vanished from the scene without explanation — a pity, as she was an intriguing personality. Laban Creed also appeared in *Pluck* in opposition to Detective Will Spearing. His later exploits were recorded in the *Sexton Blake Library*, where he was sometimes to be found in company with the notorious Basil Wicketshaw, another criminal who continually evaded Blake's clutches.

A more formidable foe for Blake and one who rivalled Plummer

was Count Ivor Carlac, who was introduced by Andrew Murray. As far as can be judged by the early stories, he was of Polish nationality. There was a serial in The Dreadnought entitled The Great Conspiracy, which brough in Plummer, Marsh and Carlac. (This was not a reprint of the story of the same name in The Union Jack.)

Carlac is perhaps better known to many in conjunction with Professor Kew, a character who was diametrically opposed to him in physique. The two met in prison and joined forces, and subsequent to that meeting they worked in double harness. Following Andrew Murray, Gilbert Chester wrote three stories of Kew, and one of Kew and Carlac; then the pair went into limbo except for re-issues of old Sexton Blake Libraries. There was also at least one story of Nelson Lee versus Kew and Carlac in the A.P. Nugget Library.

Robert Murray invented The Bat, a Raffles-type cracksman who reformed and helped Blake in his campaign against the sinister Mr. Reece, who somewhat resembled Kew in appearance. Reece himself was overshadowed by The Criminals' Confederation, that infamous organisation which provided a long-running series that was in due course taken over and finished up by Gilbert Chester. When this series was reprinted it was given a new conclusion, which was where it should have finished up in the first place instead of running indefinitely. One always wondered what happened to Sir Phillip Champion, second-in-command of The Confederation, who simply faded out of the stories.

G. H. Teed's best known criminal was Dr. Huxton Rymer, another long-lived character who also survived into the post-war era. I think Rymer must have been Teed's favourite character. At first he was ruthless, then at times he and Blake called a truce and worked together, but towards the end of Teed's writing career the ex-surgeon was becoming ruthless again. Rymer also appeared in a few serials in The Prairie Library, this time in opposition to Nelson Lee; and there were short stories dealing with his adventures on his own in Pluck and The Boys' Realm.

It is impossible to deal with all the criminals who escaped at the end of the story and returned to create more problems for Blake, but mention must be made of Leon Kestrel, the Master Mummer, who recently returned in a paperback Blake. He was one of the detective's

most dangerous opponents, with his faculty for disguise and impersonation. He is particularly memorable in that the stories written around him had some of the most ingenious plots in the history of the Union Jack.

After the Great War new authors arrived with new criminals: Dr. Ferraro, Zenith the Albino — a brilliant creation — Gilbert and Eileen Hale and others. It was noticeable that in the late twenties some of the master criminals mellowed and became more likeable. Waldo, who started off as a murderer, developed into a sort of Robin Hood; Ferraro, who had been a sinister type, became a friendly foe; even Zenith was less deadly.

The advent of World War 2 seemed to wipe most of the master rogues off the map. Very few of the old favourites appeared from 1941 onwards with the exception of those revivals already referred to. In the modernised Blake there were one or two recurring criminals, but they do not seem to have caught on.

I sometimes think the resident rogues were rather overdone, that there should have been more stories in which the crook was unmasked and disposed of in the one yarn. Nevertheless, much of the popularity of the Union Jack was due to the reappearing rascals.

The trouble with the majority of the master rogues is that, when their creators died, we heard no more of them. So, somewhere, a whole band of criminals is still at large with little likelihood of receiving their just deserts, unless some current author rounds them up and puts them where they belong.

+ + +

VARIATIONS ON A THEME

BY BLYTH

by Kenneth Bailey

It was February 1933, my schooldays nearly over and I was recovering from a serious illness. My recuperative diet had been supplemented with doses of Jester, Funny Wonder and Chips, until the day that father brought home a yellow covered paper on which cover was depicted a dressing-gowned figure, telephone in hand, face grimly alert. From the pages of the paper fell a small packet bearing the

legend - "Minora Blade." Having yet no need for its contents, I ignored it and turned my attention to this new delight. I had heard of Sexton Blake, but I had no previous dealings with this legendary character.

But from that day on my choice of reading underwent a change. Chips, Nelson Lee, Modern Boy and the like were now behind me, although I admit to reading these papers from time to time.

Detective Weekly's impact upon me was considerable and immediate for the page two profile on the great man filled me with awe. Some weeks earlier I had struggled through a Sherlock Holmes novel but here was something better. Not only had Blake all of Holmes' attributes, he had the advantage of being contemporary and alive. I could not participate in the Holmesian exploits of forty years ago, for the age seemed outside my comprehension.

The first D.W. story was "Sexton Blake's Secret," a fine Lewis Jackson tale, and the first of a trilogy in which the sleuth's brother had become the victim of a criminal lapse.

At times this story carried a certain sadness as Blake became involved both professionally and emotionally in his brother's tragedy. The Eric Parker illustrations were admirable.

In subsequent weeks I was to enjoy a Paris spring with G. H. Teed and to meet the enigmatic Zenith.

These joys went on for many weeks until I was dismayed to find that a variety of new artists had appeared on the scene, to a total exclusion of Parker. These artists, whose work I had seen in papers such as Boys' Magazine and Ranger, included one whose illustrations had appeared in Bullseye, and whose human figures closely resembled four feet tall dwarfs.

I decided then that I would give Amalgamated Press a sharp lesson by not purchasing D.W. for a period. For, to me, Eric Parker was Sexton Blake and Sexton Blake was Eric Parker. They should be as inseparable as Gilbert and Sullivan. (In earlier days Kenneth Brookes meant Nelson Lee to me.)

However, time went by and I discovered the Sexton Blake Library which (a) gave a much longer story and (b) best of all, had Eric Parker firmly enthroned as its illustrator.

The first S.B.L. story I read was No. 495, Teed's "Mystery of the Cashiered Officer," a really great story in which to meet Blake once more.

I have not read this story for almost thirty-five years, but I still recall the grimness of the opening chapters, set at a lonely French farm. The later London settings maintained the excitement. London, where some gas lights still hissed and spluttered, where trams still clattered their way neath blue sparking trolley poles and where mists gathered and drifted round Wapping Old Stairs. Such was the back-cloth to many of Blake's adventures. On stage George Marsden Plummer and others weaved their webs of intrigue.

Teed, like other Blake authors, had the good sense to make his criminals men of character and not just cardboard bad-men.

Who hasn't felt a tinge of sympathy for Plummer when, success in sight, misfortune or Blake himself has dashed his hopes?

In later novels I was to find more sympathy for a lighter-hearted figure in Raffles. Hornung's character, revived by Barry Perowne, brought a gayer mood with the gentleman cracksman as often with Blake as against him. Here was a figure as ageless as Peter Pan.

The romantic side of my nature was catered for by Pierre Quiroule's Mlle. Julie, who had the pleasant habit of bringing a little tenderness to the stories and providing a welcome warmth to offset the main theme of dark conspiracy.

Most of the Blake authors had the ability to create atmosphere in its many variations, but to me, oddly enough, one of the less prolific of those chroniclers remains in my mind as the one who really injected his tales with super tension. I speak of John Hunter whose works I had previously read in Boys' Magazine and Modern Boy. His style was unique and to this type of fiction he was as Hitchcock is to the screen - a master of suspense.

So there are a few of the variations. The characters good and bad, the moods grim and gay, all served up to grip us and to humour us, to intrigue and puzzle us, but always to entertain us.

WANTED ANY MAGNETS. Please state numbers and prices required.
Write to - M. R. A. JACKSON, 19a AYLMEY PARADE, LONDON, N.2.

Back to a story written by an author in his prime, when St. Jim's was new and the Century was young.

STAUNCH CHUMS AT ST. JIM'S

From a distance many inquisitive juniors watched the search that was immediately made. Taggles, the school porter, made it, accompanied by the doctor, by Kildare, and by the head prefect of the New House.

Study No. 6 was first examined, but in that famous apartment no trace of the missing money was found. For the sake of making assurance doubly sure, even the property of all the chums was searched, but with no result. A five-pound note was certainly found in a drawer of D'Arcy's ink-stand, but Arthur Augustus explained that it was his own, and offered to refer the doctor to his "governah," who would be able to identify the note by its number.

From Study No. 6 the searchers proceeded to the Fourth Form dormitory, without result. All Blake's belongings were subjected to a keen search, which missed nothing. But no trace of the missing money could be found.

"He's shoved it in an awfully safe place," said Percy Mellish to his cronies. "What we want is a detective, you know, to shadow him, and discover where he has hidden it."

Mellish had followed the search carefully. There were few happenings in the School House that escaped Percy. As he had no conscientious scruples about listening at doors, he generally kept himself well posted.

"There was a fiver found in the study," he went on. "I heard D'Arcy explain to the Head that his governor had sent it to him. That's all my eye."

"Don't you believe it?" said Walsh.

"Not much. D'Arcy was shielding Blake."

"Then you think he's guilty, and they're trying to screen him?"

"I know he's guilty.."

Percy Mellish broke off with a yell.

A grip of iron was on his collar, and a set of bony knuckles were ground into his neck. He swung round furiously, half-throttled, and saw that it was Figgins who had seized him.

"So you think he's guilty, do you, you little beast?" said Figgy.

"What are you doing here, you New House cad? You've no right in our house. Kick'em out, chaps!"

The Co., who were, of course, with their leader, clenched their fists to stand by Figgy, but it was not necessary.

"Kick him out, yourself," said Walsh. "We'll see fair play."

But that did not suit Percy. He would as soon have tackled a wild bull as Figgins, who could have wiped up the ground with him in no time.

Percy jerked his collar free.

"What do you want here, anyway?" he snarled. "If Mr. Kidd catches you you'll get into a row, I can tell you."

"We've come to see Blake," replied Figgins. "As for you, Mellish, if you were worth licking I'd waste five minutes on you, but you ain't. Come on chaps!"

And Figgins & Co. marched off to Study No. 6.

Blake and his chums were in the study. They were about the most miserable group that had ever gathered together within the ancient walls of St. Jim's.

The situation seemed hopeless; the sentence of expulsion was suspended, but unless the truth came to light soon, Blake had to go, with a stigma upon his name which would last all his life.

Blake started from a painful reverie as a timid knock came at the door.

The door opened, and Figgins & Co. came hesitatingly into the study. Herries

and Digby sprang to their feet, their fists clenching convulsively. A thought, unjust, but not unnatural, had sprung into their minds at once.

"You've come to - - -"

Figgins shook his head.

"Pax!" he exclaimed. "We ain't on the warpath; and if you think we'd crow over a thing like this, even if we believed it --"

"Sorry!" said Herries, sitting down again.

"And we don't believe it," said Figgins earnestly. "That's what we've come over for, to tell you so, Blake. Most of our house have made up their silly minds that you are guilty; but some of your fellows are saying the same thing, too. But we know you didn't take the money. We know it, don't we, chaps?"

"We do!" said Kerr and Wynn, in a breath.

"We're going to back you up," continued Figgins. "We've gone for each other often enough, and there's been hard knocks on both sides, but we don't bear malice. We know you didn't take the money, and we back you up, Blake."

There were tears in Jack Blake's eyes now, though he was far from being one of the crying kind. His own chums had proved staunch in the hour of trial, but he had never expected this eager faith and loyalty from his rivals of the New House.

"You're jolly good about it, Figgy," he said, in a low voice. "I can't say much, but you'll understand how I feel. There's a horrible mistake somewhere, though I can't make it out."

"There's more than a mistake," said Figgins. "Somebody has been telling lies. Somebody has taken the money, and has managed to fix it on you."

"But, I say," remarked Herries, "you know what that amounts to, Figgy. If you admit that Blake's innocent, it's as good as accusing one of your own house."

Figgins nodded.

"I know that, Herries; but I believe that Blake is innocent all the same. Whether it was one of our own house or not, we're going to discover the thief."

"You are?"

"Yes, we've talked it over between ourselves, and we're going to set to work. You lot do the same. I know it's most likely that he's on our side. It will be a come-down for us to admit that we have a thief in the New House, but we're going to get at the truth, and clear Blake."

"You're a Briton, Figgy, and no mistake," exclaimed Herries, deeply touched by the devotion of Figgy. "I hope you'll succeed."

"We will!" said Figgy determinedly. "We've already got a clue. I won't tell you what it is, because it concerns one of our fellows, and it may be nothing, after all. But we're going to follow it up like a giddy Sherlock Holmes. Now, Blake, tell us all you can about the matter, so that we shall be posted."

Willingly enough, Jack Blake told all he knew. Figgins' face was a study as he listened to the story of the unfortunate half-sovereign.

"Look here, Blake," he said, "after what has happened, do you still think the half-sov was one of your own which you had put in your pocket and forgotten?"

"I couldn't think anything else when I found it there," said Jack. "But now - well, if it was possible for anybody to have put the coin in my pocket, I should think someone had done it."

"And only the thief could have had any motive for doing it?"

"Yes, to throw suspicion on me. But then, only a School House chap could have got at my jacket when I wasn't wearing it --"

"But what about when you were wearing it?"

"I don't see how anybody could put a half-sovereign in my pocket without my knowing it," said Blake, in surprise.

"Suppose he had hold of you at the time - slinging you out of his study, for instance?" said Figgins slowly.

The chums of Study No. 6 gave a simultaneous jump, and looked at each other and Figgins.

"Do you mean to say --" began Herries.

"I don't mean to say anything," said Figgins obstinately. "I simply asked a question. Would it be possible, under these circumstances, to slip the coin into

your breast-pocket, Blake?"

"Why, of course. It would be easy enough if he wanted to."

"That's all I want to know. We'll be off now. Mind, not a word to anybody about what I've said."

"Of course not. We'll be mum as oysters."

"What I mean is, we don't want the rotter to know we're hunting him, or he'll be on his guard, and make it harder for us," said Figgins. "Well, so-long, and keep your pecker up!"

And Figgins & Co. quitted Study No. 6. They left hope behind them.

(ANOTHER INSTALMENT NEXT MONTH)

FILM WEEKLY and PICTURESHOW from No. 1, Bound Volume 1924 Picturegoer. Many pre-war and post-war film Annuals. Still a few items left from last month's advert. In addition Bound Volumes Wonder Star Story Paper 1913, 34 Nos. £7.15.0.; JACK HARKAWAY, 23 Nos. Vol. 11, 25/-; 200 Comrades around 1898/99 some in poor state, some good, £3 the lot, cheap; 150 bound B.F.L's in mint condition, Hayter, Drew, Storm, etc.

NORMAN SHAW, 84 BELVEDERE ROAD, LONDON, S.E.19.

XX
FOR SALE: 32 St. Frank's, S.O.L's, 5 N. Lees Old Series, 58 1st New Series, 28 2nd and 1 Third New Series. Offers for exchange in the Magnet and Gem line. Write with s.a.e. to -

H. FRANKLIN, 83 UFFINGTON AVENUE, HARTSHOLME ESTATE,
LINCOLN.

XX
FOR SALE - ANNUALS: Chatterbox (1908, 09, Vol. 68), Chick's Own (1929, 34, 36), Jolly Jack's (1936), Pip & Squeak (1937, 39), Rainbow (1933, 35), Schoolgirl's Own (1930), Sparkler (1937), Wilfred's (1934, 36, 37), also 4 Schoolgirls Own Libraries. All good/reasonable condition. Offers or enquiries to:

R. E. ANDREWS, 80 GREENWOOD AVENUE, LAVERSTOCK,
SALISBURY, WILTS.

XX
WANTED - MODERN BOYS 304, 323, 346, 389, 390, 453, 461 and NEW SERIES 4, 21, 22, 23, 24, 68, 69, 73, 74, 75, 76, 78, 81 - some available for exchange if required.

HANGER, 10 PARK SQUARE, KINGS HEATH,
NORTHAMPTON, NN5 7LQ.

NELSON LEE COLUMN

WHAT'S IN A NAME!

by Raymond Curé

What is in a name? - much every way - mention the name of a film star and your mind will supply the rest of the details. By way of example take Charlie Chaplin and your mind conjures up the old-time comedy. Douglas Fairbanks for swash-buckling adventure. W. C. Fields for droll humour. Or for modern fans, Steptoe and Son, Derek Nimmo, Lucille Ball, Harry Worth, etc., Churchill and Harold Wilson for politics.

The same applies in the realm of fiction. I will mention but a few names and you will find your mind will slot in the characters of each (swifter than a computer). Are you ready?

Sherlock Holmes - Sexton Blake - James Bond - Robinson Crusoe - Oliver Twist - Billy Bunter - Handforth. One could continue with a list that would at least ring a bell for somebody.

If you want to "send" (I believe that is the modern idiom) a long-standing St. Frank's fan, just mention the name of EZRA QUIRKE.

Talking with men of my own age and at times mentioning the "old papers" such as Magnet - "Oh yes! Billy Bunter!" they exclaim. Union Jack. "Sexton Blake!" is the reply. Mention the "Nelson Lee" and Edward Oswald Handforth springs to mind. But what is most amazing, Ezra Quirke who only had a couple of series devoted to him is often remembered. "Nelson Lee? Didn't it feature that queer chap, Quirke or something?"

"That queer fellow!" That about sums up Ezra Quirke. But how did he first enter our lives, and come to leave such a lasting memory?

Let me take you back to those long-ago days of 1925. The month of October. I cannot remember what the weather was like in my part of the world, but Edwy Searles Brooks reports that "the wind howled and moaned around St. Frank's with steadily increasing force - now and then it rose to a mighty shriek, and the solid old piles fairly shook under the force of the elements. It was a wild October night."

(I read once that you need English weather for the setting of mystery - the London fogs - howling winds - cold dark rainswept streets - deep snows, imagine trying to give your occult story the setting of a brilliant June day - though personally I have read one or two good occult mysteries set in sunny Egypt.)

However, E. S. Brooks takes advantage of our weather for his spooky settings.

And now enter Ezra Quirke. "The figure had come noiselessly and there was something unreal and spectral about it he was attired in a curious cloak and wore no hat. His long hair was waving in the wind, and his white face looked utterly ghostly. It was even possible to see the fixed expression of the eyes."

For readers of "Nelson Lee" these three sentences give the essence of the "Ezra Quirke" Saga. In a few short weeks this character was to burn his way into the minds and memories of N.L. readers.

One can understand Billy Bunter - Handforth - Sexton Blake, finding a place in one's memories. The constant repetition week by week would explain this, but this character Ezra Quirke attains such an honour on the strength of fourteen to fifteen stories covering two series, (I stand to be corrected) and it speaks well for his creator Edwy Searles Brooks.

Space is limited - I will proceed no further - except to say if you have not read of Ezra Quirke it is not too late. Bob Blythe of the London O.B.B.C. library can help you for a small loan fee.

And this will begin for you several happy hours of thrills and laughter. I read the series again the other day. I recommend it. If you have not read it before and are now going to do so for the first time, all I can say is "you lucky people."

+ + +

HATS OFF TO THE BAD HATS

by Len Wormull

After seeing a recent Western take-off called The Good Guys And The Bad Guys, my thoughts instinctively turned to the school sagas of Charles Hamilton and E. S. Brooks. For sure, the good guys always won; our moral code decreed it. But spare a kind thought for the bad guys, those inveterate scene-stealers and impact-makers;

the backbone of some of the finest school dramas penned by our favourite writers.

One speaks lovingly of the "golden age" of the Magnet, but undeniably it was the bad lads who gave it eminence by their gilt-edged performances. Bunter played so many delightfully villainous roles (under the clever guise of obtuseness) that he easily gets my oscar for unmitigated depravity. Imposture, theft, prevarication, mischief-making, kidnapping in Bunter Court, blackmailing in Hollywood - what a job for the chronicler of his crimes! Bless him.

St. Frank's was no less endowed with "bad hats" in the grand tradition. I arrived too late to savour the worst of Ralph Leslie Fullwood, but a backward glance showed a blackguard of rare calibre. I think his creator threw away one of his best-drawn characters by reforming him, a change which didn't ring true, anyway. Bernard Forrest quickly filled his shoes as the cad I loved to hate. He went too far in the Feud Of The Fourth and got the sack. But what a way to go! No back exit for this V.I.P. - Brooks pulled out all the stops. The school gathered to see him off; jacket and cap flung to the ground, the St. Frank's Cadets drumming him out the while. The momentary pang of remorse, then defiance, then the gates clanging shut. Poor devil. All rather melodramatic now, but wonderful stuff in those days. Forrest was too bad a character to lose, and I welcomed news of a come-back. Alas, the sequel was rather a let-down. He returns with a D'Arcy lisp, wearing pince-nez, and posing as his cousin. His enemy of the moment, Claude Gore-Pearce, soon tumbles the impostor. A rare slip, it seems. Gore-Pearce arrived at St. Frank's in The Mystery Of Edgemore Manor, some time after Forrest's expulsion, so could hardly have known the real from the false. Forrest redeems himself, is reinstated, and the clouds roll by. Another leopard that changed its spots.

Alan Castleton, of the Twin series, wrought four weeks of utter rascality before going out on a whimper of remorse. Great while it lasted. Full honours to that odious character and charlatan, Ezra Quirke, for one of the most original and intriguing school stories ever told. He left a monument to his name - and Brooks. He was to return again, but the magic had gone. A fine study in snob-cads was

Claude Gore-Pearce himself. He bared his fangs in the Sneaks' Paradise series, to my mind the last really inspired school story the author was to write. His toppling of Nipper for the captaincy by ~~by~~ deeds most foul, to become boss of the Remove, was sufficient alone to urge me back to St. Frank's in after years. Brooks did sterling work with adult villains, but I give no marks to Professor Zingrave. He destroyed St. Frank's.

Whether they passed our way but once, returned again, or stayed to the end, the baddies gave us the worst years of their lives in a way we shall never forget. How dull the school scene would have been without them.

+ + +

MEMORIES OF A SCOUT

from W. T. Thurbon

I was most interested in Bob Blythe's article on E. S. Brooks and The Scout, in the current Digest.

Way back in 1913, before I was old enough to join officially, I was attached to a scout troop and began to read the 'Scout' shortly after "In Quest of Millions" began. I have the bound volume in which the serial appears. It began in number 273 of 5th July, 1913, and ended in No. 281 of 8th August, 1913. The name of the author was given as Basil Norman - did Brooks use the name much? Presumably Brooks did "make a bit more of the sandstorm." The incident impressed me when I first read it, and it still strikes me as one of the best in the serial.

Until I saw this month's Digest, I never associated the story with E. S. Brooks. Actually it's not a bad treasure hunt story.

Incidentally Brooks met the objection to the "explorers stealing the canoes" (presumably against the ethics of The Scout) by making the owners related to a native rescued by the expedition.

+ + +

HANDFORTH MINOR

by R. J. Godsave

One of E. S. Brook's finest characters was Willy Handforth. He was introduced to the readers of the Nelson Lee Library on o.s. 386 "Handforth's Minor."

DO YOU REMEMBER?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 82 — Magnet No. 1555 — "Bunter's Orders"

By the time the Magnet had adopted its salmon-coloured cover, it was getting into the sere and yellow leaf. There is an autumnal air about "Bunter's Orders," a feeling of self-satisfaction and maturity, but the cold winds of winter are not far off, and the story has hints of decay about it.

It began with one of those familiar scenes at the letter-rack, with tips being extracted from envelopes (how trustingly relatives used to send banknotes by ordinary post!) and Bunter was announcing an unexpected promise of a handsome remittance. His celebrated Uncle George had written sarcastically to say that he was pleased to learn that his nephew was doing so well at football, and if he should be selected to play for the school, Uncle George would send £2.10s.0d. for a new outfit and £5 in addition. Bunter's one ambition from this time was to play in the Rookwood match.

The other thread of the story concerned Nugent and his minor. Walker had caned Dicky Nugent for smoking, and Frank Nugent was convinced that it was excessive punishment, and he concocted a scheme to take revenge on Walker. Bunter happened to witness the attack, and was thus in a position to blackmail his way into the team.

There are some pleasing aspects of this story. The description of Frank Nugent, so calm and reasonable on all points save one (his minor), is a well-observed piece of character-drawing. Bunter, Vernon-Smith, Wharton, and Bull all live up to their well-defined natures, but there is something missing, as there is with most of the salmon-covered Magnets. Wordsworth once asserted that "there hath passed away a glory from the earth" and I feel the same about the later Magnets.

With single stories it is rather difficult to define this loss, but it seems to me to consist chiefly in style and characterisation. The happy choice of metaphor, the apposite comparison, the delightful irony that brought a smile to the reader's face - all had gone. The characters themselves did not change much, but they ceased to surprise us in a convincing manner, as E. M. Forster insists that all

fully-rounded characters should do. In the late 'twenties and early 'thirties, the Golden Age, everything was fresh and unexpected. Plots used to twist and turn with amazing agility, and the style was a sheer delight in its novelty and humour. By the late 'thirties, Hamilton began to coast along. His stories were never less than competent, but this was poor consolation for readers who had been educated by him to expect so much more.

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 146. THE DIRK POWER SERIES

The story of the madman, Dirk Power, and his pursuit of the Levisons, is largely ignored today. The passing of time is leaving a cold frost in its wake which is slowly obliterating the memories of series which appeared before the thirties. The diary of Danny, who was a sunny-natured schoolboy fifty years ago, gives the very old stories a brief span of new life, and this very column often blows on the sparks which Danny has rekindled, producing a passing flame. But fifty years is a long time - and the numbers of those who remember so far back gradually grow less. It is inescapable that slowly but surely the members of the hobby are getting out of touch with the beginnings of it all.

The inevitable shrinking in the numbers of those who remember first-hand does not, of course, lessen the interest of any particular series. The Dirk Power set of stories has always been neglected, even though, at the time it appeared, it was a significant series.

Apart from one little pot-boiler, Charles Hamilton had been absent from the Gem for the best part of a year. There can be no doubt that the paper was feeling the draught, and an effort was made to stop the rot. In the autumn of 1920, free gifts were given in the Gem over a number of weeks, two new serials were started (one was "Renton of the Rovers" by G. R. Samways), and, the main factor, Charles Hamilton was persuaded to write again for the Gem, and his stories were now to feature for seven consecutive weeks. Five of these new stories from the creator of the characters comprised the Dirk Power series.

In some ways this series reminds one of the Brazil series of the 1939 Gem. Thrills come thick and fast - too thick and fast - in both series. The 1939 series is almost certainly better written, but its repetitiousness produces a tedium which is absent in the earlier series with its rapid changes of background.

Although Tom Merry had been with a party to the New World some twelve years earlier, that series had been a welcome flash in the Gem pan. But Dirk Power was to set a pattern, and as time went on the Hamilton characters, particularly in the Magnet, were to become globe trotters. This seems to indicate that readers found the Dirk Power type of interlude a welcome change from the normal run of school stories in the Gem and Magnet.

When Dirk Power came to the Gem, certain subtle changes were evident apart from the suspension of substitution for a couple of months. Though this series told of the Levisons, it was really mainly a Tom Merry series. Tom Merry had been eclipsed for years by Cardew, Talbot, and others. He now becomes, very surely, the king pin once again.

The group which accompanies the Levisons in flight strikes one as rather curious, when one recalls the trend since the blue cover went the way of all flesh. Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther, Gussy, Figgins, and Fatty Wynn. That group was very certainly contrived with a purpose, and it is reminiscent of the oddly-assorted party which went to the Rockies with Tom Merry way back in earlier times.

It is significant that it was the old heroes who went with the Levisons, and not Cardew and Clive. The "old faithfuls" among readers were being wooed. There was a brief explanation that Cardew and Clive had gone to Cardew's home together owing to the illness of Cardew's relative.

This is one series which does not come alive until the party leaves Britain, and this is due to the fact that happenings which are quite incredible when set in England are more believable when the party gets to foreign parts.

Well enough though it was written, the opening story of the series was a failure. Even Charles Hamilton's writing could not disguise the fact that the basic situations were inconceivable in the quiet

English countryside.

Mr. Levison's abject terror of Dirk Power was false, or, at least, faulty. An Englishman, threatened after many years by a madman, would surely protect his family by seeking the aid of the British police. That he would send a telegram, instructing his two young sons to "FLY," without even notifying their Headmaster, was preposterous. That, a little later, Mr. Levison should ask a number of schoolboy friends to accompany them in fleeing round the world before a madman, took a very great deal of swallowing. Little wonder that this series stepped off on the wrong foot and was tripping up all over the place within a chapter or two.

Dirk Power, as a murderer, was an amateur. He did not shoot the schoolboys. He crawled along the running board of the local train between Rylcombe and Wayland, while the Levison boys jumped from the train into some passing trucks. He chased them on a bicycle, and went up on one sail of a windmill while they descended on the other. He set fire to the barn where they were hiding - and so on, to incredible lengths.

There is evidence that the opening story was longer by several chapters when it was originally written, and that these chapters were tacked on to the front of the second story. Probably it was an afterthought, on the part of the editor, to add a second serial to the Gem programme, and shorten the St. Jim's stories by a page or two. It is fairly certain, also, that the author preferred writing shorter stories at this time.

Once England was left behind, and Tom Merry & Co. were out on their travels via the Panama Canal, San Francisco, the Yukon and Texas, the mood of the tale changed, the atmosphere took on a higher plane, and the series was saved. The scoundrel who had terrorised the Yukon and the Wild West became more believable, and the series settled down into pleasant adventure reading, even though it was far removed from the normal Gem tale. Here and there one comes across some well-written prose, and real thrills replace the melodrama of the opening story.

Most attractive is the episode set in Texas, with some lively descriptive work on the Llano Estacado, the Staked Plain. In passing,

one came on the Llano Estacado again in the Rio Kid stories. By the time the Rio Kid was on the scene, I had long forgotten the Dirk Power series, otherwise I might initially have credited Hamilton with those famous westerns. The Texas of the Dirk Power series was the nearest thing to the Rio Kid that Charles Hamilton wrote. Reading it all now, one can clearly see the link.

I was a child when I first read the Dirk Power series, and I enjoyed it, though even then the opening story irritated me. But I was overjoyed by the return of the real writer, and by the fact that Tom Merry came into his own again. It rang the bell for me then, and, to some extent, the same factors play their part even all these years later.

When the series was reprinted in the S.O.L., the five stories were compressed into one issue. It can hardly have been a success.

Some readers have compared the Dirk Power series with the Magnet's Wingate Love Affair series, because both appeared in 1920. Apart from the fact that both were off the beaten track, there is no comparison. There is no doubt at all that Hamilton wrote Dirk Power, despite its flood of adventure. Even at his second-best, Hamilton was always readable with brilliant little sidelines. I can find no trace of Hamilton in the hammy Magnet series of the same vintage.

However, the main significance of the Dirk Power series is that it was a turning point for the Gem. The real author was back, at long last. Not so far round the corner was the Gem's Indian Summer, and next year, in 1921, the star writer was to contribute thirty stories or more, instead of the meagre eight which had formed but a tiny oasis in 1920.

WANTED:- Any issue "ADVENTURE" 1936-9, S.O.L's, 2nd series "Blakes," 1st "Sexton Blake Annual."

HILLIARD, 45 MOORBRIDGE LANE, STAPLEFORD,
NOTTINGHAM, NG9 8GR.

xx

WANTED: Any weeklies 1936 - 44. Wizards, Hotspurs, Adventures, etc. Details and price to - BONETTA, "LITTLE HOUSE," CHOPE ROAD, NORTHAM, DEVON.

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

MIDLAND

Many a time and oft in reports have I remarked that the time just whizzes by at our meetings! But surely never more so than at our meeting on 24th March, with three interesting programme items, in addition to the other concomitants of a meeting. Thus members much enjoy any opportunities for a get-together in small groups for conversation. Thus for example before tonight's meeting really started, we had what was virtually a short stamp collectors' meeting; several of our members being interested in Philately.

In addition also there were an unusually large number of items of interest circulated at the meeting.

Some fine photographs taken by our Vice-Chairman, George Chatham, at the Christmas Party in December. Then there was the usual Anniversary Number, tonight School Friend No. 202, dated 24.3.33., also a Collectors' item, Champion Library No. 271, dated 2nd May, 1940. Also circulated at this meeting was a press cutting, giving the obituary notice of Dr. W. A. Bryce, late of Thornhill Road, Streetly, Sutton Coldfield. This gentleman had combined a medical practice in Birmingham with writing both short stories and serials for the Boys' Own Paper, and several books for children.

Of the three programme items, one was a tape-recording of a BBC Third Programme item some years ago. The whole would have taken about an hour, so tonight we heard the introduction which gave some interesting comments on the Greyfriars Saga, illustrated with a few quotations from early stories. Later in this recording comes an interview with Charles Hamilton at Rose Lawn. We are much indebted to Bob Wareing for bringing along this most interesting recording, and look forward very much to hearing more, perhaps at the April meeting.

Then we had a most interesting short talk by Norman Gregory. He broke fresh ground by dealing with the lesser known Annuals, such as Herbert Strang's, and the Rover, Skipper and Modern Boy Annuals. Naturally an animated discussion followed. This alone could have occupied much of the evening.

As a final programme item, Ian Bennett had brought along as a new idea for a game, that old party favourite "Consequences." Naturally there was much hilarity as the "stories" were read out!

Finally a raffle, and so home.

EDWARD DAVEY

NORTHERN

Annual General Meeting held Saturday, 11th April, 1970.

Fifteen members were there when the Chairman, Geoffrey Wilde, opened the meeting after the library had been cleared. The Secretary and the Treasurer-Librarian, gave reports on the year's effort and a discussion on programmes, publicity, etc., followed. There had been only two talks last year, but the original writings of members were taking their place and these we much enjoy. It was suggested by Jack Wood that during the celebration of York's founding 900 years ago, we might be able to have a display. Some interesting correspondence had come from Bessie Barron, who, having lived in Canada, had written to a newspaper there asking if any remembered the Magnet, etc. Mrs. Barron had received a shoal of letters from all over Canada! We looked over a selection of these and it was heartening to read them.

In the election of officers we had a slight change round. Jack Wood was elected Secretary (to assume duties after that all-important Wembley fixture on 9th May) and Mollie Allison is to assist the Treasurer-Librarian. Jack Allison was elected a Committee member with special regard to programme planning, and Elsie Taylor's request

to be relieved of the Vice-Chairman duties was reluctantly accepted and this was left vacant for the time being. The other officials were re-elected.

The refreshments were now welcomed after this lengthy discussion and then Jack Allison took up the tale of "What Happened to Hacker." Apparently Mr. Hacker is not finding life at Popper Court a bed of roses! Sir Hilton's nephew, Ethelred, though a good athlete, is no scholar, but Sir Hilton does not like his being called a "Dolt!" The temporary master of the Shell "Mr. Moss" alias Montgomery Snooks, stuns that Form with his theatrical manner and after a fantastic nature ramble Mr. Moss finishes up at the Cross Keys! Jack brought his witty story to an end with the Hacker v. Wharton motif retained.

It was now time to take leave and we look forward next month to the Quiz recorded by Roger Jenkins of the London Club.

Next Meeting, Saturday, 9th May, 1970.

M. L. ALLISON
Acting Hon. Secretary.

LONDON

It was Ladies' Day at the Richmond Community Centre (the venue having been changed from Cricklewood), and a real good job they made of preparing their programme.

In the absence of Breezy Ben, Dismal Don took over in his stead. After the chairman had welcomed some 20 members, Sam Thurbon introduced Richard Palmer, who acted as Harry Wharton in the 1959 T.V. series.

Josie Packman opened the proceedings for the ladies by giving us a talk on the female characters in the Sexton Blake saga, and a lively discussion followed.

Mary Cadogan, who had obviously spent some time in research, gave us an excellent treatise on Cliff House, showing us how the various authors (and artists) changed the characteristics of some of the leading lights. This was supplemented by drawings from The Magnet, School Friend, etc.

After tea, it was the turn of Winnie Morss, who had devised a Picture Puzzle Quiz on notable places and characters. It was so easy that nobody solved them all, but Eric Lawrence was highest, followed by Len Packman and Don Webster.

Finally we had Millicent Lyle with a word game based on Primrose and she certainly had us racking our brains, and our efforts caused much merriment to others.

The chairman presented the ladies with a gift for their efforts. Congratulations! Well done, girls!

Bill Lofts brought along some copies of his O.B.B.C. Catalogue (price 25/-), and he mentioned business was brisk.

The May meeting is on May 17th at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Bob Blythe at Colindale. Let them know if you are attending.

D.B.W.

TWO POUNDS EACH offered for Nelson Lees (Old Series) 20's, 114, 144 and 146 to complete sets for binding.

JOHN GUNN, M.H.C.I., MEADOW INN, 91 ARKWRIGHT STREET,
NOTTINGHAM, NG2 2JS.

XX
FOR SALE: RED MAGNETS. No. 102 "The Disappearance of Wun Lung;"
No. 130 "Billy Bunter Limited." £2 each plus postage.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE ROAD, SURBITON.

The Postman Called

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

RAY HOPKINS (New Cross): How nice to read the name of Gracie Fields in Danny this month. One gets a warm glow at the remembrance of how much pleasure this great artist has given one over the years, mainly, in my case, from old films and records. However, one didn't realise that that famous show, "Mr. Tower of London" is now 50 years old. I have always believed it to belong to the very late twenties, with her first film "Sally in Our Alley" coming along a year or two later. Danny still is able to startle one occasionally by making one realise how easy it is to have a misconception of just when a certain event took place.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: "Mr. Tower of London," the show which brought Gracie Fields to the notice of the public and which also established Archie Pitt as a producer and manager, seems to have been first sent on the road in 1919. By the Spring of 1920 it was playing return bookings. "Tower" was followed by another successful Pitt revue "It's a Bargain." The public suddenly realised that it had a wonderful new star when the third revue "By Request," starring Gracie, and also featuring Tommy and Edith Fields, went on tour about 1923. It was when "By Request" was paying one of its visits to the Empire at Kingston-on-Thames that Gracie Fields and Archie Pitt were married, in that town. Towards the end of the twenties, Archie Pitt took Gracie to London in "The Show's the Thing," which also starred Edward Champan, Tommy Fields, and Archie Pitt himself. The show played for many months at the Victoria Palace and then transferred to the Winter Gardens Theatre.

For years, Archie Pitt held the lease of the fine theatre at the Alexandra Palace. I saw several dress rehearsals of Pitt shows there, and often wondered whether the letters A.P., in gold on the sumptuous red curtains of the stage, stood for Alexandra Palace or Archie Pitt. About 1930, Archie Pitt revived "Mr. Tower of London" on tour, with Gracie's sister, Betty Fields, in the star part. I saw this show, and found it feeble. The original production must, I think, have had something which the later one did not have. Possibly it was just Gracie herself.)

S. GORDON SWAN (Australia): I must comment on the article by Raymond Curé in Blakiana, "Was I Born Too Soon?" This contains a reference to "Tiller and Tideway" by W. Murray Graydon. But this author never wrote that story; it was by E. W. Alais.

While on the subject of errors, I should like to correct one of my own which appears in the article on Alec G. Pearson, also in the March issue. In this I stated that Frank Ferrett's adventures appeared in the $\frac{1}{2}$ d. Marvel, but on going through my old papers I find that this should have been $\frac{1}{2}$ d. Pluck. Of course, he may have appeared in the $\frac{1}{2}$ d. Marvel too, but I have no evidence of this and do not like to give

misleading information.

G. McROBERTS (Belfast): The magnificent standard of C.D. Always interesting and refreshing in these days of filthy literature and other obscenities. It is great to look back on the good old days and reflect upon something decent. Many thanks to your wonderful band of contributors.

JOE CONROY (Liverpool): I was interested in the comments of Mr. M. Hammond and Mr. N. Evans and their reactions to the re-issue of "The Boy Without A Name." Most of us found this book to be a delightful addition to our collections but, and I think it is a very big but, other adults such as Mr. Hammond and Mr. Evans would take a different view.

Had these gentlemen been given say "Wharton the Rebel" to review or some other of Frank Richards' gems such as "The China Series" or the "Lancaster Series," I think they would have realised immediately what made the "Magnet" tick! Even solidly converted Hamiltonians realise that all his work was not perfect.

It is surprising how many times Danny says in his diary "a very weak month both in the Magnet and the Gem," thus showing in those early days what a load of rubbish was written by substitute writers. Personally, apart from a few, I don't think it is worth collecting prior to 1928. The magic of the master's pen was then flourishing at full bloom and was to continue to do so. The work prior to 1928 was very ordinary indeed and quite a lot of it was, in my opinion, not worth shelf room.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Our reader is too sweeping. Though the golden age of the Magnet shines like a beacon, there were plenty of good tales in the Magnet before 1928. And the golden age of the Gem is found in the years 1911 - 1912. Most readers would agree that some of Charles Hamilton's finest work is to be found in the blue Gem.)

W. O. G. LOFTS (London): I was greatly interested in our editor's recent mention of Trevor Wignall. This brought back memories to me about when I started in the hobby.

Just after the last war, my sister who was an N.C.O. in the W.A.F.A. out in Egypt married. On her return to England she settled in Birmingham with her new in-laws. In meeting my brother-in-law for the first time I told him of my interest in Sexton Blake. He told me that his family came from Swansea in South Wales. His mother, when young, was a great friend of Trevor Wignall who was a boys' writer who had written a few Blake stories. Indeed; his mother had once a tin-trunk full of Sexton Blake Libraries which her husband used to read - but they had been given away in the process of moving house.

Trevor Wignall was born at Swansea in 1883 and educated there. His first job

on leaving school was as a junior reporter on the 'Cambria Daily Leader' in Swansea. Later worked on other Welsh papers, and then came to London. As our editor said correctly he wrote two Sexton Blake yarns in 1920. There is no record of him writing any Blake's in the Union Jack, but it is possible he may have penned a few of those still unidentified stories in PENNY PICTORIAL. Actually he wrote mainly under two pen-names, ALAN DENE and DAVID REES, and was quite prolific.

Later he joined the DAILY EXPRESS and became famous as a writer having his own column entitled DAILY SPOTLIGHT.

He died 22nd March, 1958, at Hove, Sussex. It was told to me, but needs confirming, that his father was an M.P. and a friend of Lloyd George.

D. M. HILLIARD (Nottingham): A chance remark by Gerry Allison, published in March "C.D." needs further comment. The inclusion of "Thomsonia" would bring a great deal of happiness to many of us nearest on these wonderful papers. For me as a boy the delight of the week was to receive my "Adventure." My elder brother and I had all the five issues:- "Adventure" Monday, "Wizard" Tuesday, "Rover" Thursday, "Hotspur" Friday and "Skipper" Saturday. To me, however, "Adventure" topped the polls with "Chang" and "Strang." In 1936 I had been introduced to the magazine by being given the copy which commenced the series "Sheriff by Day - Outlaw by Night." What happiness I associate with this and what would I give to have that copy now!

The very popularity of these papers means that there are few left to collect. Locally we accepted three "Magnets" for one "Wizard" in the days 1936-39. Sacrilege perhaps - but our local newsagent (with a terrific round) recalls that he ordered 10 Thompson papers to every one of the Companion ones.

REVIEW by Frank Vernon Lay

OLD BOYS BOOKS - A complete catalogue 25/-
by W. O. G. Lofts and D. J. Adley.

This is a catalogue that no collector of old boys and girls magazines, comics and annuals can possibly afford to be without.

The authors are to be congratulated for their immense industry in completing such a gargantuan task. One can well understand it has taken them 15 years of research. York Duplicating Services are also to be congratulated for the excellence of the production.

As one who is always referring to my own private lists, lists in C.D.'s and C.D. Annuals and elsewhere, it will be a god-send to have all the information handy in one book and, in addition, hundreds of items that are here published for the first time. It is particularly pleasing to note the listing of over 800 different Annuals and the interesting information on The Girls' Own Paper and Girls' papers generally.

A particularly pleasing feature is the inclusion of post-war information and the various introductions and notes. It is a little early perhaps to comment upon the accuracy of the information but I can vouch for the care the authors and the printers have taken to see that annoying mistakes and misprints are absent.