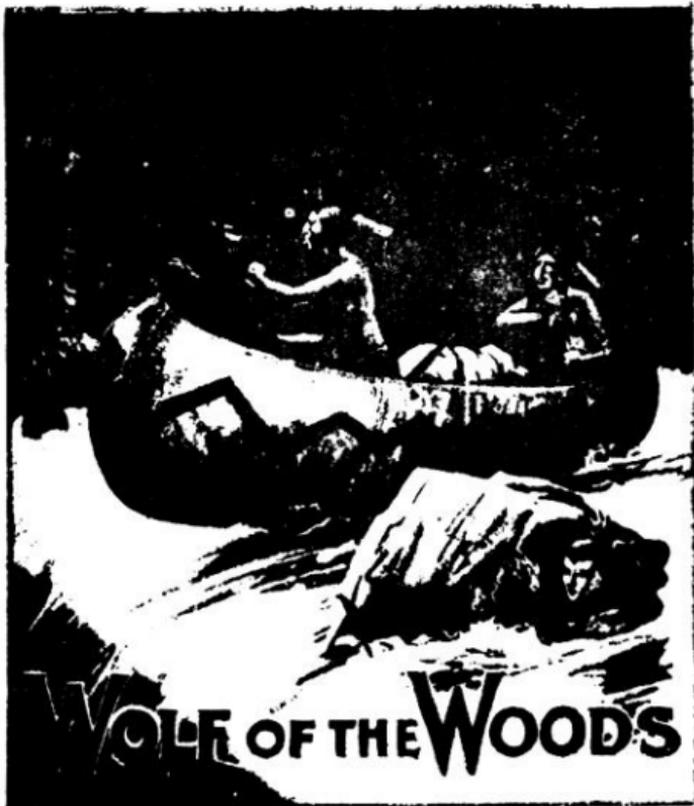


STORY PAPER  
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Vol.  
25



No.  
294



12½p

JUNE  
1971

12½p

## COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by  
W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by  
HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 25

No. 294

JUNE 1971

Price 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ pNEW GENERATION

"They seemed to him, these new Stantonians, the victims of a mania for grownupness. Only by this vile word could he describe his feelings. They weren't natural boys. Allow for the War, for weekends, for motor-cars that almost took the place of home - allow for everything summed up in another vile word, "modern" - and still he felt that these Stantonians not only failed to be as young as Lee and himself had been for better or worse; they were older, more conventional, more worldly; yes, he was forced unwillingly to own, more narrow."

Those words seem to be uncomfortably true of youngsters in 1971. Children become little old men and women, long before their

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time, and are encouraged to do so by their parents, their school-masters, and the mass media. The fault is not the children's.

But oddly enough, the words which open this editorial do not refer to 1971. They were written by Desmond Coke in 1930, in his novel "Stanton," a school story for the adult reader, and a story which has never been so well-known or so popular as his earlier books.

The words are undoubtedly true of 1971. I do not believe that they were true of the youth of 1930. At that time I was at the start of my teaching career. Until long after the war, boys and girls seemed but little different from those of my own schooldays.

Odd indeed is the reference to the motor-car "that almost took the place of home." Nowadays, with plenty of people, the car is almost more important to them than anything else in their lives. But the car was hardly the precious toy of the average parent in 1930. Yet Desmond Coke seemed to see it as such as long ago as 1930. Clearly Coke was forty years ahead of his time.

#### THE AMERICAN SCENE

Plenty of Americans are loyal and enthusiastic readers of this magazine, and they seem to have as much enthusiasm for the old British papers as they do for their own. One of my most delightful regular correspondents is Mr. J. Randolph Cox of Minnesota, who always has something pleasant to say about the Digest.

An American contemporary publication, dealing with collecting of old periodicals and their lore, is a contrast to this magazine in that it deals chiefly with periodicals published in the last century, whereas our own interests are those of the first forty years of this century. In other words, our own interests seem to be nostalgic while the American interests seem to be mainly historic.

The American interest seems to lie with adventure stories, which is not surprising when they have the wonderful legend of the Wild West as a basis for so many great tales. In Victorian times, the main interest over here was adventure. From 1907 onwards, however, the school story reigned supreme, and the era lasted a very long time. Probably the twenties were the heyday of the British school story as well as detective yarns, with a slight dropping away as the thirties

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progressed. I wonder what American boys were reading while British boys were revelling in school life and tec tales.

Maybe some of our readers will let us know.

### GOOD-BYE, MR. CHIPS!

Perhaps, when we named him Mr. Chips, it was inevitable that the time would come prematurely that we should have to say Good-bye.

When Mr. Tail was run over outside Excelsior House in Surbiton in April 1964, we vowed that we would never have another pet. Yet, less than a week later, the vet sent along a lady whose cat had presented her with several kittens. She brought all the kittens with her, and, though they were lovely, we were dubious.

If we had one at all, we wanted a tabby. One of the kittens was a tabby, and, furthermore, he was very much like Mr. Tail to look at. Beyond that, however, this tabby had decided personality and determination. He immediately made himself at home. He decided that he had come to stay, and, under the circumstances, there is little that any humble human being can do about it.

We named him Mr. Chips. He grew into a beautiful cat. Unfortunately, his lifetime was marred by at least four serious illnesses, which took their toll, to some extent, of his activities.

Through each illness he was nursed with loving care, and, perhaps, one tends to grow even more fond of a pet who has had his trials and tribulations than of one who has always been wildly healthy.

Though he rallied each time, each illness left him a little weaker, though no less of a character. He ruled the home; he inspired the editorials; he never ceased to be controversial. He was a great guy, as our American friends might say.

Soon after Christmas he had a severe attack of pleurisy. Once again, despite all her other duties, the first lady of Excelsior House nursed him night and day. He rallied again after a fortnight, but his vet warned us that Mr. Chips' time with us might not now be long.

Chippy went to his new home in Hampshire, and had ten happy weeks there. It was Lymphosarcoma, a malignant tumour, which

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finally took him away from us. The vet told us that Chippy might live, at most, a week or so longer, but, in that case, he might be in discomfort and even in pain. So we let the animal doctor give him the injection which would put him into a sleep from which he would never awake. You cannot do that last loving act for a much loved human being. For an animal you can.

If love, and care, and expert attention had been enough, we could have saved him. They were not enough. Mr. Chips was just seven years old when he said Good-bye.

Perhaps our love for Mr. Chips is nothing to do with the hobby, and my farewell to him is out of place here. But most of our readers must be animal lovers. And many of them, who visited Excelsior House, knew Chippy.

Maybe one day we will have another. Another tabby. But not yet. Good-bye, Mr. Chips, and thank you for everything.

#### THE EDITOR

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 FOR SALE: Modern Wonder (1937) Nos. 1-22 inclusive, £2; Wizards: 1 copy 1937, 12½p; 15 copies 1938, £1.50; 11 copies 1939, £1.10; 6 copies (1948-50) 30p; 14 Champions (1944-50) £1; Hotspur, 1 copy 1939, 10p; 10 copies (1949-50) 60p; Girls' Crystal, 3 copies (1936-37) 28p; Schoolgirl, 2 copies 1937, 12½p each, 1 copy 1939, 12½p. 3 Rovers 1937, 25p. 3 Rovers 1939, 25p. 1 Rover 1949, 10p. 1 Adventure 1939, 10p. Lot: 13 Chips of 1949, 10 Comic Cuts of 1949, 1 Wonder 1949, 1 Beano 1949, 3 Knockouts 1949, 1 Radio Fun 1950 + £1.50 the lot. 1 Skipper 1938, 12½p. The entire lot, above, if sold in one lot, offered at £7. In addition to above, 15 issues of Modern Wonder (1937) between No. 4 and No. 21 (inc.) at 8p each. Postage and packing extra on all items.

S.a.e., first, to ERIC FAYNE.

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 SALE: Turner, 'Boys will be Boys,' £1.05; Eagle Annuals, Nos. 4, 5, 63p each; Blackies Boys' Annual, 50p; Two Adventureland Annuals, 50p each; Sexton Blakes, 28, 8d issues, 15p each, 8, 9d issues, 15p each; Magnets (Salmons) 50p each. Greyfriars Holiday Annuals, 1921 to 1924, 1926 to 1928, 1930, 1931, 1933 to 1935, 1937, 1938.

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 FOR SALE: 8 SBL (2nd). 460 SBL (3rd). Offer for No. 1 SBL (3rd). 1st SBL Annual. 1 & 2 OBB Collector. 30 U.J. (24 pink). 3 Magnet (fair). 1 D.W. (non S.B.). 40 Rover (1949-52). 87 Adventure (1947-54).

MATHESON, 25 GUNNS' TERRACE, WICK, CAITHNESS.

# DANNY'S DIARY

JUNE 1921

Rookwood, in the Boys' Friend this month, has been exclusively devoted to a new series about a new junior named Montmorency. He is a very gorgeous youth, very expensive, and very snobbish. But when he meets Sergeant Kettle, the sergeant says "What are you doing here, George Huggins?" Montmorency clashes with the scholarship boy, Rawson, and in the final tale of the month, a horrid character named Lurchey, who knew Montmorency when he was a servant, turned up. The four tales of the series so far are "Montmorency of the Fourth," "The Mystery of Montmorency," "The Upstart's Secret," and "From Servants' Hall to Rookwood." The series continues.

The excellent series about Frank Richards as a rolling-stone, after he has run away from Cedar Creek, goes on its way merrily. Frank is a partner of Bronze Bill, the gold-digger. But when the bag of gold is stolen in the canyon which they believe is locked against anybody but themselves, each partner suspect the other. Two tales named "The Gold Thief" and "Frank Richards Makes Good."

In the final tales of the month, "Tracked by Rustlers" and "The Black Sack Gang," Frank rescues a nobleman, Lord St. Austells, from Jake Scuttler and his gang of rustlers. But Frank knows Lord St. Austells as the friend of his pal at Cedar Creek, Beauclerc.

This month, the world's largest airship, R.38, has made its maiden flight. Soon everybody will be travelling through the air in these great airships.

We are doing badly in the cricket. The Australians have won the second Test Match which was played at Lord's.

There has been a census this month, and plenty of people are saying it's very sinister and a lot of tripe. Dad had to fill in the form one Sunday evening, and he grunted about it. They hold the census every ten years, and dad says they are a nosey lot.

I had another Nugget Library this month. It was entitled "The Outsiders," and it was a story about Nipper and Co. and Handforth and Co. of St. Frank's, and Langley Mostyn and the boys of Rottingdean

School. I also had a Nelson Lee Library which was a good tale of a cricket match between St. Frank's and Bannington Grammar School, entitled "The Demon Cricketer."

There has been a big trial this month. Farrow's Bank crashed last December, and Thomas Farrow has now been sentenced to four years in prison for what the newspapers call the great bank conspiracy.

And speaking of banks, the Bank Rate has gone down to 6%, whatever that may mean.

It has been another half-good and half-bad month in the Gem, though what promises to be a great new series has now started. The first tale this month was pretty good. It was called "Fighting the Flames," in which the School House juniors started a school fire-brigade, and eventually came in useful.

"Bound by a Promise" was a stodgy story in which Herries and Gussy fought because Herries thought Gussy had left Towser out and got him killed. In "The Plot Against St. Jim's," Tom Merry, lurching at an hotel, overheard some men saying they were going to buy up St. Jim's and develop the site. Tom Merry and Kerr took a hand in a weird affair which was set partly in Cornwall.

Then came the first of a new holiday series, "Tom Merry & Co's Camp." The chums decided to buy a donkey to carry their camping equipment. Several different fellows, including Gussy, buy a donkey named Solomon from Honest Joe. But the donkey has been trained to go back to the man who sold him. At the end of the tale, Tom Merry & Co. managed to bag Solomon for keeps. A lovely little tale, and it looks as though we are going to have a great series. Hooray!

Whatever is happening to the post-office? This month the Sunday delivery has been abolished. It will seem funny not to expect the postman on Sunday mornings.

Some good pictures in the cinemas of the old home town this month. Rosemary Theby and Harry Myers in "A Yankee at the Court of King Arthur;" Norma Talmadge in "The Forbidden City;" Nazimova in "Billions;" Mary Pickford in "Suds" (Mary was a little girl who worked in a laundry); George K. Arthur in "Kipps;" and Tom Mix in "The Terror."

The Magnet does not get much better as it gets older. "Wun



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# BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN  
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## SEXTON BLAKE'S

by S. Gordon Swan

### EARLY DAYS

PROBABLY THE FIRST extra-long story of Sexton Blake to be published was a serial entitled "Shadowed and Haunted," which was printed in the  $\frac{1}{2}$ d Union Jack during 1896. It commenced in No. 102 and finished in No. 118, a total of seventeen instalments. Unfortunately the writer's name was not given, and unless special information on this point is available, the authorship of this tale is forever lost in the mists of time.

Detective stories in the early days of the boys' papers were not noted for their mystery ingredients. The villains were usually obvious from the start and the narrative was concerned with the detective's attempts to bring the criminals to book, in the course of which he was subjected to a succession of perilous adventures.

There is something of this latter aspect in "Shadowed and Haunted," but the story differs from the routine style of the day in that it contains a strong element of mystery. In fact, the editor invited readers to send up their solutions of the riddle. In the opening chapters a mysterious murder takes place in a London lodging-house kept by a man named Roger Stepfast. He has two lodgers, Hesbach, an analyst, and Gesler, a watchmaker.

One night the analyst is murdered - stabbed in the back - and Sexton Blake receives an anonymous offer of £500 to track the assassin. Roger Stepfast also approaches Blake, telling him of a ghost in the murdered man's room, and the detective arranges to wait until midnight to unravel the mystery. As the clock strikes twelve the sound of a heavy fall is heard from within the room, accompanied by a scream and a groan.

The plot is too complicated to detail in full here. Enough to say that Blake finds himself in conflict with a crook known as Captain

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Jim and the several members of his organisation, and after a number of stirring events succeeds in rounding up the gang. In a concluding instalment the identity of the murderer is revealed and every item of the strange mystery surrounding the murder room is explained in detail.

This story from a long-past era is well worth reading, not merely as a curiosity but for itself alone.

The early days of Blake are of particular interest to the reader who remembers the great detective in his heyday in the 'twenties and 'thirties. In the first story of Blake, "The Missing Millionaire," which appeared in No. 6 of the  $\frac{1}{2}$ d Marvel on the 13th December, 1893, Blake was already an investigator with an established reputation, so we are intrigued to know what was actually his first case.

In U.J. Second Series No. 69, under the title of "Sexton Blake's First Case," Stanhope Sprigg chronicled what appears to be the great detective's earliest assignment - itself an interesting tale, in which Blake acquired a girl friend. Later Cecil Hayter gave us the story of a case which Blake solved while he was at Oxford. But both these writers had been anticipated by W. Shaw Rae, who wrote No. 125 of the  $\frac{1}{2}$ d Union Jack, entitled "How Sexton Blake Won His Spurs." Although written in the 1890's this story takes us as far back as 1878.

Chapter 2 begins: "On the evening of that fateful 3rd of September, 1878, the saloon steamer 'Princess Alice' of the London Steamboat Company, was ploughing her homeward way up the lower reaches of the Thames, on her return from an excursion to Sheerness... Sexton Blake, then scarcely out of his 'teens,' was there, the gayest of the gay."

By this reckoning, our timeless, ageless detective to-day would be somewhere in the region of 113!

The story concerns the abduction of a young lady - the heiress to a fortune - by a villain rejoicing in the name of Egbert Trewolf. Of course, Sexton Blake thwarts this rogue and his gang and receives an offered reward. "Yet, ample as was the monetary reward, the success in itself was greater recompense still, as entitling the amateur detective to pass into the professional ranks, and launch out into that career in which he afterwards attained such signal success as to make his name a household word."

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"Such is the true story of 'How Sexton Blake Won His Spurs!'"

Never in their wildest dreams could these early authors have imagined that the name and fame of Sexton Blake would still be known nearly eighty years later. Thanks to their efforts we are afforded a glimpse of the great detective's endeavours in an age that seems to transport us to a different world - a world of hansom cabs and gaslight, when aeroplanes, radio and television were unknown. The image of Sexton Blake, his ideals and integrity, are all that remain to us of that world.



MR. ERIC PARKER

by Anon.

More Pro than Con

In the December issue of C.D. Mr. Chas. Day of Keighley had this to say about Eric Parker: "Personally I find him the only portrayer of Sexton Blake."

I think I am safe in saying that every Blake fan echoes those sentiments one hundred per cent.

However, not every reader of the Union Jack shared Mr. Day's feelings back in the good old days, for in 1933 the editor printed the following letter from Mrs. P. Cleeland, Park Close, Meadow Way, Wealdstone.

"I don't know how you take criticism from readers and I hope you will pardon my plain speaking. I admire the reading matter in your book immensely, but the illustrations are done as though they are of no importance - the last lot ('The Squealer' illustrated by E. R. Parker) in fact are rotten. Blake is a virile, not unhandsome man. The sketches destroy that idea by always showing the disgusted reader a dressed-up skeleton."

This surely must be a rare adverse criticism of Mr. Parker's work. Unfortunately it is not known if anyone rallied to his defence because regrettably, this letter appeared in U.J. 1525 and 6 weeks later saw the demise of this fine old paper.

I don't think anyone can say that Blake wasn't depicted as the authors described him. Blake was in his 40's and so he was shown to

have hair receding from the temples. In "Disgrace" (U.J. 1399) Gwyn Evans wrote, "his greying hair was brushed smoothly back" and referred to his handsome clear-cut features. Blake was also referred to as tall and lean by other writers, so I feel Mr. Parker did an admirable job.

Blakiana readers are invited to express their opinions on Mrs. Cleeland's letter - did the artist do right by Sexton Blake or not?

As a matter of interest, the first story to be illustrated by Eric Parker was "Eyes in the Dark" (U.J. 995) way back in 1922. My U.J. collection does not extend that far back so I must call on some help from Josie to add a footnote to this piece. How did this first drawing of his compare with those done in later years. It is generally recognised that changes in an artist's work, even when drawing the same character, take place over the years. You only have to see a very early Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck cartoon to see what I mean. Mickey's nose and Donald's bill became much shorter in later years. I realize of course that Walt Disney did not draw every movie cartoon after he became established but I am certain the physical changes that took place in his characters originated with him.

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The author of the foregoing article is quite correct about the date of the first Eric Parker drawings in the Union Jack. I have the original copy in front of me at the moment of writing. It is the Union Jack No. 995, dated 4 November, 1922. The inside illustrations are by Mr. Parker, but I cannot say for sure whether the cover illustration is as there is no signature and the drawing is of a man's head only.

In my opinion Mr. Parker's drawings improved with the years up until the early 1930's after which I feel they were mere outline drawings. As far as I am concerned his best period was the middle of the 1920's, 1926 in particular, when the famous Sexton Blake bust was modelled on Mr. Parker's drawing of him. An excellent portrait was shown on the cover of the Union Jack which contained the story of the bust. It is No. 1169, dated 6 March, 1926. However, I feel sure that Mr. Parker did an admirable job for the Union Jack and was one of the most popular artists.

JOSIE PACKMAN

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Join us in the first decade of the Century - a time when Greyfriars was young.

## THE ONLY WAY

Rupert Valence laughed softly to himself as he plunged into the dark shadows of the wood. He had left the school quietly after the fellows had returned to bed. It did not cross his mind that Wingate might look into his study before retiring again; but perhaps in any case he would have risked it. Angry dislike had taken the place of whatever friendship he had ever felt for Courtney. Though it was very probable that, in case of need, the weak-natured fellow would turn to his old friend for help when that served his turn.

It was very dark and still in the woods. The moon was rising over the Black Pike, but in the deep woods there penetrated few of the silvery rays. But Valence knew his way well; he had roamed the woods many times at night, sometimes in company with some poaching vagabond whose acquaintance he had picked up at the Cross Keys. The cunning of the poacher seemed to be a gift with Valence, and he had had wonderful luck in avoiding keepers and discovery. He had begun his nocturnal pursuits for amusement, chiefly because such things were forbidden; but he had found a way of turning his poaching to profit. Rascally dealers, who had business with the poachers of Friardale, had come into contact with Valence, and he had found it possible to do business with them. Valence's way of life made him always hard up. He was not likely to win much money in his little games with Mr. Cobb & Co., at the Cross Keys, and he was glad to find a new way of making money. From that time, he followed his old pursuits with new zest.

For an hour or more Valence was very busy in the coverts belonging to Sir Hilton Popper. Valence listened keenly for keepers as he worked, but his long success had made him contemptuous of them, and he did not fear discovery. Excepting for his head keeper, old Parker, his old soldier servant who had been with him in

India, Sir Hilton was thoroughly hated by every man in his employ. He even suspected some of his keepers of acting in collusion with poachers, and perhaps he was right.

A sudden sound made Valence start. Something crackled under a foot. He turned and ran.

He had done enough - his bag, and his pockets, were stuffed with plunder. He plunged into the deep shadows of the wood again, making his way with quick footsteps towards the lane that led into the Friardale road.

The moon was clear of the summit of the Black Pike now and there was a faint light in the wood. Valence had almost reached the border of the lane when he heard an exclamation behind him.

"Stop him!"

The Greyfriars fellow's heart almost stood still. He bounded away, two or three partridges dropping from his hold as he did so.

There was a shout.

"Stop, you young scoundrel, or I'll shoot!"

Valence ran on. Such a threat might have frightened a village lad into surrender, but the Sixth-former was not so simple. He knew that the keeper dared not shoot at him.

Bang!

The report of the gun echoed through the woods, but Valence ran on undisturbed. He knew that the gun had been fired into the branches overhead to scare him.

He had been compelled to leave the direction he had been following, and to plunge deeper into the wood to avoid the keepers. But he knew where he was, and that he could find his way back easily when the coast was clear.

He listened, crouching in the shadows of a mass of bushes. His heart rapped and rapped as he listened. He cursed his folly as he lay palpitating. Courtney had been right. Not that he felt any

kindness towards Courtney even at that moment. He felt only a savage anger towards everything and everybody.

A footstep in the thickets.

Valence trembled. He did not move.

Any movement now would be fatal.

Two men came slowly by in the dim light, and stopped, within a few feet of him.

"He came this way." It was the voice of Parker, the head keeper on Sir Hilton Popper's estate.

"More likely towards the lane, sir."

"No, I headed him off from the lane."

Parker peered round in the thickets, his gun in the hollow of his arm.

"It was a schoolboy plain enough, Hopkins," he said. "It was one of the Greyfriars boys."

"I'd swear to that, sir."

"Well, we shall know him then," said Parker. "He must still be in the wood. I will wait here and watch, Hopkins, while you beat the thickets for him."

"Very good, sir."

The boy hidden within a few feet of them shivered. Hopkins moved off into the bushes, almost within reach of Valence. Parker took out his pipe and lighted it.

Valence lay and shivered. He could not creep away without some rustle of the thickets and that would bring Parker upon him with a bound. What was he to do? If he got away, and was seen, it would be as fatal as having been captured. If the keepers could identify him at Greyfriars, he was ruined.

But he had not quite lost his nerve yet. He felt cautiously in his pocket, and drew out a lump of charcoal. He had learned that trick from the poachers in Friardale, to black his face in case of necessity to prevent recognition. With a hasty, trembling hand he rubbed the charcoal over his face, in a few moments blotting out the white skin. In the dim light of the wood, no one could possibly have recognised him now.

He waited trembling.

There was a sudden exclamation. A footstep - a crashing of the bushes, and Valence leaped to his feet as the keeper rushed upon him.

"I've got him, sir."

Valence dodged desperately, and bounded away, and ran straight into the arms of the head keeper. Parker grasped him tightly.

The Greyfriars fellow struggled, and the powerful grasp close upon him like the clutch of a vice.

"Give in, you young fool," said the head-keeper.

"Let me go!" shrieked Valence.

Parker laughed grimly.

"Take one of his arms, Hopkins."

"I've got him, sir."

"Turn out his pockets."

The two keepers stared at the sight of Valence's plunder. The Sixth-former of Greyfriars was trembling in every limb.

"My word!" said Parker with a whistle. "You've done a good night's work, but it will turn out a bad night's work for you, I think. You belong to Greyfriars, eh?"

"Yes," stammered Valence.

"Face blacked, eh?" said Parker, peering at him. "Good old poacher game - you're not new to his, my fine fellow, and the magistrates will know it, too."

"The - the magistrates!"

"Yes, you'll go before the magistrates to-morrow," said Parker. "You'll spend the rest of to-night locked up in a room, my son. How do you like the idea? You'd better have stayed in bed at school don't you think?"

Valence gave a cry of terror.

"I must go back. Let me go. I'll give you a sovereign."

Parker chuckled.

"It's worth a ten-pound note to me to catch the poacher, besides dooty," he replied. "I'll soon get that washed off your face, and see your chivvy. What's your name, you young blackguard?"

Valence did not reply. He was so overcome with terror at the prospect before him that he could not speak, even to tell a lie.

Parker shook him roughly by the shoulder.

"What's your name?"

"I - I --"

"Tell me your name, you young rascal."

"C - Courtney," stammered Valence.

"Arthur Courtney."

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Valence had given the first name that came into his mind. His only object at the moment was to prevent his own name becoming known. He had not been recognised; he could not be recognised till the black was washed off his face. If he could only escape before the keepers could get him to the house, it would be all right yet. He must escape. To be locked up in a room or a stable all night, taken before a magistrate in the morning - perhaps sent to a reformatory - at all events certainly expelled from Greyfriars -- as he thought of it, he almost fainted.

Force, of course, was useless against the keepers - either of them could have handled him like a child. But Valence had the cunning of a weak nature - and he knew that only cunning could serve him now.

He faltered in his walk and leaned heavily upon Parker's arm. The head-keeper looked down at him contemptuously.

"Buck up!" he said.

"I feel faint," moaned Valence. "I think I'm fainting! Oh!"

He reeled and hung on to Parker. The keeper, with a snort of contempt, lowered him into the grass. Hopkins looked down on him.

"He ain't got the nerve for this game," he remarked. "He's gone right off, sir."

"Get some water in your cap, Hopkins. I'm not going to carry the young brute to the house - more'n half a mile."

Hopkins disappeared into the thickets, towards the stream that flowed in the wood. The head-keeper bent over Valence and loosened his tie and collar. Valence's eyes were closed, his face set, his lips rigid. The head-keeper never dreamed of

treachery. But as he loosened Valence's collar, all of a sudden the boy's eyes opened, and his two fists came up, clenched and hard, crashing into the keeper's face.

It was a terrific blow, with both fists, with all the force Valence could throw into it. Parker gave a gasping cry, and fell back, and rolled on the grass.

Valence leaped to his feet, and ran. "Stop! Hopkins! After him! Oh, the young villain!"

He dashed in pursuit, but his head was reeling from the blow, and he stumbled over a root and crashed to the ground. Hopkins dashed up, with his cap full of water.

"Wot's happened, sir?"

The head-keeper groaned.

"He got away. He was only shamming. Oh, he's made my head spin."

The two keepers ran in the direction of the lane. Valence was clear away by this time, but they still hoped to cut him off from Greyfriars. But the Sixth-former was not likely to risk that.

Valence was making a detour of a mile or more to get out of Friardale Wood, careless of how long it took him. The keepers searched for him, up and down, for an hour or more, and then gave up the chase.

"We've got his name," said Parker savagely. "Sir Hilton will see that he's brought to book, that's one comfort."

And Valence, at the same moment, had reached the school at last.

(ANOTHER TRIP INTO THE DISTANT PAST — NEXT MONTH)

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# NELSON LEE COLUMN

RIVER HOUSE or HIGHCLIFFE?

by R. J. Godsave

"I am quite positive that Wellborne knows nothing of this matter," went on Mr. Wragg. "He is incapable of such - Ah, what is this? Somebody's handkerchief, I believe."

The above extract is from O.S. 170, "The Coming of the Serpent" which is the first of the series introducing Reginald Pitt.

Being intercepted at Bannington Junction station by Wellborne & Co. - known as the Honourables - of the River House School, Pitt is allowed to be under the impression that the three River House boys are St. Frank's scholars who were meeting him as a friendly gesture and would accompany him to St. Frank's. Arriving at the River House School in a hired trap, and carefully avoiding the big notice board they enter the school, which was fairly deserted as it was a half-holiday, the Honourables leave Pitt in Mr. Wragg's study to await his return.

At first Pitt fully believes what Wellborne & Co. tell him, but being a quick-witted boy soon realises that something is wrong. Left alone in the under-master's study Pitt deliberately wrecks the study, leaving Wellborne's handkerchief on the scene in order that Wellborne gets the blame.

If the name of Ponsonby is substituted for Wellborne, and that of Mobbs for Wragg, then one could, from the extract, well be reading of Charles Hamilton's Highcliffe School.

In both cases the under-master adopts a fawning attitude to those scholars from titled families. Both Dr. Hogge and Dr. Voysey are rather on the elderly side and do not take sufficient interest to correct this attitude. Such a state of affairs could only exist in a comparatively small school.

It would be difficult to imagine either Mr. Crowell or Mr. Quelch treating titled scholars differently from other juniors.

Prior to the last war, titles did command a certain respect, whereas to-day honours are handed out wholesale.

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Similarity between the writings of Hamilton and Brooks is so rare as to be noticeable when it does occur.

# # #

DOUBLE FOR YOUR MONEY

by William Lister

For some reason, known only to myself, I enjoy those stories in which the characters usually featured in another paper and the creation of another author are brought together in one story, (under one roof, so to speak) the writer blending the fictional creation of others with his own characters.

I came across this theme often in my reading of the old papers and other reading matter that comes my way.

On occasions, mostly at Yuletide, our friend Sexton Blake was surrounded by friends (and enemies) enjoying a Christmas truce when the police, detectives and star-crooks mingled together happily, all in one story.

Being a St. Frank's enthusiast, it was in this setting I enjoyed my favourite tales all the more. "Handforth at St. Jim's" by E. S. Brooks, Schoolboys Own Library No. 224, plunged my star St. Frank's schoolboy into the midst of the St. Jim's crowd - dear old Handforth - he shone forth all the brighter in his unusual setting. I was never a St. Jim's fan, but put Handforth among them and things were worth while.

I suppose a writer has to use reasonable care when embarking on tales of this nature. To take and use characters created by another man, you must indeed go by the book. If the types used were cast wrongly you would offend regular readers and also the original author.

If I read a tale featuring Handforth or Ezra Quirke involved in another setting and not portraying the character as created by Edwy Searles Brooks, I would be livid, sir, absolutely livid! I want my Handforth and my Ezra Quirke in the true character setting created by Brooks. In "Handforth at St. Jim's" I noticed the care with which E.S.B. tackled this theme. While he pressed heavily on his own creation, the supporting schoolboy characters created by another writer retained their original image.

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"St. Frank's in London" by E. S. Brooks, Monster Library No. 8, contains a brief encounter between Sexton Blake and Tinker and Nelson Lee and Nipper. I must confess that as I read the incident I thought Brooks might be skating on thin ice, in relation to readers and their favourite characters.

While in London, Nelson Lee became involved in a spot of trouble. So much so, that Nipper, taking advantage of being on the doorstep of Baker Street, called on Sexton Blake and Tinker and put his fears regarding Nelson Lee before them, asking their help.

Having read thus far I began to think, now what! If Sexton Blake does have to come to the rescue of Nelson Lee it will put him one up on his counter-part, but if he does not rescue him it will put him one down.

However, Brooks steers the situation through by making Sexton Blake too much of a gentleman not to have complete faith in his detective friend, even to think that Nelson Lee cannot get out of own difficulties without the help of Baker Street. But in order to qualm the fears of Nipper, he offers his help. As Blake surmised, Nelson Lee did not need help; in fact, he was not even missing, he was merely moving around in disguise waiting to pounce on his prey. Nipper had actually spoken to this character without penetrating the disguise - but you can't deceive Sexton Blake.

So the incident worked itself out, both detectives remaining equal masters of crime and detection.

Another character that kept turning up from time-to-time out of his own setting, was Waldo, the Wonder-man, and never was he more welcome, so far as I was concerned, then when he visited St. Frank's.

I said at the commencement of this article that for some reason, known only to myself, I enjoy these stories where fictional characters are brought together, "doubled up" one could say. Perhaps it's because I'm a Yorkshireman and by this means I get double for my money.

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THIS IS THE SILVER JUBILEE YEAR OF SPCD

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DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 89 — Goldhawk Book No. 1 — "Tom Merry's Secret"

Charles Hamilton, to do him justice, was never ashamed of the fact that he was a writer whose work was intended for boys' papers, instead of being a "respectable" author of hard-back stories. When the opportunity came in the Spring of 1952, for the publication of paper-back stories at 1/6d each, rather like the old Schoolboys' Owns, he was immensely pleased at the prospect of reaching a wider public. Unfortunately, the venture met with rather less success than it deserved, probably because Cassells wouldn't agree to Greyfriars' stories appearing, and so St. Jim's was featured instead.

During the war and for some time afterwards, paper was in short supply, and publishers were rationed to a proportion of what they had actually used in 1939. New publishers, however, were free to start in business and apply for a quota of paper, which was usually generously granted, much to the chagrin of older publishers. This probably accounts for the fact that many of Charles Hamilton's post-war publishers were of the mushroom variety (like Mandevilles, who went out of business leaving unpaid debts), and Hamilton's, who published the Goldhawk books (named after the Goldhawk Road). They had an office in the entrance to a block of flats in Shepherds Bush, and a rather inefficient method of keeping records: I have vivid memories of being repeatedly dunned by them for books that I had paid for in advance.

The publications were, however, good value for money. "Tom Merry's Secret" would have fitted in a single number of the Gem, and described a feud with Knox which led to the Terrible Three attacking Kildare by mistake in the dark. Trimble got to know, and the usual blackmail was attempted. Reading it again now, after such a long time, I am inclined to agree with Gerry Allison's remark in the C.D. review that it was a jolly romp. Some of the later Goldhawk books attempted more serious themes, but the subtleties of characters like Cardew were beyond the author's ability to portray after the war. I raised this very point when I went to visit Charles Hamilton in October that year, and he confessed to me that when he re-read some of his post-war stories, Cardew seemed to have turned into a scoundrel, bereft of all

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the whimsical touches that endeared him to readers of the Gem in days gone by. This was all the more a pity because St. Jim's weathered the post-war years far truer to its original state than Greyfriars did.

There is an interesting postscript to this saga of the eleven Goldhawk books. The publishers relied very heavily on the C.D. for publicity and advice, with the result that Herbert Leckenby and Len Packman persuaded them to drop the artist they were using, and employ Macdonald instead. Oddly enough, Chapman got the job, and the last seven books had his unmistakable stamp upon them. But nothing could save the series, and they suffered the indignity of being remaindered by Woolworths at half price later in the year.

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TOP PRICES paid for complete Collections or surplus items.

VERY GOOD stocks available at present of most old boys papers, hardbacks and annuals. This includes Hamiltonia, Lees all series, Blakiana, etc., and mags. previously listed. Try me!

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIALNo. 159. SUCH MEN ARE DANGEROUS!

All sorts of things have been said about Truth by all sorts of people. A cynic - I forget whom - said that truth doesn't hurt unless it ought to. At best, such a claim was only a half-truth.

Much nearer the mark was Pope who asserted that "Blunt truths cause more mischief than nice falsehoods do." Those of us who are getting a little long in the tooth - and don't mind facing the truth - will recall a song which was a hit when we were much, much younger - "Those Little White Lies."

Children often tell lies. But they can sometimes be more embarrassing when they speak the truth. Richmal Crompton delighted us on countless occasions with her shrewd comments on child psychology.

One of Miss Crompton's delicious toffee-nosed ladies had had her portrait painted. She showed the portrait to William.

"Don't you think it's like me, dear boy?" gushed the lady.

After a moment's inspection, William said: "It's not so fat as what you are!"

The Hamilton moral code was laid down early in the century. It varied but little as the years passed by. The heroes were meticulously truthful. But invariably the cads were liars and the liars were cads.

The code was a trifle too rigid, as, from the lofty heights of adulthood, we can well realise. There is absolutely nothing far-fetched in boys being truthful, as any schoolmaster knows. Some are naturally truthful; some, in fact, are obstinately truthful; and it is, perhaps, unlikely that they weigh up any moral pros and cons in their truthfulness. It just comes naturally to them. Others, and they are in the majority, will lie to get out of a scrape. Some will do it without turning a hair; others will lie yet give themselves away as they do it. And just a few are compulsive liars, and, as such, can do much harm. Such men are dangerous.

In the blue Gem there was a story entitled "Shoulder to Shoulder." It was a good plot, and largely well-written. But a chapter or two, in which the heroes told lies, embarrassed the reader - not because the heroes lied, but because they were stricken with such pangs of remorse

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because they had lied.

I did not shrink too much from "It was a lie - the first that Tom Merry of St. Jim's had ever told." As I said earlier, some boys just do not lie. But that Tom Merry should be stricken and heart-broken in the knowledge of his guilt - and that Gussy should insist on lying too so that Tom should not bear the burden alone - I found quite embarrassing and hard to swallow. Martin Clifford had his heroes skating on the thin ice of priggishness. This was not quite unknown in the Hamilton story, but it was very, very rare, and that, in itself, is remarkable when one accepts how very high was the moral code of his writing.

I may add that this appraisal of "Shoulder to Shoulder" is not arrived at from the adult's smug pinnacle, or from an age when moral values have changed and when a minority glory in their wickedness and would love to see the rest of the nation go the same way. I first read "Shoulder to Shoulder" as a child, and had the same impression of it then.

An earlier blue Gem, "The Tell-Tale," was a first-class story of Mellish making trouble by telling lies. And much, much later, we had Trimble making trouble by telling the truth.

Trimble's pseudo-reform, when he became "Too Good For St. Jim's," was related in two stories in the twenties, and, though they featured Trimble who was always my pet aversion, these two stories are certainly among the best which the Gem ever presented. They contain admirable character work, and are a delight.

Later on, Hamilton transferred the plot to Greyfriars, with Bunter playing the Trimble part. For some reason, the Greyfriars version was not nearly so entertaining or so convincing as the St. Jim's one. Of course, subsequent uses of a single plot were seldom, if ever, as good as the original. Many times I saw the same phenomenon in films. Re-made films were never as good as the original. Examples of this which come to my mind are "Mutiny on the Bounty" and "Ben Hur."

But there was another reason why the St. Jim's version of the truthful trouble-maker was so much more successful than the same plot transferred to Greyfriars.

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It has always been accepted that Baggy Trimble was the St. Jim's version of Bunter, created to cash in on the success of the Greyfriars fat boy. And, of course, that is correct. Nevertheless, Trimble, created to be a carbon-copy of Bunter, was different in a subtle way, and it was that subtle difference which made Trimble a roaring success as a slimy prig in a way that Bunter could never be.

If Charles Hamilton had only stressed the slimy, sly streak in Trimble's character, and had forgotten the carbon-copy purpose, the author might well have had an equally successful character on the St. Jim's stage.

Bunter was the most inconsistently handled of any Hamilton creation. By the strangest trick of chance, his two lovable periods were illustrated by Arthur Clarke and Leonard Shields respectively. The repulsive Bunter of the 1915-1925 era was echoed to some extent in the Magnet of 1936 onwards, and during both these periods he was illustrated by Charles Chapman.

But Bunter, whether lovable, fatuous, cowardly, or criminally-inclined was at no time credible as a priggish trouble-maker. Trimble was. And the period when Trimble, with unctuous oiliness, - told the truth, was his finest hour - or, should I say, his finest fortnight?

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A TIP FROM THE STATES. David Hobbs writes from Seattle, wondering whether we had noticed an intriguing advertisement in the March issue of The Cricketer. Here it is:

Autographed Bat (B. Warsop) 1930 Australian visiting team.  
Competition award in the "Magnet" of that year. Offers  
invited. Box 163.

We had that issue of Cricketer, but we are ashamed to admit that we missed the ad.

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THE MUSEUM PRESS: The new edition of the Housemaster's Homecoming, by Martin Clifford is now ready for despatch price 63p including post and packing. Send your order with remittance to The Museum Press, 30 Tonbridge Road, Maidstone, Kent.

ALSO AVAILABLE: In the same familiar green hessian cover The Boy Without A Name and Rivals and Chums in one volume price £1.00 including post and packing.

A FEW COPIES LEFT: No collector should be without a copy of The Billy Bunter Picture Book price 75p including post and packing. These editions are limited and they do become exhausted, so do not leave it too long!

# NEWS OF THE CLUBS

COPY OF LETTER FROM P. G. WODEHOUSE

PRESIDENT O.B.B.C. NORTHERN SECTION

Remsenburg,  
New York.

May 1st, 1971.

Dear Mr. Allison,

I am thrilled to hear of the coming-of-age celebrations, and I wish I could be there to be the life and soul of them. But I am not much of a traveller these days, being within six months of my ninetieth birthday.

Give all the lads my love, and tell them that I shall be with them in spirit. Good luck to you all!

Your proud President,  
P. G. WODEHOUSE

P.S. Touch of arthritis in the hands, but otherwise terrifically fit.  
(Sounds a bit like Hurree Jamset Ram Singh!)

☉ ○ ☉

## SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

It was a particularly happy occasion when members gathered at their usual comfortable rendezvous Cahill's Restaurant, Castlereagh Street, Sydney, for their first meeting of 1971 on Tuesday, 27th April at 6 p.m. Reason for this was the presence of Mr. Harry Matthews and his wife Doris on a visit from their home in Adelaide, South Australia. The secretary had corresponded with Mr. and Mrs. Matthews for quite a few years and had been most happy to be able to entertain them to dinner when they first arrived in Sydney on this holiday.

As Harry, an expatriate of the Channel Islands, knew the folk in the hobby overseas by name and through correspondence, he had familiar territory to explore and was made most welcome by the other

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members. We also had the pleasure of welcoming a new member, Mr. Ron Brockman of Kingsgrove, a very keen Magnet fan, who was extremely pleased to have made contact with fellow enthusiasts.

Club chairman Syd Smyth was unable to attend as he was enjoying the delights of a tropical holiday in Queensland at Surfer's Paradise. But he was with us in spirit as he sent a telegram saying "Best Wishes For Good Meeting - sorry to miss it - Regards to All."

Several interesting newspaper cuttings received from Ron Hodgson were passed around - the first one "Greyfriars Entry Exam" was quite amusing but the second one "Bringing back the birch call by Vicar" was on a more serious note and gave food for thought as this problem is just as serious here in Australia.

The remainder of the evening passed in general discussion with our guests on their particular interests and old memories were pleasantly revived as we put Ron Brockman in the picture concerning the origin and history of the hobby and the O.B.B.C. as well as our own club - with grateful acknowledgement to our good friend Eric Fayne for carrying on the work of our founder, dear old Herbert Leckenby, with such unflagging devotion and unequalled ability.

Farewells were said regretfully about 8.30 p.m. after a very satisfying dinner had been enjoyed by all. Next meeting will be held on 29th June (Tuesday), 6 p.m., at same rendezvous.

B. PATE

Hon. Secretary.



MIDLAND

Meeting held on 27th April, 1971.

Our April meeting attracted nine members and there were apologies from six other members.

After the minutes had been confirmed the final arrangements were made for a visit to Sutton Park, and Mrs. Wright's home in Sutton Coldfield on 9th May.

Then the anniversary number and the collectors' item were passed round. The former was N.L.L. (O.S.) 151, dated 27/4/1918,

and the latter B.F.L. (1st S.) 403, Scorned By The School.

Now followed a talk on Values by Ian Bennett, occasioned by comments in the S.P.C.D.; and the other item was a quiz kindly supplied by Gerald Allison of the Northern Club. The winner of this quiz was Norman Gregory.

During the interval, the members stood in silence for a minute to the memory of Jack Wood who died recently.

The next meeting will be on 29th June, from 7 p.m. onwards.

TOM PORTER

Correspondent.



NORTHERN

Saturday, 8th May, 1971.

A red letter day as this was the 21st Anniversary of the Northern Section and by 5 p.m. the Club Room was a hive of activity and chatter, and by 5.30 p.m. all twenty-four of us were sitting down to a study tea.

Following the feed, the Secretary read out a congratulatory note from our President and a Greetings Telegram from our friends of the London Club. The toast to "The Club" was given by one of our distinguished visitors, Tom Porter, and the toast to "The Guests" was given by Geoffrey Goode. The replies were given by Geoffrey Wilde and another of our guests for the evening, Bob Blythe. Our third guest being Don Webster.

Usual library business followed the clearing of the tables and we then settled down to the evening's programme.

The first item was "21 Happy Years" - a potted history of highlights from 21 glorious years of the Club, read by Geoffrey Goode. This was written by Gerry Allison who was, unfortunately, unable to be with us on this happy occasion.

The next item should really have taken place in the boxroom, being "Pontoon" by Jack Allison. Instead of playing with cash we had hobby and general knowledge questions and the Greyfriars team who

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had three really good hands were victorious by 10 points to 8 over St. Frank's. St. Jim's and Rookwood being also rans.

Bob Blythe then took the floor and gave us some transparencies of his visit to the home of Edwy Searles Brooks, and Bob also had on display a large number of original manuscripts which were much in demand. Myra Allison also provided us with slides showing happy memories of holidays had by Gerry and herself with other hobbyists.

Starting before and continuing through the supper interval, Geoffrey Wilde gave a most humorous reading from "Uncle Fred Flits By" - one of the short stories by the President of the Northern Section, P. G. Wodehouse.

Don Webster gave a short closing speech to send us all on our various ways at about 9.15 p.m.

RON HODGSON

Hon. Secretary.



### LONDON

A memorable May meeting at the home of Blakiana, when twenty members assembled to enjoy the hospitality of the hostess, Josie Packman. Available were copies of the second impression of the Sexton Blake catalogue plus those of the supplement, the latter to go with members first catalogue issue.

In the absence of the chairman, Brian Doyle, and the late arrival of Don Webster, Ben Whiter took over in the chair. After the usual formalities, the president of the club, John Wernham, gave a good account of the Museum Press' publications. One of the most popular issues was the Hamilton Handbook. There is the possibility of a new impression of this in the near future. For publications still available, kindly consult the advertisement columns of the C.D.

The Margate luncheon party was the subject for discussion and names were taken of those who intend to participate.

By now Don Webster had appeared on the scene and he spoke of Bob Blythe, Tom Porter and himself at the Northern Club's 21st anniversary meeting.

However, it was the ladies who provided the entertainment side of the meeting. Mary Cadogan gave a sterling paper of Jemima Carstairs, which was thoroughly enjoyed by all present. Millicent rendered a good paper on the first hard back school story book that she read. This was the immortal "The Fifth Form of St. Dominic's."

Winifred Morss' Underground Railway Station Quiz resulted in Messrs. Webster, Bush and Godsave being the one, two, three. Josie Packman read a reply by Bill Lofts re Michael Storm.

Interesting conversations and discussions were indulged in and the time passed all too quickly. So with lifts home arranged, Haydyn Salmon from Ipswich being seen off at Bethnal Green station, the company dispersed.

Next meeting at Greyfriars, Hollybush Ride, Wokingham, Berks. Hosts Eric and Betty Lawrence. Phone CROWTHORNE 4626, kindly advise.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

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## *The Postman Called*

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

H. P. CLARK (Nuneaton): I would like to take up Roger M. Jenkins on the last sentence of his article "Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School" (May C.C.) - "... it is possible to wish that the Amalgamated Press had never repented of their decision" (not to allow Charles Hamilton to write Greyfriars stories).

Much as I admire the expert knowledge of Mr. Jenkins on Hamiltonia, I feel he is being rather less than fair to the Bunter books.

True, Charles Hamilton wrote these books at an age when most people like to take it easy, and it should be remembered that he was limited to a small canvas - a Bunter book, I should imagine, is equal in length to rather less than two Magnet stories. Yet they were splendid stories - rather more polished, I think, than some of the Magnet yarns - and far and away better in quality than a great deal of present day juvenile literature.

But the important point is this. They enabled another generation of youngsters to enjoy Greyfriars. Would Mr. Jenkins deny these

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youngsters the pleasures we ourselves enjoyed in our youth?

Without the Bunter books the world would have been the poorer, and it is probable that Frank Richards would not have achieved the fame he so richly deserved.

BILL LOFTS (London): I couldn't agree more with Roger Jenkins on his piece about the post-war Bunter books. As an old reader of the Magnet, they left me cold, and in my opinion the Master had lost his magic touch. True, that maybe these publications were meant for a new generation of boys and girls, but it is a pity that they never had a chance to read Charles Hamilton in his prime. A fact not generally known, and which rebounded on the Amalgamated Press, was when they eventually relented, and let Frank Richards write about Bunter - they gave permission with no financial strings whatsoever. They thought it would simply be a one-shot effort with poor sales Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School. The Bunter books of course run to 36 issues - and I remember a high executive of Fleetway complaining bitterly to me of the bad lapse of the controlling editor who allowed this to happen.

M. MILSTON (London): Once again post-war Hamiltonia has been ruthlessly attacked even to the extent of wishing it had never existed. (Roger M. Jenkins - Do You Remember?) One of the criticisms was that all the stories revolved around Bunter. This is just not true.

I would like to say that if Hamilton had not continued after the war, I would never have experienced the countless hours of pleasure that I have and I certainly wouldn't have been writing this letter now.

H. MACHIN (Preston): How heartily I agree with the sentiments expressed in all your editorials. What a world we live in today! Rubbishy books, sport gone money-mad, legalized murder of the innocent, music and entertainment at its ugliest, life lived among the ceaseless roar of speeding traffic - all this is progress.

J. RANDOLPH COX (U.S.A.): Once again, C.D. arrives and brings a bit of sanity into my life. I hope the publication and mailing schedule will allow a full quota of issues to come out this year. I appreciate the atmosphere of enjoyment that I sense in C.D. . . . sometimes a hobby becomes too serious and the fun is lost (I've sensed that in some collectors over here). Our Hobby is still grand fun and (for me

especially) a doorway into a fascinating world.

MAURICE KUTNER (Clapton): I have been very interested in the recent articles on the early days of the cinema. In the peaceful year before the first world war I patronised a local cinema (a converted shop), entrance fee one halfpenny. Children sat right in front on hard, and seemingly high, forms, which plagued us with the exquisite pains of "pins and needles," while adults, price one penny, stood at the back. As the "hall" was too short for the projectionist to work from the rear, the film was projected in reverse on to the back of the "silver screen" from an open window across an empty space or yard. As the path to the toilets led to the yard behind the screen young show-offs congregated in a small group behind the screen and added to their educational attainments by reading aloud the sub-titles backwards. As some of the children in front of the screen also read the sub-titles aloud, this was a great help to those young 'uns who couldn't read and, I suspect, of some help to a few adults too. There was no music provided by the management, but the younger section of the audience filled that vacuum with a sufficiency of noise.

Around the corner, in the Whitechapel Road, was a "de-luxe" cinema. Children one penny, adults twopence, seats for all, and a young lady provided the most beautiful, melodic music on a real piano!

Those were the days when the screen was periodically hosed down in compliance with the then existing fire and safety regulations, sometimes giving the front row, in the course of these operations, a bit of a shower bath!

(Editorial Comment: Mr. Kutner's memories go very much further back than my own. His comments on the early Bioscope are fascinating. I wonder how many readers have come across "Gone to the Pictures," a novel by Hilda Lewis, published by Hutchinson in 1946. It is an entertaining story, but its main delight is its setting in England in the period of the cinema to which Mr. Kutner refers. It is well worth seeking by anyone who has interest in the cinema's early days.)

DENIS GIFFORD (Catford): I have written another long piece on the history of the coloured comic in England for The Saturday Book, that favourite adult "annual," again with coloured reproductions, and I have two purely nostalgic pieces written from a personal point of view appearing in Mayfair shortly, one on the pre-war penny comics, the other on Thomson's tuppenny bloods. What with a piece on my work in

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the Marvelman series of pseudo-American comics of the fifties coming up in Rex, and a shortish piece in The Listener last January about Radio Fun, I have been pretty busy! Now I am embarking upon two books about comics, one on the comic strip and its entire evolution and art, the other on children's comic papers. And here comes the commercial!! I have found it increasingly hard, since returning to collecting, to obtain copies of the old comics. I'm hoping that an appeal in your letter columns might turn up something. Really, I am after almost anything from the year dot to around 1942 - from Slopers, Scraps, and the Victorian picture papers, up through Cuts and Puck and Merry and Bright (especially the 'music hall' series), through Sunday Fairy and Bo-Peep, to Film Fun, Film Picture Stories, Knockout, Beano, Magic and the rest. There are too many to specify, but, of course, I'm always after Number Ones or, indeed, one specimen of any title, British or American. If you've anything to sell, give, loan, hire, or whatever in the comic strip line, please get in touch, chaps - this is for serious research, and the end result will be a definitive, detailed history of English humour, with handsome acknowledgements to all who help, and maybe even a copy at a hefty discount!

(Mr. Gifford's address is 6 Westdown Road, Catford, S.E.6, if anyone can help him. - ED.)

JOE CONROY (Liverpool): I most heartily disagree with Roger Jenkins' closing comment in his article in May. If it had not been for the Bunter books I would never have heard of C.D., the Annuals, or many friends in the hobby.

One has to agree with Mr. Jenkins to a certain degree that a lot of repetition of the old Magnet tales took place, but I think that some of these stories were very good.

One must point out that even in the Magnet, at approximately five year intervals, stories did tend to repetition with the new intake of readers.

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 Next month we shall review the Supplement to the Sexton Blake Catalogue, now available at 17½p plus 5p postage from Mrs. J. Packman, 22 Archdale Road, London, S.E. 22.

Eric Fayne continues the series concerning some of the cinemas and theatres he knew long ago.

### THE HOLBORN EMPIRE

The first twelve years of this century saw the great Music Hall boom. In Victorian times, such places of entertainment were always considered to be the pastime of the lower classes - a little naughty and a little scruffy.

Now men like Sir Oswald Stoll set about making the music halls respectable. To woo the middle classes, beautiful and elaborate new theatres were built: lushly seated and carpeted, with the emphasis on entertainment rather than on the drink, the sale of which had been the mainstay of the Victorian Halls.

Up till the outbreak of war in 1939, the three main circuits in England were the Stoll, the Moss Empires, and the Syndicate Halls. This week I propose to look at just one or two of the Moss Empires.

The chief of them was, of course, the London Palladium. But running it very close - and, indeed, my favourite of all the music halls I ever visited - was the Holborn Empire. Smaller than the Palladium, Holborn Empire was nevertheless on the large side, yet always cosy and intimate. It had the real atmosphere of the old music hall at its best, allied with luxury and comfort. Most twice-nightly houses offered entertainment lasting 1½ hours at the outside. But the Holborn show never ran for less than two hours. And there was a large resident orchestra, though the name of the band-leader, who was in charge for many years, eludes me now.

Front stalls at the Holborn Empire were 3/-. But booked in advance they were 3/6. I found that by booking I would often get a seat on the side of the third or fourth row. Yet much better seats in the 5th or 6th row, right in the centre, were vacant. Often I vacated my booked seat, to move to the centre only a row or so further back. The secret was that, at the first performance, they only booked the front four rows of stalls. Providing one arrived early, a much better seat, central, was normally available without the increased cost of booking.

Early in the war, a resident revue was running at the Holborn - I fancy it starred Ben Lyon and Bebe Daniels, though I may be wrong in this. But one night, during the blitz, an incendiary bomb put an end to the finest music hall in London.

Another splendid Moss Empire was Finsbury Park Empire. I remember going to this lovely house about 1930, or maybe a little earlier. It was the time when the talking pictures had finished off repertory theatres and had hit all music halls very hard. The touring revue I saw at Finsbury Park was "The Reply to The Talkies." The giant chorus of Tiller Girls sang "Here's our reply to the talkies - we're alive - we're alive!" It was a superb production, and played to packed houses all over the country.

New Cross Empire was a pleasant enough theatre on the Moss circuit. It was probably built during the first decade of the century, though, as it was rather less luxurious than plenty of the Moss Halls, it may have been one of the earlier ones.

Moss, like his contemporary Sir Oswald Stoll, had a strict code which had to be observed by all shows and performers on his many stages. But it was worth it. It was the seal of quality to be booked on the Moss Empires circuit.

