STORY PAPER COLLECTORS Digest

VOL. 25
Nº 298

OCTOBER 1971

12½p

FUNNY WONDER

G. Hutchison

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COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 25 | No. 298 | OCTOBER 1971 | Price 12½p

A WORD FROM THE SKIPPER

FAMOUS FIRST WORDS

Deathless are the first words of many classics. For most of us, our studies at school have made them deathless. "When shall we three meet again?" has been a question hammering in my ears down the corridors of time. "Hence! Home, you idle creatures!" has thundered into my brain since the time, long ago, when I played Mark Antony in a flowing toga which I thought suited me down to the ground. "If music be the food of love, play on!" has echoed down the ages among scores of

tuneful first lines of the classics.

"The way was long, the wind was cold," is a first line for an icy winter's evening, and "I come from haunts of coot and hern" is a beginning for a breathless summer day. I have long admitted to the sin of laziness, and this is exemplified by the fact that I have always known that a hern is a heron, but, till just now, I have never bothered to find out what a coot is. It's a water-fowl, without feathers on its head. Hence the term, "bald as a coot."

Modern literature has produced but few famous first lines. But one is as famous and deathless as "Marley was dead to begin with!" That one is "Last night I dreampt I went to Manderley again." Everybody knows it was the start of that superb novel in which the lady of the title does not appear in the story at all, while the heroine herself is never given a christian name.

How many first lines have lived with you from the books you read when a child? Three stay very definitely with me.

The first: "Rain. Rain. Rain. How mercilessly it fell on the fairground that Sunday afternoon!" It comes from "A Peep Behind the Scenes," and that must be a pretty wonderful tale for anyone to remember it affectionately for so long. The B.B.C. has presented some delightful serials for Sunday tea-time television enjoyment. What a pity that they have never got down to "A Peep Behind the Scenes." Maybe one day they will. Now I come to think about it, I can remember one chapter title: "Mother Manikin's Chairs."

One deathless beginning (for me) comes from a blue Gem which I have not read for countless years.

"What?"

"How?"

"Why?"

That is the start of "Tom Merry's Concert Party," and I have never forgotten it down the years. A Gem which has the very warmest spot of all in my sentimental heart. Of its type, I doubt whether Charles Hamilton ever surpassed it.

One other beginning in boyhood literature remains with me, though it is long since I saw it.

"It was most mysterious."

It was a start to set any boy's pulse tingling - do pulses tingle? In any case, the line is the start of "Birds of Prey" by Maxwell Scott. I certainly did not read more than the opening instalment, for it was the only copy I then had. Now I have the full story of "Birds of Prey" serialised in both the Boys' Friend and the Gem, though I have never read it. But the opening line has remained with me.

I have a feeling that "Birds of Prey" was one of the greatest Nelson Lee novels in its day. Yet our Lee fans never mention it.

AN OLD FRIEND

For as long as I can remember, the Sunday Companion came into my home. When I was a child, my mother always had it delivered regularly. Since I had a home of my own, there has always been somebody in it who ordered the Sunday Companion. In consequence, it became a familiar friend. The news that the paper is closing, or, at least, being amalgamated with another paper, brings me a pang of sadness.

Circulations which were economic for so many years are no longer so. Rocketing costs, which, it seems to me, must be linked with rocketing wages, make the smaller circulation papers a prohibitive proposition. Some months ago we were wondering that a newspaper, with a circulation of two millions, was nevertheless running at a mighty loss.

What a ride we are being given with this decimal currency! While causing gigantic inflation, it is also being used to mask it.

"All the news of B.B.C. programmes for less than a penny a day," proudly boasts the Radio Times. Sounds good, though the Radio Times costs a shilling - 12 old pence. It sounds better in what we call decimals.

As I walked into town this morning I passed a garage where they were just putting up a new large poster. It read '5p off.' And, in large type - "Save a Shilling, (and, also large, in brackets 1/-) - on five gallons." When you're spending it sounds better in decimals. When you're saving, so much better in old currency.

JUBILEE

Next month Story-Paper Collectors' Digest reaches its 25th birthday. Early in December, our London Club is laying on a special celebration luncheon to mark the Silver Jubilee of C.D. It is clear that we, in the editorial office, must celebrate too.

All being well, to mark this terrific occasion, we hope that our December issue, which will also be our 300th number, will be an extra-special Christmas Double Number to mark our Silver Jubilee.

We have not lost sight of the fact that Christmas is a very expensive time for everyone, and, of course, the Silver Jubilee edition of Collectors' Digest Annual is due out in mid-December. All the same, we feel that most of our readers will want us to mark the 300th issue and the Silver Jubilee with something extra-special, and a double number seems the most happy way of doing it. If you have any special Birthday message to send along to us, - how you first met C.D., or what C.D. has meant and still means to you, or anything you like - jot them on a piece of paper or a postcard, and send them along. We hope to publish some of them in our Silver Jubilee Special.

Oh, and by the way — Have you ordered your Annual yet?

THE EDITOR

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FOR SALE: "LITTLE FOLKS" (1910) pleasant volume for browsing over and then handing to the small son or daughter 37p; School Friend Annual (1930) 37p; Girls Own Annual 1892-3 (heavy volume) 50p; Chatterbox (1927) 20p; Golden Annual for Girls (1925) 37p. Magnet 940 "Hidden Foe" 60p; Gem 777 "Christmas Barring Out" 60p; Gem 430 "Conquering Heroes" (complete with blue cover but on the rough side 60p; Magnet 762 "Schoolboy Divers" (supplement missing) 25p; Gem 1493 "Jolly Jinks at St. Jim's" (moderate copy) 25p. Postage extra on all items.

Write ERIC FAYNE with s.a.e.

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OFFERS INVITED for the following Hotspurs, range 681-1061. 1949 (6), 1950 (52), 1951 (51), 1952 (50), 1953 (52), 1954 (52), 1955 (49), 1956 (23). Including run 1003-1018 and Xmas No., 1957 (10) run. Also Bumper Bundle comics 1949-56 comprising 7 Adventures, 3 Lions, 1 Rover, 4 Beanos, 1 Dandy, Xmas No. T.V. Fun, and 6 Hotspurs. S.a.e. for reply.

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MAGNETS FOR SALE. Write to - FELDMAN, 4 BALLANTRAE HOUSE, LYNDALE, LONDON, N.W.2.

DANNY'S DIARY

OCTOBER 1921

Wotter month in the Magnet! Some of the rummiest tales I have ever read. The month started off with "The Island Raiders." Highcliffe called off its footer fixture on account of the team being down with mumps. Luckily, the next morning, Harry Wharton received a challenge from a team on Storm Island, near Black Rock. The writer of the challenge mentions that the ferry has stopped running, owing to bad weather, but he supposes that the Greyfriars boys will find some means of getting to the island. So Wharton's team row over in boats. And some other Removites manage to get there in the same way. When they get there, they find out that a band of criminals led by Captain Donovan has taken over the island. The scoundrels intend to steal all the valuables from the place.

Luckily, Harry Wharton & Co. manage to defeat the rascals. Then they manage to defeat the football challengers, owing to the fact that the ball is "lobbed on the head of Archie Howell, and Archie, by a deft jerk of his cranium, deflected the ball into the net." Wow!

Next came "The Remove Exam Mystery." Everything written disappears. The rack is filled with letters without writing on them, and the exam papers, put away overnight, are a blank the next morning. All due to that awful cad Skinner, who had been spraying everything with a marvellous chemical. He gets a public flogging.

Then, "Skinner's Revenge." Mr. Lascelles needs money to lend to his brother. He, Mr. Lascelles, pops his watch with Mr. Lazarus. Skinner pinches the pawn-ticket. Then Skinner takes Wharton's watch and pops that with Mr. Lazarus. The pawn-tickets get mixed up, but everything gets unmixed in the end. Mr. Lascelles and Wharton meet as they are unpopping their watches, and they smile at one another, "a smile of understanding. Both understood." Lucky them. It was all a quagmire to me.

It was a relief when the old writer came back next week with "Bunter's Very Latest." Bunter had been reading "Good Gilbert, the blind schoolboy." Everybody was kind to Gilbert because he was blind.

So Bunter got a knock from Coker - and pretended to be blind. Longer than most stories these days, it was very funny in parts.

"The Plot Against the School" brought the month to a close. Russell's father has been robbed, so he can't send Russell any money to meet expenses. An old boy named Jack Vernon comes to the school. What was Russell to do? He could not stoop to borrowing the money he needed, and he could not bring himself to beg. So he decided to rob the Games Fund box which was "nailed to the wall in the Remove passage."

While Russell is fighting temptation - should he? could he? no? yes? Jack Vernon saves him. "You put aside the thought of borrowing money. You're not a beggar. So there was only one course open to you - namely, to appropriate the money. I don't like the word 'steal.'"

Jack Vernon gives Russell £10. What a friend! In the final chapter it turns out that Jack Vernon is Russell's uncle, he robbed Russell's father, he was 'Jack Donovan' who led the criminals in that island tale, and he is at Greyfriars to rob the school.

When Jack Vernon - Captain Donovan is exposed, the Head proves what a marvellous man - he - the Head - is. Providing Vernon dissolves his gang, he, the Head, won't send for the police. In fact, he is so touched that he makes Vernon, Captain Donovan his own private secretary. Marvellous.

Wotter month in the Magnet!

The Sexton Blake Library and the Boys' Friend Library are each issuing 5 new editions every month. It shows how very popular they must be. There was a truly wonderful Sexton Blake story this month entitled "The Sacred City." It was set in London and in Benares, and as well as Blake, Tinker, and Pedro it featured those two lovely characters Granite Grant and Mademoiselle Julie.

A very good Sexton Blake tale in the Union Jack was entitled "In The Grip of Waldo."

It has been an unusually hot October. It seemed to be ridiculous to be playing football, for the weather would have been ideal for cricket.

In the Boys' Friend, the Morcom series has continued and ended after three more excellent stories. "Not Wanted at Rookwood"

told of Morcom and Mornington in a big feud. Morny, of course, does not know that the new boy is Lord Bob and not really Morcom at all. In "The Forbidden Fight" Morny and Morcom arrange to fight it out at a rendezvous in the wood. But when Morcom (Lord Bob) arrives there he finds Morny being attacked by a vicious tramp. Morcom wades in to help Morny, and so they become friends.

Last of the series was a delicious tale - "The Rookwood Charity Boy" - in which the Marquis of Maybrook visits Rookwood to pay a friendly call on Morcom, his gamekeeper's son - and finds his own son being fearfully treated by the snobs who think he is Morcom. So Lord Bob fades from the Rookwood scene, and, not surprisingly, Morcom does not come to Rookwood at all.

Two final Rookwood tales were two morsels in which Tubby Muffin set up as a detective, after the style of Jack Drake. In "The Rookwood Sleuth" and "Detective Muffin of Rookwood," Jimmy Silver loses his telescope (it has been borrowed by a friend), and Muffin decides it has been stolen by the French master (who has bought one exactly like Jimmy's).

Monsieur Poincare, the French President, has come to London on a visit.

Some awfully good films at the local cinemas. A tip-top one was "The Fifth Form at St. Dominic's," the famous tale by Talbot Baines Reed. It was played mainly by real public school boys. Clara Kimball Young was in a heavy picture named "Mid-Channel" and Jack Pickford was in a lovely light one named "The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come." It was Jack Pickford's best so far. Bransby Williams was in "The Adventures of Mr. Pickwick."

Summer time ended, and the clocks went back on the 3rd October. With the weather so hot, we could have done with another week or two of the light evenings.

After reading this month's first Gem, "Tom Merry & Co's Trip," I decided that it is not only the Magnet which has weird stories. This one was a shocker. Owing to there being sleepy sickness in the neighbourhood, the Head decides to close down St. Jim's - as if he would - and divide all the St. Jim's boys at schools throughout London and the suburbs - so many to each school. Tom Merry & Co. are sent

to Magdalen School at Edmonton, but most of the story tells of their journey through London where they visit all the sights - the Tower, Madame Tussaud's, etc. They just arrive at Edmonton in time to have a brief clash with Hugh Valentine & Co., the heroes of Magdalen School at Edmonton, and be introduced to their new Headmaster, when the story ends. Another queer thing was that this tale only had five chapters, though they were very long chapters. It all threatened a long series, but presumably the editor changed his mind, for the remaining tales of the month were by the regular writer, and there was no further mention of sleepy sickness or Edmonton.

The next three tales were light ones of house rivalry - not very original, but all delicious fun. They were "Figgins on the Warpath," "Blake & Co's Campaign," and "Tom Merry & Co's Victory." Final of the month was "D'Arcy's New Hobby" in which Gussy took up ventriloquism, until he was cured by Glyn.

Most of the newspapers, and John Bull, are now running insurance schemes. If you break your neck you get £500 providing you have placed a regular order for the Daily So-and-So, or John Bull.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: The film of "The Fifth Form at St. Dominic's," seen by Danny in October 1921, would not be the most famous one. The book was filmed again a year or two later, with Ralph Forbes as "Oliver" and Micky Brantford as his younger brother. This later film was probably the best school classic ever to reach the screen.)

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WANTED: Magnets 1573 to 1582; 1589 to 1598; 1599 to 1608; 1626 to 1629; 163? to 1642. In condition for binding. Gems 1389, 1401, 1406. Nelson Lees 1st New Series 183-186, 3rd New Series 1 to 18.

38 ST. THOMAS ROAD, PRESTON.

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WANTED: S.B.L. Second Series 122, 129, 143, 164, 171, 221, 723, 728. Also "House Opposite" by Farjeon.

BRIDGWATER, 20 BAY CRESCENT, SWANAGE.

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WANTED: Good loose copies or volumes containing one or more of the following: GEMS 801, 817, 826, 828, 832. Boys' Friends from mid-1923 to April 1926, preferably long runs or in bound volumes. Good copies essential.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, 113 CROOKHAM ROAD, CROOKHAM, HAMPSHIRE.

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WANTED: Magnets, Gems, Populars and Hamiltonia S.O.L's.

DR. B. KELION, 69 FRIERN BARNET LANE, LONDON, N11 3LL.

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

SEXTON BLAKE, FAMILY MAN

by Chas. C. Day

Sexton Blake as a family man? Perhaps a new slant on the famous Criminologist, but every man is someone's son. Blake was one of the two sons of Dr. Berkeley Blake (not Barclay, as written in that fine "New Look" yarn "The Angry Night," later published in revised form as a Mayflower/Dell paper-back edition of the Sexton Blake Library, "Fire over India" by W. Howard Baker).

In Lewis Jackson's first story in the Nigel Blake Series, "Sexton Blake's Secret" he introduces to us, for the first time, I believe, the facts relevant to the careers of Sexton Blake and his brother.

It was Dr. Berkeley Blake's dearest wish that his two sons should follow in the family tradition and become practising doctors. Sexton Blake came down from Cambridge loaded with honours and ended up fully qualified, whilst Nigel failed his M.D. and not having the strength of character of his brother, turned waster, thus bringing sorrow to his father and the rest of the family.

Blake was a now fully qualified medical man, a state of affairs which was to stand him in good stead in later years, but having that turn of mind which utterly abhors crime and the persecution of the underdog, turned his attention to Criminology to become the world famous detective that he is today. Sexton Blake, with some difficulty, then persuaded Nigel to go abroad and try to make a fresh start, and it was whilst he was in Africa that he met and married the young widow of one-time Rugger Blue, Jim Peterson. Her name was Clare, and the result of this union was the boy Garry, and after Nigel had reverted his former ways and deserted his wife and child, Clare decided to give the boy the name of her first husband, keep him in ignorance of his real father and spare him the disgrace.

With typical concern for his family Blake paid for the boy's education and kept a fatherly eye on Clare and his nephew through the years. Twenty years or so later, Garry joined the Metropolitan Police

Force, eventually to become a member of Scotland Yard and working as assistant to Inspector Martin, a not-too-friendly C.I.D. man.

This fine "Family" series began in No. 1 "Detective Weekly" dated Feb. 25th, 1933, successor to the dear old "Union Jack." There are few occasions in the Sexton Blake saga when Blake is referred to by his Christian name. Once he is addressed as "Sexton dear," by the Duchess of Derwentwater, in one of the "New Look" stories, and again, in the same period, as "Sexy, Darling" by some amorous female or other. (Which shook me somewhat.)

In Lewis Jackson's stories Blake is speaking to Clare, his sister-in-law, and she calls him "Tony," which I suppose is acceptable, coming from one who is on intimate and family terms with Blake.

So it can be seen that apart from being the stern, implacable crime-fighting machine feared amongst the criminal fraternity, Blake was very much a family man, and underneath the austere exterior, capable of love and affection, just like any other human being, as witness the father/employer relationship between himself and Tinker.

(Not Edward Carter, please.)

# # #

BAKERIANA

by Francis Hertzberg

In an old number of C.D. I found someone complaining that in Fire Over India Howard Baker had given Blake a brother and a father. My first reaction was that legitimizing Blake was no insult. But, really, it wasn't Baker who invented brother Nigel, but the author of the first Detective Weekly, who brought him to dissolute life: Baker simply gave him a glorious death.

What I do dislike, and think was Baker's sole work, is his transformation of Mrs. Bardell into a 'daily woman' - albeit one who works long enough hours to be still resident.

Baker once wrote that the Blake saga must always at least keep up with the times, if not be ahead of them: in the last week I've read of a 'Morning Star' newspaper in the early thirties, and reference to 'as phoney as a ten shilling piece!'

I've just picked up a paperback of Howard Baker's (Scandal Street)

which includes all the ingredients that marked his 4th Series S.B.L. - sex, violence, and that Street which so often appeared.

Lastly, is it not appropriate that a man named Baker should have been concerned with the adventures of one of the two most famous "men from Baker St.?"

# # #

THE "INDEPENDENT" STORY

by S. Gordon Swan

THE UNION JACK and the Sexton Blake Library are best remembered for the galaxy of colourful characters which decorated the pages of those periodicals and there is no doubt that they provided some splendid stories. But the connoisseur of detective fiction may prefer to give the award of merit to those independent yarns which appeared from time to time.

In these tales Sexton Blake was confronted with a problem which taxed all his ingenuity to solve and which exemplified in high degree his powers of deduction and logical reasoning. In the end the skein of mystery was unravelled and the criminal brought to book.

One of the experts at this type of story and one whose name is not often referred to in articles on the Sexton Blake saga, was C. Malcolm Hincks. In the Union Jack and the Detective Weekly he was responsible for a number of tales which come into the category of straight detective stories. As examples of some of his best work I will quote:

U.J. 1346 The Shadow Man
U.J. 1377 Hidden Fangs
U.J. 1441 Secrets For Sale
U.J. 1459 The Bishop Murder Mystery

These are vintage mystery stories and rank high among the many and varied exploits of Sexton Blake. For these literary efforts this rather neglected author should receive his due measure of praise.

Another author who wrote many good independent yarns was Gwyn Evans. It might be argued that Splash Page, a recurring character, appears in many of these, but then Derek Page was not a criminal who escaped justice at the end; he more or less fulfilled the

role of an extra assistant to Sexton Blake. Some of his best tales are:

U.J. 1153 The Sign of the Saracen

U.J. 1293 Poison

U.J. 1375 The Melodrama Mystery

U.J. 1519 Suspended From Duty

Other good examples of the independent story are to be found in:

U.J. 1073 The Case of Cormack's Key by H. W. Twyman, in which the editor of the U.J. tried his hand at setting his readers a puzzle to solve.

U.J. 1069 The Secret of the Sarcophagus by John W. Bobin, a Sax Rohmerish type of yarn which contains several surprises.

U.J. 1146 The Scarecrow Clue by F. W. Young, an ingenious story with a twist in the tail.

U.J. 1136 The Clue of the Sheffield Sampler

U.J. 1142 The Negative Alibi

both by Gilbert Chester, who wrote a number of good "straight" crime stories.

Mention should be made of two other authors whose output for the Union Jack was confined to a few stories, but those few are notable additions to the Saga. They are Tom Stenner, who wrote:

U.J. 1223 The Puzzle of Blue Ensign, a racing mystery.

Those with long memories may recall a scientific detective named Craig Kennedy - he appeared in the film serial, The Exploits of Elaine - and his adventures were recorded by Arthur B. Reeve. The stories generally ended with Craig Kennedy in his laboratory expounding his solution of the crime to an absorbed audience. The ending to The Puzzle of Blue Ensign is planned very much on those lines.

R. L. Hadfield, who wrote two excellent tales in:

U.J. 1343 Some Persons Unknown

U.J. 1371 Burden of Proof

In the latter story Sexton Blake was charged with manslaughter.

Any or all of these stories would be suitable for inclusion in an anthology of Sexton Blake's Greatest Cases.

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DO YOU REMEMBER? by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 93 — Magnet No. 1655 — "The Tuck-Hoarder"

The final ten months' issues of the Magnet had a certain sparkle about them that lasted right through from the Water Lily series almost completely to the promising final number. The group of single stories at the beginning of the autumn term were varied and entertaining, but none of them were so neat and perfectly plotted as "The Tuck-Hoarder."

Because the stories were written so much in advance, it always took a long time for topical events to find their way into the pages of the Magnet. References to A.R.P. and gas-masks were not infrequent, but of course these were peace-time innovations: undoubtedly the first war-time story was No. 1655 with its mention of food regulations and the black-out. It is interesting to note that the time-lag in 1914 was just about the same period as in 1939, which means that production schedules in Fleetway House remained unchanged during that quarter-century.

Fisher T. Fish was "The Tuck-Hoarder" and there were really three strands to this story, all of them displaying typical streaks in his unpleasant character. The first item was the five-pound note, the profits from his moneylending business; the second was the pile of newspapers which he was saving to sell for salvage and into which he slipped the banknote in an emergency; and the third was the locked suitcase full of tinned food, a precaution against a possible war-time shortage. Bunter found the key of the suitcase, and decided to punish Fishy by eating the food in instalments, but Fishy had lost the banknote and suspected Bunter of having cashed it to buy all the tuck he was so ostentatiously consuming.

When this story is compared to Magnet 348, the first war-time story in 1914, the difference is striking. No. 348 dealt with the departure of Herr Gans and his replacement by his cousin, who turned out to be a spy, and the war stories grew grimmer and grimmer as time went on in 1914 until they very sensibly stopped being used as regular themes for school stories. The 1939 story with its obvious moral line was loyal and patriotic enough, but it was written in such an amusing manner that it seems far less dated than the 1914 stories. Its delightful

climax, when Mr. Quelch executed such perfect poetic justice on the wily Fishy, makes it a story to remember with pleasure.

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SALE/EXCHANGE Victorian/Edwardian St. Nicholas, Boys Empire, Herbert Strang, Little Folks, Our Darlings, Sunday, Eagle, Chums, School, Adventure Authors -- Stamp List --

GALLOWAY, 146 WHITEHALL ROAD, GATESHEAD, DURHAM.

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CHANGE OF ADDRESS

On the 15th October, Capt. John Gunn, M.H.C.I., of The Meadow Inn, Nottingham - moves to -

THE SPRINGFIELD ARMS,
SPRINGFIELD ROAD, GRANTHAM, LINCOLNSHIRE.

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CHANGES OF ADDRESS: J. W. Cook's new address is 18 Douglas Road, Mount Eden, Auckland 4, New Zealand. Harry Broster's new address is 7 Foster Crescent, Kinver, Stourbridge, Worcs. DY7.

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 163. YES, PLEASE, LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

In a recent radio programme named "What Does the Team Think?", Mrs. Mary Cadogan of our London club asked the question: "What papers did the members of the panel read when they were boys, and did those papers have any effect on the panel as adults?"

It was a worthwhile question, and it was a little unfortunate that the team comprised famous comedians who are expected to justify their existence by striving to be desperately funny. However, some of the comments were interesting and nostalgic, and it was useful to learn that Cardew Robinson, in his schoolboy sketches of some twenty years ago, was making his fun with Cardew of St. Jim's in mind. I often wondered. I have a feeling that "Cardew" was not a baptismal name of Mr. Robinson, but that the name became attached to him as a result of his clever little cameoes of a caddish schoolboy.

Charles Hamilton, of course, never had any doubt. He was immensely happy that one of his characters had inspired a stage character actor, and I have always felt that that belief influenced him in his handling of Ralph Reckness. In post-war St. Jim's, the term "Cardew the Cad" was used, which seemed to owe more to Mr. Robinson than to the creator of that master of nonchalant repartee which we had known in the Gem in the twenties.

Recently, in a letter to the editor and also in an article, Harold Truscott accused Roger Jenkins of being dogmatic. Though Mr. Truscott probably didn't know it, he was reviving a breeze which blew up in the early days of this magazine, when we praised those fine fellows who thought as we did, and labelled as dogmatic those whose opinions varied from our own.

Is Mr. Jenkins dogmatic in his writing? Indeed he is. So am I. And so, with all respect, is Mr. Truscott. All critics are dogmatic. Usually I dislike critics, especially television critics in newspapers. They tell us what we have seen the night before, and whether we should have enjoyed ourselves or not. Almost invariably, they slate what I have liked immensely, and drool over something which has bored or disgusted me.

I always delight in Mr. Jenkins' writing, though I do not always agree with what he writes, any more than he always agrees with what I write. For instance, I was far from agreeing with what he wrote recently on the Rio Kid. I have said the opposite on the Kid in the past, and, probably, will do so in the future. It should be quite obvious to anybody that Mr. Jenkins is merely expressing a personal opinion, and does not claim that everything he says is an incontrovertible fact.

As an editor, I am very happy with Mr. Jenkins. He writes with an economy of words which I find most commendable. He does not take 24 words to express what could be said equally well in 6. He is being dogmatic when he says that the Ravenspur Grange series was out of place in the Magnet, as I am when I say that the Old Bus series was far superior to the Water Lily series, and as Mr. Truscott is when he states that the post-war "D'Arcy's Disappearance" is as good as any pre-war single-issue Gem in the heyday of that magazine.

It should be clear that we are all expressing personal views, and if we constantly embellish our remarks with "In my opinion --" or "My own view is --" or "So far as I can see --," we may be making the obvious a little clearer and disarming those who don't agree with us, but we risk our work reading pedantically and we take up much precious space.

I agree with a good deal of what Mr. Truscott wrote in his article. I have a soft spot in my sentimental heart for the post-war Hamiltonia, and I have it all in a conspicuous place on my book-shelves. I have never made any secret of my view that Hamilton was more successful, purely from a literary viewpoint, in his handling of St. Jim's than of Greyfriars which was too-Bunterish. I agree that "Skimpole's Snapshot" was a delightful story, and one of the best of the post-war offerings. "Trouble for Tom Merry" pleased me, as a Tom Merry fan, but I had a sneaking feeling that, in this story, the writer put Tom Merry sadly out of character as a rebel. It would have made good Harry Wharton stuff, but it was off-tone Tom Merry.

With regard to Cardew, I disagree with Mr. Truscott, and have no doubt that Mr. Jenkins was accurate. My view is that, neither in 1939 nor in post-war years, did Hamilton ever recapture his delightful delineation of Cardew in the 1916-1925 decade. Cardew was never a

favourite of mine, but I have no doubt that the author made a superb character of him in earlier days.

Again, with regard to the new boy Ridd, I do not agree with Mr. Truscott. Hamilton had chopped away much of the dead wood - the superfluity of minor characters on the St. Jim's and Greyfriars stages - in the thirties and in the post-war years, and to introduce a new boy as a permanency at St. Jim's at that late stage struck me as being totally unnecessary, and, indeed, an absurdity.

Of course, I am taking advantage of circumstances. The very title of this series makes a built-in excuse for me to be dogmatic. But, if readers' letters are anything to go by, the series seems to be as popular as when it started about 15 years ago. So I daresay I shall go on being dogmatic.

As for Roger Jenkins, - well, more power to his elbow. His writing has delighted readers throughout the 25 years of this magazine's existence, and as our Silver Jubilee celebrations approach we thank him for the pleasure he has given us down the years. Let him be dogmatic when he feels like it. It helps to keep the hobby healthy. And, if anyone disagrees with him, our Postman Called column is open to anyone and Mr. Jenkins' back is broad.

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NELSON LEE COLUMN

"THE MAN WHO WAS ST. FRANK'S"

or

"EDWY SEARLES BROOKS AS I SEE HIM"

by William Lister

I am unashamed, and I freely admit it. I have borrowed - swiped - purloined - pinched or lifted the above title and I am not ashamed of doing so. For a while I had toyed with the idea of "EDWY SEARLES BROOKS AS I SEE HIM" now relegated to the sub-title as you will have noticed. Then along came a book by Michael and Molly Hardwick "The Man who Was Sherlock Holmes" pointing out that you cannot separate Arthur Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes.

True - true, and neither can you separate the name Ian Fleming from James Bond - Charles Hamilton from Billy Bunter and Greyfriars or Edwy Searles Brooks from St. Frank's and Handforth. There is bound to be a blending of author and his created characters somewhere along the line. Any writer who has had any measure of success with his fiction personalities is bound to be identified with them.

Though E. S. Brooks used many pen-names, such as Endser Rivers. Leundian Gymdm, C. Gorden Chambers, Berkley Gray and Victor Gunn, to mention only a few, I always think of him as Edwy Searles Brooks.

Think of St. Frank's and you think of Brooks, think of the "Nelson Lee Library" and you think of Brooks, think of the "Monster" library and you think of Brooks. How could it be otherwise?

When I first took the "Nelson Lee," the author was of no consequence. It was the story which had my interest; the weekly adventures of the St. Frank's boys filled my horizon.

That is, until I was "hooked;" instead of just buying my copy I placed a regular order. The "Nelson Lee" was probably the first paper I ever placed a regular order for in my life.

By then I was conscious of the author. I began to take an interest

in him, an increasing interest, when the author's page became a feature and when we were offered a post-card size photo of E. S. Brooks, I secured one which I had around for ages.

(Just for the record, a while ago I was fortunate to secure a much larger picture of a much older E. S. Brooks from Bob Blythe.)

Any story by Brooks under whatever name he chose became my meat. A reader of the "Union Jack," I considered it at its best when the name Edwy Searles Brooks was on the cover.

But always and anon to me he was (and still is) Edwy Searles Brooks of St. Frank's. He couldn't escape that! We are told in later life he tried to escape it. If he is remembered today it is by his St. Frank's fans. In life - in death - Edwy Searles Brooks was St. Frank's.

When it was curtains for "Nelson Lee" I lost touch. New interests arose. Jobs, courtship, religion filled the landscape. Until about twelve years ago at the ripe old age forty-seven I picked up the threads. It was while reading a Sexton Blake Library. Information was given that to join the S.B. fan club you had to take a certain "Collectors' Digest." So I did. So I still do. So I hope to do, to the end-of-time. That is, of course, either my time or the "C.D's" time.

Through the pages of the "Collectors' Digest" I discovered that St. Frank's still "lived," that the "Magnet," "Gem" and "Union Jack" still had a host of admirers, and this was good.

I discovered that E. S. Brooks was still alive. That books I had seen by a certain Berkley Gray and Victor Gunn were by my favourite author. I wrote to him and received an answer. I owe much to "Collectors' Digest."

Recent letters, discovered and printed in C.D. show that E.S.B. was a plodder. Scripts returned time after time. Thousands of words for little or nothing, yet he stuck it out. R. J. Godsave said of him, "He was born with a pen in his hand" (C.D. February, 1966).

One needs a good opening, if possible, to an article. It is equally important that one should have a suitable close. I borrowed my title (with apologies). I know of no better way to close than by using the words of J. R. Murtagh of New Zealand (March C.D., 1966).

"Edwy Searles Brooks is no longer with us in the flesh. But his spirit will live on, and whenever we can escape from the rigours of the

hectic life of today by reading of the adventures of the St. Frank's juniors. Whether it be a Christmas series or a Summer Holiday series or a Mystery series, we shall remember him and the pleasure he brought us with his writing."

Edwy Searles Brooks, we salute you. You are the man who was St. Frank's.

o o o

ALL FOR A LABOUR OF LOVE! by W. O. G. Lofts

Recently in correspondence with an elderly author - Mr. L. E. Ransome - who poured out stories for the girls and boys papers in the 1916/60 period, I asked him if he ever had any hand in the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, and his reply was as follows ...

'A life on the ocean wave,
Is better than going to sea,
And better than either of these,
Is reading the NELSON LEE.'

He added: "This rhyme sticks in my memory, although it was invented by Willie Home-Gall, then the editor over 50 years ago. This was before Harold May took over office. One very sad story for me, and about Harold May, is that just after he had taken over the Library, he commissioned me to write two St. Frank's stories, as a supply had not come from Edwy Searles Brooks. They were at that time desperate for copy. Willie Back the controlling editor was away on holiday - so already having written a serial for the GEM, and two full length Morcove yarns for the girls' department, I set about those yarns. As a boy I was an avid reader of only the MAGNET and GEM, and not only knew the characters backwards, but also won a prize in the Greyfriars Story Competition run by Hinton.

"I knew nothing about the St. Frank's characters, and one can imagine my task! I swotted up old copies of the N.L.L. and all through my holidays worked the candle at both ends to complete these stories. I posted them on to Harold May. When I saw Harold shortly afterwards, he blandly informed me that (1) They had now received an ample supply from Brooks. (2) Willie Back had rejected mine out of hand. (3) The

latter had said that Harold had not authority to commission them anyway. 'Ah, well,' said Harold, 'it has been excellent practice for you!'"

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Eric Fayne continues the series in which he looks back at the cinemas and theatres he remembers in the Great Britain we once knew.

THE KINGSHOT SYNDICATE

There were only two theatres in the Kingston Syndicate - the Kingston Empire and the Aldershot Hippodrome. Hence the name. The managing director bore the hyphenated name of Stanley-Watson.

Probably I visited Kingston Empire more than any other music-hall, for it was only a penny tram ride, a tuppenny trolley-bus ride, or a sixpenny motor-bus ride away from my front door.

Built in 1910, it was a delightful theatre. The colour scheme - carpets, seating, curtains - was rather unusual in brown and gold. Most similar houses plumped for red as the predominant colour. The Empire was of ideal capacity - small enough to be cosy and intimate, large enough to be able to stage the very best touring productions.

Unlike most twice-nightly theatres, it always gave a full two-hours' programme. Shows put out to tour on the twice-nightly circuits were always timed to last 1 hour 50 minutes. Revues which came to the Empire were augmented by an additional variety act, interpolated into the show. Another theatre which always offered liberal programmes was Moss's Holborn Empire.

The first show I saw at Kingston Empire was a revue starring an excellent artist named George Clark. He played typical "silly ass" parts, supported by a diminutive little lady named "Tiny Mite." She was a charming little thing, always looking about 8 years old. She was obviously a midget, for a child of her apparent years would not have been allowed on a professional stage in those days, and, in any case, as the years went by, Tiny Mite never looked any older. I often wonder what happened to George Clark and Tiny Mite.

Another early revue I saw at the Empire was "Zip," featuring that talented couple Hilda Munday and Billy Caryll.

The all-male revue "Splinters," featuring a gifted pair of stars Reg Stone and Hal Jones, came round regularly. Hal Jones, now in his eighties, has recently been King Rat in the famous Water Rats philanthropic association. He was in robust health the last time I heard from him. Reg Stone died prematurely in the mid- thirties. In those days of innocence, we enjoyed the Splinters revues for what they were - rattling good entertainment. In the early post-war years dubious eyes were cast on all-male shows. Nowadays, in more decadent times, the all-male revue has become a symptom of the age. I have seen none, but I fancy they are far removed from the delightful "Splinters."

I first saw Gracie Fields at Kingston Empire. The revue "By Request" was presented by Archie Pitt, though he did not appear in it. The Fields family was in it, however - Gracie, Edith, and the irrepressible Tommy who was as talented as his famous sister. I recall taking my sister to see "By Request" one Saturday night, when the theatre was packed to the roof, and chairs were placed down the aisles to add to the capacity. I should have thought that, even then, they were sidetracking the by-laws. Gracie Fields and Archie Pitt were married at Kingston during one of the visits of "By Request." (Archie Pitt lent me scenery for one of my own productions, and, in the late thirties, Gracie Fields attended one of my shows and said some nice things about it.)

By the late thirties, revues were losing popularity, and it was all-star variety which was the certain house-filler. Such people as Layton and Johnstone, Teddy Brown,

(Continued on Page 31...)

NEARING THE END. Our classic from Edwardian days when roads were dusty, people rode in traps, and the hero's honour was bright. 60 years later our lovely land has eradicated much of the bad from those days, and, also, some of the good.

THE ONLY WAY

Sir Hilton Popper was standing in his doorway, looking down the drive through the park. He had a riding-whip in his right hand, his watch in his left. He was looking at the watch. It indicated five minutes to six.

"Huh!" grunted the baronet. He was feeling disappointed. He had given the schoolboy poacher until six o'clock to come up to the hall and take a flogging, and if the culprit did not come Sir Hilton intended to let the law take its course.

The flogging was the punishment which Sir Hilton would have preferred to inflict. He wanted to feel his riding-whip lashing on the back of the boy who had dared to poach on his preserves. After such a thrashing as he would bestow upon his victim, the baronet felt that there was little likelihood of the offence being repeated.

Sir Hilton grunted discontentedly, and looked with knitted brows at his head-keeper, who was waiting, too, at a respectful distance.

There was the ring of a bicycle bell on the road, and Sir Hilton looked down the drive. A couple of minutes later, and an athletic form came striding up the drive towards the baronet.

Sir Hilton glanced at his head-keeper.

"Is that the lad?"

"Yes, Sir Hilton."

"Good!"

Courtney stopped before the baronet.

"So you have come?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have decided to take the flogging you deserve, instead of letting the matter go to the police, I presume?"

"I have decided to take the flogging."

"Huh! Follow me!"

Sir Hilton Popper strode into the house, and led the way to his library. Courtney followed him, and the keeper followed Courtney. Parker was grinning. He had not the slightest doubt that this was the same boy who had struck him that heavy blow the night before. And Parker felt a keen satisfaction at the idea of hoisting Courtney for a flogging.

In the library, Sir Hilton signed to Parker to close the door. He fixed his round eyes upon Courtney.

"You have come here to take the thrashing of your own free will," he said. "You are at liberty to go, if you wish."

Courtney's lip curled. He knew that the baronet was thinking of the case that had made a great deal of talk on the countryside - the boy who had been thrashed savagely for trespassing, and the summons for assault that had followed.

"I understand," he said quietly.

"Very well," said Sir Hilton. "You ought to be sent to prison, but if you prefer to take the flogging, I think it a more suitable punishment."

"Please get it over."

The baronet signed to Parker.

"Take him on your shoulders," he said.

Courtney said no word. He allowed the burly keeper to take his hands and raise him on his back. Courtney's chest rested on the keeper's broad shoulders, and his arms were passed over the shoulders, Parker holding his wrists. Then the man bent down, and Courtney's feet were raised from the floor.

Sir Hilton Popper took a tighter grip upon his whip. His ruddy face was full of cruel satisfaction. He raised his hand, and measured the stroke, and brought the riding-whip down with the full force of his arm.

Lash!

Courtney winced.

But he set his teeth, and no sound

escaped him. Whatever he suffered, he would not gratify the baronet by uttering a single cry.

Sir Hilton handled the riding-whip as if he were accustomed to administering that kind of punishment. Perhaps he was.

The blows fell steadily and incessantly, and with terrible force.

Courtney's face was very pale, his teeth set together like a vice. He would make no sound.

The baronet lashed harder and harder as if determined to draw a cry from his victim's lips.

No cry came -- only at last a hard, sharp breath of pain, as if the infliction were almost more than the boy could bear.

Twenty savage strokes had fallen, and still the hard-hearted man did not desist.

Parker looked round at his master uneasily.

"Don't you think, sir --" he began hesitatingly.

The baronet stared at him.

"What are you saying, Parker?"

"Ain't he had enough, sir?" stammered the keeper.

"Huh!"

"He's only a boy, sir --"

"Hold you tongue, Parker!"

Lash! Lash! Lash!

Courtney's face was white as death. The baronet seemed to be lashing harder since the remonstrance from his keeper.

Lash! Lash! Lash!

But even Sir Hilton desisted at last. There was a savage look upon his face; he had not extracted one cry from the victim of his cruelty.

"You can put him down, Parker," he said at length.

Courtney slid down to the floor, and stood unsteadily, gasping for breath. Parker caught him as he reeled.

"He's fainting!" muttered the keeper.

"Hold your tongue, Parker!"

Parker bit his lip. At that moment he would have been glad to take the riding-whip and use it forcibly on the stout person of the baronet.

Courtney leaned heavily on the keeper. The punishment he had received had been a terrible one, and he was almost fainting. Even at that moment he was thinking what would have happened if Valence had had the courage to come there and take his punishment.

The wretched fellow would have been shrieking in hysterics long before he had received half as much. Courtney, certainly, was better fitted to endure it.

Courtney turned blindly towards the door. Parker helped him to the door on the drive. Courtney staggered out into the sunlight.

Sir Hilton followed him, and pointed down the drive.

"Get out," he said, "and don't let me see you again!"

Courtney turned away without a word, and staggered down the drive to the gates.

His bicycle was leaning against the park railings. He wheeled it slowly down the road. At last he let it fall on a grassy bank. Then he sat down beside it, and fell in the grass, and darkness came over his vision.

Two cyclists came whizzing along the dusty road, and they stopped simultaneously at the sight of Courtney lying on the bank.

"It's Courtney!" said Harry Wharton in amazement.

"Courtney! My hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Leaving their machines, the two juniors ran towards Courtney. The senior's face was white and set.

"Good heavens! He's fainted!"

"Riding in the sun, I suppose," said Bob Cherry. "I saw him leave Greyfriars, and he was scorching for all he was worth. Dangerous in a sun like this."

He raised the prefect's head upon his knee.

"Get some water, quick!" he muttered.

There was a flowing ditch on the other side of the road. Wharton ran to it and filled his cap with water and ran back. The cool fluid was dashed in Courtney's face.

Arthur Courtney drew a long breath, and opened his eyes.

"Oh, you utter brute!" he muttered.

Wharton stared at him.

"Courtney!" he exclaimed.

The prefect recognised him.

"Oh, you, Wharton?" he said. "What has happened?"

"You weren't calling me that, then?" said Harry.

"You? Oh, no! Sir Hilton - ah!" Courtney checked himself. He did not intend the juniors to know what had happened. "It's all right. Was I asleep?"

"You'd fainted."

Courtney sat up. He was racked with pain still, but was more sure of himself now.

"I sat down here to rest. I tell you I'm all right."

"You don't look all right," said Bob Cherry.

Courtney pulled himself together.

"You fellows going back to Greyfriars?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You might take my jigger, will you? I shall walk."

"You don't look fit to walk," said Wharton anxiously. "Let me cut off to the village and send a trap --"

The prefect shook his head.

"No, no. If you take my machine, I shall be all right. Don't jaw this all over Greyfriars."

"Oh, all right."

"Buzz off!" said Courtney.

It was evident that he wished them to go, and, anxious as they were, the juniors did as he wished. They mounted their machines, and Wharton took Courtney's bicycle by the handlebars, and they rode away.

The senior sat in the grass, watching them go. They were out of sight down the long dusty road before he staggered to his feet.

"My hat!" he muttered. "How shall I ever get over this? How would Valence have stood it?"

He laughed grimly. Valence could never have stood it.

Courtney tramped slowly down the road. Long, long afterwards that tramp through the sunshine remained imprinted upon his memory. But at last the prefect walked unsteadily in at the gates of Greyfriars.

Gosling, the porter, saw him and came quickly towards him. Gosling was not a tender-hearted man, but the boy's white, strained face alarmed him.

"You ain't well, Master Courtney!" he exclaimed. "Sit in my lodge for a minute."

"I'm all right, Gosling."

Courtney was tramping on.

He entered the School House, and more than one curious glance was cast towards him.

Wingate stopped him in the Sixth Form passage.

"What on earth's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"You look ill --"

"I'm not ill. Help me to my study, old man," muttered Courtney.

His strength was failing. The Captain of Greyfriars took his arm, and led him to his room.

Courtney sank down on a sofa. A groan escaped his lips.

Wingate looked at him in great anxiety.

"What has happened?"

"Don't ask me," muttered Courtney. "I shall soon get over it. Only - don't ask me what it's about, there's a good fellow."

"Can I help you in any way?"

"Thanks, no. Better leave me alone."

Courtney looked anxiously at the door. He was expecting Valence to come in any moment, and he was afraid that some incautious word might enlighten Wingate.

"If you'd rather be alone --"

"I would. Excuse me, old fellow."

Wingate left the study. Courtney was alone. He took his jacket off, and removed his shirt carefully. There were red stains on the shirt; the baronet's cruel blows had drawn blood.

Courtney put an old loose blazer on, and laid down on his side on his sofa under the window. The cool breeze blowing in revived him somewhat. He waited; he expected Rupert Valence to come in, and did not want him to come.

Valence did not come.

Voices floated in from the Close. Courtney gave a start as he recognised the voice of Valence. Valence was talking to Loder of the Sixth.

"Are you coming out?" Loder asked. "We can get over to Courtfield, and get

back quite easily by dark. There are some jolly fellows there - a better set than those bounders at the Cross Keys. I can promise you a good time."

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Valence. "I want bucking up. I've had a rotten time the last day or two."

"I've noticed you've been down in the mouth," Loder said. "I suppose you've been getting into trouble. Some of us know jolly well who it was old Popper was complaining about."

"Oh, let's get off!" said Valence.

"What about Courtney?" asked Loder, a satirical note in his voice. "Will your father-confessor allow you to come?"

Valence uttered an impatient exclamation.

"Oh, hang Courtney!"

The voices passed on out of hearing. Courtney, lying on the sofa under the window, had heard every word.

Hang Courtney!

The fellow he had suffered so much for had gone off on an excursion of pleasure, and that was his valediction --

Hang Courtney!

(THIS OLD MASTERPIECE WILL BE CONCLUDED NEXT MONTH)

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NEWS OF THE CLUBS

MIDLAND

Meeting held on 24th August, 1971

Our August meeting took place a week earlier than usual because of the Bank Holiday. Seven regular members were able to be present and an enjoyable meeting ensued for all - everyone taking a leading part at some time during the evening.

Tom Porter presented his customary Anniversary Number, a fifty-four year old copy of the Nelson Lee Library, "The Cottage on the Moor" No. 168, Old Series, dated 24th August, 1918. The Collectors' Item was B.F.L. No. 266 (New Series) with Win Brown reading from the hardback edition "Bunter the Bad Lad" for good measure.

Treasurer, Norman Gregory read that excellent "Daily Telegraph Magazine" article from the 13th August issue entitled "Is Good Reading Dead, Boys?" which enabled us to develop further the theme of last month's discussion, namely the sad decline in standards of contemporary juvenile periodicals when compared with those of earlier generations. "Hamilton, Brooks, Johns, Roberts and Co., thou should'st all be alive at this hour!"

Under Tom Porter's firm control we were then all confronted with individual opportunities to talk for thirty seconds on a nominated topic, depending on the luck of the draw. Subjects ranged from O.B.B.C.

topics to railways and reminiscences. Ivan Webster then contributed a further reading from "Bunter the Bad Lad" assisted by Ian Bennett. The evening was rounded off by a single session of "Twenty Questions" wherein the dear old "C.D." itself was finally deduced at the twentieth question (despite such helpful clues as "You would certainly feel seedy if you ate it" — which fain should have been seen instantly) by the voluntary victim, none other than your correspondent,

IAN BENNETT

Vice-Chairman.

* * *

NORTHERN

An "unprecedented and unparalleled position" arose on Saturday, 11th September, when the only committee member present was Miss Molly Allison. These were the words she used to address the meeting of the other eight members when the cause of absence of our Chairman (Geoffrey Wild), Secretary (Ron Hodgson) and other staunch supporters was given as being in the main caused by holidays. Jack Allison was, however, soon unanimously elected Chairman and successfully carried out his duties in the true tradition of the "Allison" name. The writer was asked to stand in for the Secretary. This position was very difficult to carry out successfully, since after emptying two "biros" on note-taking regarding the first half of our programme - a reading by the Rev. (Geoffrey Goode) on a school story extremely well written by another of our members (unfortunately absent), he was told that the absentee had specifically requested that the story should receive no publicity, and that his name should be anonymous. We trust that further details can be supplied later after the bushel has been removed from the light.

The second half of the programme was enjoyably spent watching an Epidiascope Show presented, produced and directed (minus the cigar) by Harry Barlow from his cuttings of "Mick the Gypsy."

KEITH BALMFORTH

Acting Hon. Secretary.

LONDON

Sunday, 19th September, 1971

Longtime members were reminded of those small, jolly gatherings we had in London twenty years ago, as an unusually small group gathered at the home of Reuben and Phyllis Godsave. Leytonstone was bathed in warm sunshine and as we chatted on the lawn, the fruit trees beyond the house completed the illusion that we were in the country. Brian Doyle called the meeting together and Uncle Ben being on holiday, I became substitute Secretary/Treasurer. Mr. H. A. Owen from West Hampstead was welcomed as a new member. Sexton Blake being his main O.B.B. interest. Financial reports were given and it was decided that due to the sparse attendance we would postpone discussion of the Rembrandt Hotel Luncheon Meeting in December, and the raising of the subscriptions, until the next meeting when more members would be present. Bob Acraman read a letter from Norris McWhirter, Editor, Guiness Book of Records assuring us that Frank Richards' name would in future editions be pluralized and thus spelt correctly. Brian Doyle announced a forthcoming new paperback called "Discovering Comic Papers" by Dennis Clifford. Also, The Penguin Book of Comics is to be reissued in both hard and soft covers. Excellent buys for pre-war Comic devotees. Mary Cadogan read us an article on one of her favourite characters, Hurree Singh, entitled "My Heart has the Hunger." Brian Doyle played a tape of his portion of a January 1969 T.V. program, "Late Night Line Up," in which he discussed with Tony Bilbow the works of three authors who had lately died: Enid Blyton, Richmal Crompton and Captain W. E. Johns. This led to an interesting discussion regarding the fact that so many successful writers for children were themselves unmarried. Tom Wright read us a St. Sam's adventure entitled, "The Mystery of Jolly Lodge," wherein Dr. Birchemall is suspected of having stolen the diamond tiepin of the Rajah of Bhang. This enjoyable get-together was closed with Josie Packman's "Policemen" Quiz in which we had to identify the rank as well as which book, paper or T.V. series certain celebrated police officers appeared in. Charlie Wright won with 26 points.

Next meeting at 46 Overbury Avenue, Beckenham, Kent. Phone 650-1458. Please advise hosts Mary and Alex Cadogan if you are going.

UNCLE RAY

* * *

LONDON OUTING

There were nineteen of us in the Claude Duval coach that left Victoria in perfect weather. Arriving at the Nayland Rock Hotel, we were met by fifteen other members who had travelled by bus and car. John Wernham, the President, presided over a happy gathering. Guest of honour was Miss Edith Hood. Speeches were short and during the interval between luncheon and tea, one and all enjoyed the perfect sunshine out on the sea front. A good journey home and an unanimous decision that it had been a very enjoyable day.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

The Postman Called

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

G. W. MASON (Torquay): Your June editorial reference to prophetic words written by Desmond Coke in 1930, recalls to mind a similar instance in his "Confessions of an Incurable Collector" wherein he has a chapter on Penny Dreadfuls, and wrote (in 1928): "There are, it may be added, not only American but English Collectors: and soon, doubtless, a literature, solemn and learned, will grow up around these roughly printed leaflets." He refers, of course, to Ching Ching, Jack Harkaway, Ned Kelly, Sweeney Todd and similar original issues of the eighteen-sixties and seventies, which were eagerly sought after by collectors before the advent of the Magnet and the Gem and other twentieth century boys' periodicals. Nevertheless, he touched the right chord.

PETER HANGER (Northampton): I enjoyed Mr. Truscott's article on Post-War St. Jim's. It was doubly enjoyable for it is so refreshing to realise that someone else besides myself believes that Charles Hamilton did write something other than rubbish after 1935. And he was so right to make the point that those who are regarded as experts do have a nasty habit of putting their opinions and preferences as Facts.

JOHN STOKES (Dublin): I particularly enjoy the editorials. You so often put into words thoughts and opinions which have been milling around in my mind for months but which, owing to illness, I cannot express in words.

JOHN BRIDGWATER (Swanage): Congratulations on "catching up" with C.D. issues after the post strike: also on the high quality of the material published. I find your series on the old theatres fascinating.

"How to be a Detective" by William Lister this month reminded me of a talented ventriloquist we had on Southsea beach before the war. I wonder how many readers enjoyed the performances of Andrew and his dolls in his punch-and-judy-like box by South Parade pier during the 1930's? I thank Mr. Lister for reminding me of the enjoyment Andrew gave me for 1d in the collecting hat.

TOM SHERRARD (Potters Bar): Just one criticism of the September C.D. I thought that perhaps four pages given over to the N.L. Column of letters to E.S.B. and back was too many. I think that two pages would have sufficed at a time. In lack of anything as good to fill those two pages there could have been more of The Postman Called. I am sure readers are interested in other readers' views and comments.

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THE KINGSHOT SYNDICATE

(Continued from Page 23)

the Houston Sisters, Florence Desmond, the Crazy Gang, Donald Peers, and a boy entertainer named Hughie Green were names among hundreds who starred at the Empire.

The Empire always maintained a first-rate resident orchestra. From the mid-thirties till the end of the war the musical director was Olly Aston, renowned for his own stage band a few years earlier. Olly, now in his seventies, still lives in the Kingston area. After the war, the Kingston Empire baton was taken over permanently by Jack Frere, who had been conductor for Royal Command Performances at the Coliseum and the Palladium. He was a great friend of mine, and his sons were pupils in my school. On many occasions he played my own music as intermission selections at the theatre, and one of my own girls, on those occasions, sang with his band. His gifted pianist, Freddie Ferris, scripted all my music for me. It was astounding to watch Freddie taking it all down like shorthand as I played my compositions to him. He produced many splendid orchestrations of my work to be played at the Empire by Jack Frere's fine band. Jack died a few months ago, in Surbiton, after a long illness.

Aldershot Hippodrome, the second half of the Kingshot syndicate, was an excellent theatre, about the same size as the Kingston house and with a similar scheme of decoration. But Aldershot was a less "classy" area than Kingston, and the shows presented, though good, were lower down the scale. Seats were cheaper.

As television competition increased, the audiences at both theatres fell away. They turned, like all other music halls in the kingdom, to nude shows, in the hope that, if they could not get one class of audience they would try to carry on with another. They played to quarter-full houses, in the atmosphere of the mausoleum.

But in its last week of existence, the Empire staged a sparkling revue starring Duggie Wakefield and his company. It was not only nostalgia that packed the theatre to the roof during that last week. A quality show will always fill a theatre. I was there at the unforgettable last performance.

Some ten years ago, the theatre was gutted and, though it does not, even now, look all that different outside from what it did long ago, it is now a Supermarket. The Aldershot Hippodrome came down and a block of offices went up, still named Hippodrome corner.

I fancy it was not entirely a falling away in support that finished off these lovely theatres. The fantastic prices offered for the sites was a major factor, possibly.

(This series is drawing to a close. In another couple of articles, or so, Eric Fayne looks at various cinemas he visited and some of the films he saw when on holiday. In a double-length article, under the title "Tinkle, Tinkle Little Star" he relates how he realised a boyhood ambition in connection with some cinemas.)

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Our picture, from the Western Daily Press, shows the famous comedian, Bob Monkhouse, with enthusiastic C.D. reader, Jack Parkhouse of Bath. The picture was taken in Mr. Monkhouse's dressing-room at the Playhouse, Weston-Super-Mare, where he has been starring all the summer.
Mr. Monkhouse is a keen collector of old comic papers, of which he has about 5,000 as well as 1,200 miles of old film.
Lucky Bob!

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