

STORY PAPER  
**COLLECTORS' DIGEST**

*Vol. 26 No. 302*      *FEBRUARY 1972*

**THE RETURN OF YVONNE**



15p

*SPECIAL ENLARGED ISSUE*

15p

# COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by  
W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by  
HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 26

No. 302

FEBRUARY 1972

Price 15p

**NEXT WEEK'S GRAND NUMBER**

**PLUCK 1**

**THE CONTENTS**

**A Thrilling Detective Tale**

**of**  
**WILL SPEARING**

**ENTITLED**  
**HUNTED DOWN!**

**A Rippling Christmas Wild West Yarn of**

**ZENA RACE and**  
**DICK BRITTON**

**ENTITLED**  
**THE GHOST SHIP!**  
**and Another Extra Long Instalment**

**of**  
**ON TURPIN'S HIGHWAY!**

**OUR GRAND HUNDRETHAN SERIAL.**

**All these Attractions on Sale**  
**NEXT FRIDAY . . . . . FROM 14.**

*A WORD  
FROM THE  
SKIPPER*

THE OLD PAPERS -  
and TELEVISION

I believe firmly that a television programme on the old papers - a programme which would be a delight to millions of people in this country - could be done. I believe, just as firmly, that it never will be done.

Most of us, perhaps, watched the "Man Alive" programme which concerned "Comics," which was on the small screen at the end of

1971. It is only fair to state that it was reasonably well done, and was quite entertaining in a limited way. There were flies in the ointment. The production was "bitty," and the constant crashes to accompany the "blams" and "ker-lunks" were distracting; too many people made insignificant comments; the earlier comics were sadly neglected in comparison with the attention given to modern material; the charts showing the popularity of various pictorial characters were chilly in their modernity; several artists made comments which were surprisingly lacking in information.

All the same, the programme did a little of what it set out to do - tell the story, more or less, of the British comic paper. It was exciting to see one or two of our club friends on television, but it must be confessed that they seemed incongruous in this particular show. Most of us have stressed vehemently, in an effort to stem the jolly modern practice of those who know no better, that the old story papers were not comics but something entirely different. We have stressed it over many years. Yet in that television programme we saw our own friends proudly displaying their Union Jacks and Nelson Lee Libraries, just as though these papers which we love so much were really part of the comic stream with which the affair was concerned.

For me, the man who stole the show was Peter Cushing. With a long look down Memory Lane, he spoke of the Gem and of a wonderful character, Tom Merry. In his gentle simplicity of statement, he must have touched a chord in all our hearts. He was truly delightful and delightfully true. He threw into sharp contrast the "blam" and "blah" of what is on sale for youngsters today and the reading matter which had such a profound effect upon some of our own lives.

### THE WISDOM OF COKE

Over the years, I have often quoted Desmond Coke who wrote some of the greatest stiff-cover school stories of all. This month I propose to quote him yet again.

He wrote: "I am only too well aware that in most British minds the idea of Art is bound up indissolubly with that of Gloom, just as good form is considered a sure mark of mediocrity; but you at least can realise that the present fashion for school stories of variegated morals and sanguinary oaths does not cover even a small part in the

full life of School. The average boy remains stubbornly decent in spite of his biographers, and fun - given a free hand - still bulks larger in him than depravity."

Those words are very true to-day. It is remarkable to think that Coke wrote them in 1919. If Art was bound up with Gloom in 1919, there is no gainsaying that it is bound up with Dirt and Violence in 1972. In fact, Art covers a multitude of sins in this Year of Grace.

### THE RIO KID

An Australian reader, Mr. A. Davidson, who lives in Melbourne, recently sent me a stiff-cover book entitled "The Return of the Rio Kid." The author is given as Davis Dresser, and the publishers are Ward, Locke. This is the first time that I have heard of a Rio Kid apart from the creation of Charles Hamilton, and this strikes me as a little curious. Western stories are very popular in this country, and I would have expected that, had the yarns been published in England, the duplication of names would have cropped up in letters from some reader or other. If Ward, Locke have not published them in England, one wonders why not.

Old readers of the Digest may recall that I always felt that there was some story behind the Hamilton "Rio Kid" yarns. They were so geographically accurate, and so convincing. I once explored the possibility that Hamilton might have been given the task of re-writing an overseas series for the British market. My contacts with Charles Hamilton convinced me that he was very fond of the Kid, and it seemed unlikely that he would have felt such patently sincere affection for a character which was not his own.

"The Return of the Rio Kid" reads pleasantly enough, though the writer was certainly not Charles Hamilton. But the story is obviously one of a series, and the character is similar - the Kid is a youngster put on the outlaw trail by injustice, and sought by sheriffs all over the country. It is dated 1940.

Of course, there is another angle. Did another writer have the task of preparing the Hamilton stories for an adult market overseas? Or is the whole thing one giant coincidence?

To appreciate the Hamilton Kid stories it is necessary to read them in the Popular. The B.F.L. versions were too drastically

---



Some critics of the Gem have considered the period from mid-1921 to mid-1923 to be the finest two consecutive years in the whole history of the paper, and this was one of the points I put to Charles Hamilton on the memorable occasion that I visited him. He confessed he was always uncertain about exact dates, and asked me to name some of the series that were published at that time. I gave him a list from memory, and he chuckled as he puffed away at his pipe, and declared, "Good stuff, yes, good stuff!" One series I never mentioned at the time was the one about Levison's past, possibly because I had some misgivings about it, and on re-reading it now I find I am still left with mixed feelings about it.

The series began with the Greyfriars eleven visiting St. Jim's for a cricket match. Trimble asked Bunter why Levison had left Greyfriars, and Bunter untruthfully explained that it was because Levison had been caught robbing Dr. Locke's safe. Trimble retailed this story about St. Jim's, and everyone expected Levison to take the matter to Mr. Railton, but to the surprise of all he refused to do so. Levison was accordingly adjudged a thief on all sides; even Cardew and Clive shared the general opinion, Clive dropping Levison as a friend whilst Cardew considered it made no difference; he even enjoyed seeing a glimpse of the old Levison, which was something new for him.

One of the fascinating aspects of Hamiltoniana is the continual reference back to past events. Levison had left Greyfriars in Magnet 46. He was not technically expelled but he left under a cloud, and Mr. Levison omitted to inform Dr. Holmes of this when his son was sent to St. Jim's in Gem 142, some two years later. The facts came to light in the same story, however, but Levison managed to get Mr. Lumley-Lumley to intercede for him, and Dr. Holmes allowed him to stay. Consequently the series about Levison's past in Gems 759-764 is inconsistent in that it portrays Dr. Holmes as ignorant of the circumstances concerning Levison's departure from Greyfriars. A partly inaccurate reference back to the past is extremely tantalising, to say the least.

---



LET'S BE CONTROVERSIALNo. 167. LET'S HAVE A HAPPY ENDING.

I recall, when I was small, hearing my father and mother discussing the works of Hall Caine. My father did not care for this novelist. "I like to be in clover all the time," said my father. On the other hand, my mother did not mind what vicissitudes the hero and heroine went through providing all turned out well in the end. Both my parents were of the opinion that evil often seemed to triumph in the long run in Hall Caine's novels.

I have never read Hall Caine, so I cannot pass an opinion. I only know that he wrote extensively of the Isle of Man, and his most famous work was "The Woman Thou Gavest Me."

Years ago it was usually assumed that a successful book, film, or play needed a happy ending, though there were a few of each which ended in tragedy. It doesn't seem to matter today, for what they call plays on television have no beginning and no ending. As some of the old sub-writers had the mistaken idea that a description of a sporting event made a story, so TV playwrights today seem to think that a bedroom and swear-words make a play. Not that I'm much of a judge of TV plays. As soon as they start swearing, I switch off, so it is a very long time since I saw a play on the little box.

I have heard it suggested by some critics that story-endings were one of Charles Hamilton's weak spots. I don't know that I subscribe to that view, though I suppose there might be some cases when he seemed to tire of a series and finish it off quickly.

Very contrived endings can be irritating, in a way, even though most of us, like my dad, liked to finish up in clover.

The ending of "The Only Way" was heavily contrived. How everything became clear to the heroes, and how Valence's sister learned it all by standing outside Courtney's study, made it all just a little too syrupy and incredible. But the author was writing for young people - a fact we tend to overlook at times - and for young people everything should end, perhaps, in ecstasy. If everything was to be cleared up to the entire satisfaction of the youngsters, contrivance was essential. We cannot deny that Hamilton relied heavily on contri-

vance at all stages of his career, though he used it so well that he never foundered over it as so many lesser writers did.

The endings - and, indeed, the entire plots - of the two Rebel series form a fascinating contrast. I think that the 1924-25 version was by far the more powerful of the two series. There was more stark drama in it. But the 1932 version made by far the more pleasant reading. Where we were among the nettles in the first great series, we were in clover when the repeat came.

The ending of the first series, in 1925, was far more true-to-life and far more credible, especially as in the first series Wharton had actually been guilty of some of the things of which he was unjustly suspected in the 1932 version.

I always felt that the 1932 series was just slightly let down by its contrived ending. There was, in fact, a natural ending at the close of the penultimate story of the last series. I cannot help feeling sometimes that the series would have been better, artistically, had the long story come to its end then. (Those who disagree can, justifiably, point to the Schoolboys' Own reprint which actually ended in this way. It was not satisfactory, but perhaps this was due to the fact that most of us knew that it was not the real ending. If Hamilton had made his own ending then, it would have been a very different matter.)

Years ago I once suggested that the final story of the second Rebel series was something of an anti-climax. Charles Hamilton himself not unreasonably, took me to task for this. He had never, he claimed, been guilty of an anti-climax in his stories.

I think he was right, really. The final story was not an anti-climax. But, for some reason, after the tale had worked to a smashing finish, he did not make it the finish. Maybe to show us that we could never take anything for granted, he turned down the opportunity of a natural and dramatic end of the story, and let it run on so that the hackneyed act of bravery formed a contrivance to put everything right in the end.

I have always regarded the Schoolboy Pug series as one of the very greatest Gem dramas, mainly on account of the splendid characterisation it contained. Here, as in the First Rebel series, we had anything but a happy ending, but, nevertheless, a more credible one.

Drama was not sacrificed to put the reader in clover. A great tale which left one with a sigh rather than a smile.

A fine series which, in my view, rather fizzled out, was the delightful one about Prout as Headmaster. It ended in a rush, just as though the writer had suddenly remembered something else he wanted to do with his characters.

I have never made it a secret that, in my book, the Stacey series of 1935 was the greatest Hamilton series of them all. But even here, the contrivance of the ending left one just very slightly dissatisfied. Quelch, from behind a tree, heard Fishy talking to Wharton in the mistaken belief that he was addressing Stacey. And the cat was out of the bag.

Maybe there was nothing wrong with any of the endings. Maybe it was just that we disliked parting with a series which we had enjoyed so much for so long.

There could be no criticism of the China series for its ending. It worked up to a stunning climax, and the series was followed with a pleasant little tale concerning the journey home. We could not ask for more.

\*\*\*\*\*

### THIS MONTH'S SPECIALS

Triumph. 7 Bound Vols. as new. 30's. Also unbound copies.

Wizard. 3 Bound Vols. late 20's, nondescript covers, contents V.G.C. 200 loose.

Skipper. 30's. 150 V.G.C.

Young Britain. Bound Vol. and unbound copies.

Thriller. Bound Vol. 400 unbound copies.

Modern Boy. Bound Vol. and 500 unbound copies.

Greyfriars Holiday Annuals. Large stock but selling quickly! All except 1920 available.

Many duplicates. Hurry!

Picture Show. Vols. 1 and 2, publishers covers.

Boys' Cinema. 1930's.

Comics. Pre-1920 Jester, Chips, Comic Cuts, Pluck, etc. About 200 left.

Young Folks Weekly Budget. Large, thick, early Volumes. Prince Pippin, etc.

Just a few items from the largest stock of Old Boys' Books in the country!

Top prices paid for complete collections or surplus items. You'll be agreeably surprised at my offer: send in your wants and jog my memory from time to time!

## **NORMAN SHAW**

84 BELVEDERE ROAD, LONDON, SE19 2HZ. Tel: 01-771-9857.

---

CHARLES HAMILTON — A NEW LOOK

by Harry Dowler

From time to time we read in the C.D. from many enthusiastic Hamiltonians, including the Editor of C.D., that Charles Hamilton is the greatest writer of school stories in the world.

Our Editor, in the introduction to "A Christmas Comedy" by Charles Hamilton in the 300th issue of C.D., again makes the same positive assertion, but in slightly different words.

Now what are the true facts about Charles Hamilton's stories? I do not think that anyone can deny that more people have read Charles Hamilton's school stories than any other school story writer. But does the number of readers of a story give a true indication of an author's literary ability? Of course it does not! The Daily Mirror has probably ten times as many readers as The Guardian, but does that mean that the Mirror is a greater newspaper than the Guardian? You know it does not!

Now regarding these continued reiterations about Hamilton being the world's greatest school-story writer; I am not sure that there is any such thing! There is no such thing as the world's most beautiful woman. There is no such thing as the world's cleverest man, and there is no such thing as the greatest in many other spheres of life.

Let us now take our examination a little further and probe deeply into Charles Hamilton's reputation in the outside world, that is to say outside of the pages of the Collectors' Digest. A thorough examination of Hamiltonian affairs as given in the pages of Collectors' Digest, and a thorough examination of Hamiltonian affairs outside the pages of C.D., reveals quite a different story!

After receiving the supreme accolade as the world's greatest school story writer, one would naturally expect to see Charles Hamilton's books bulging on the shelves of our public libraries and large booksellers' shops. But far from bulging, Hamilton books are practically non-existent! Sometimes, after a very prolonged search, you will unearth two, or perhaps, three, Hamilton books. But these two or three books are only to be found on very rare occasions.

---

Libraries and booksellers seem to be contemptuous of the world's greatest school story writer! On the other hand, while Hamilton works are so scornfully rejected, a schoolboy called Jennings, the brain-child of an author named Anthony Buckeridge, is given very ostentatious publicity. Also standing out with almost vulgar prominence are books by Captain W. E. Johns and E. Nesbit, and stacks of volumes of "Tom Brown's Schooldays." Many other books, school and adventure, are to be found on these shelves, but Hamilton is a minus quantity.

Another strange variation from the fulsome praise of Hamilton in the pages of C.D. is to be found in the pages of the many histories of Children's Literature. In these volumes - and there are many - Hamilton is practically ignored. Most ignore him altogether. Some dismiss him in two or three lines. One author, however, devotes 2½ pages to him. This is Mrs. MARGERY FISHER. She refers to him as Frank Richards, as though totally unaware that his real name is Charles Hamilton. Included in her sarcastic interpretation of Frank Richards' work, is a short extract dealing with Bunter. She ends this extract with the following caustic comment. "Nostalgia, alone, can carry you through this sort of thing."

At this stage I must explain that I am a completely unbiased neutral. I freely admit that I am unable to read Hamilton with any pleasure, and I freely admit that I find the school stories of E. S. Brooks very readable and amusing, and I am a great admirer of the adult fiction of Brooks when writing under the name of Victor Gunn.

To all readers of C.D. I would say this. Staunchly adhere to your chosen favourite whether it be Hamilton, Brooks, Sexton Blake, or anybody else. Don't let caustic comments by critics destroy your happiness. But a word of warning. You are not reading literature! You are not reading Lewis Carroll, W. W. Jacobs, E. Nesbit, or dare I say it, Talbot Baines Reed, or Thomas Hughes's "Tom Brown's Schooldays."

The great school story authors such as Talbot Baines Reed, Andrew Home, Fred Swainson, Harold Avery, P. G. Wodehouse, and many others, and not forgetting Charles Hamilton and E. S. Brooks, are all unique and completely different, one from the other, and defy all intelligent comparison.

---

There is no best, any more than you can say that a Jam Puff is the best of all toothsome morsels.

\*\*\*\*\*

THE MYSTERY OF  
MAY P. JAPP SOLVED

by W. O. G. Lofts

One of the biggest mysteries still remaining in our hobby concerns May P. Japp, the author of the well-known 'Betty' stories in Young Folks Tales. These are much sought after by collectors, and it could be said that people have been searching for them almost a lifetime with so few available. The late Professor Mason (as Otto Maurer) wrote many delightful articles for the C.D. Annuals on the Henderson type of fairy-tale stories, and I know he made many fruitless attempts in research trying to gather any data regarding Miss Japp. Although he put forward the theory that she could have been related to Alexander Hay Japp, famous man of literature, and personal friend of R. L. Stevenson, it was only recently, and after many years of research on and off - that I discovered that he was correct. May Paul Japp, was actually the daughter of Alex H. Japp, and was born at Albion Square, Dalson, North London, on the 8th November, 1870. Her father who was a great friend of James Henderson the publisher, no doubt used his influence to get her work accepted with the famous Red Lion Square firm. (Actually he also got R.L.S. "Treasure Island" accepted. It was called "The Sea Cook" originally.) Miss Japp eventually in her own right became one of their star authors - writing the Betty stories alternatively with those of 'Mabel' by Albert E. Bull. With Henderson's being bought out by the A.P. in 1922, Miss Japp found herself like Frank Richards and the Magnet in 1940, though she did have one story published by the new firm. A spinster, and living at Pollards Hill, Norbury, she lived only a short distance from E. S. Brooks. She died of pneumonia on the 22nd March, 1925, aged 54, an early, sad end to such a gifted writer, whose work is so eagerly collected in our circle today.

\*\*\*\*\*

WANTED: Nelson Lee Lib.; Union Jack; Sexton Blake Library not after 1937. Boys' Friend Lib.

H. VERNON, 5 CILLMAN ST., CHELTENHAM, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA 3192.

# BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

I am grateful to Mr. George Beal for the excellent information on two of the Union Jack serials. Mr. Cyril Rowe also gave me the name of the author of Convict 99. The story of Ralph Rashleigh, however, I

→ A THRILLING DETECTIVE NOVEL INTRODUCING →  
**SEXTON BLAKE & ZENITH, THE ALBINO!**



found most interesting and will certainly look out for a copy of the paperback edition. It should then be easy to compare it with the Union Jack version.

Thanks are also due to Eric, our Editor, for the pictures of the Detective Weekly and the Union Jack in the January issue.

Since writing my last piece for the January issue I have received a couple of articles for Blakiana, but of course I can always do with some more so that I can plan in advance which ones to use.



---

SEXTON BLAKE  
AND HIS AUTHORS

by William Lister

If your hobby happens to be reading and writing, and if you happen to know a good deal about reading, including of course, where to buy or borrow certain books; and you know little about writing, then the obvious thing is to apply your knowledge of reading matter to good purpose and secure some books on how to write, be it fiction or articles.

Let us assume that we have picked up a book on fiction. In it we are told to bring out the characters of such persons we choose to write about. Do not, repeat, do not, make the mistake of having a cool steady character losing his temper and kicking the cat during the course of the story. Keep your characters true to type throughout your story. Your readers expect it, we are told. I can see the point and the possibilities in so far as the creator of a character can develop his creation. But how about fiction characters that have to suffer a number of authors, and who has had to suffer this more than Sexton Blake?

I really think that Sexton Blake has had more pens behind his name than any fictional character you could mention. In the main the authors have built round the character of Blake as most of us think of him. There may have been odd occasions when he did not run true to type. I think this is why a number of us did not take kindly to the "new look" type of Sexton Blake detective story of recent years. There were many times when he did not run to type at all. New readers would not be affected by this but some of us who have read Blake tales for years were certainly taken aback and small wonder. The writers were transgressing a golden rule of writing fiction.

Imagine a James Bond who was no James Bond, a Sherlock Holmes who was no Holmes. A Dr. Fu Manchu who was no real Dr. Fu Manchu. Your only hope would be to foster your fake character on to a new unsuspecting public. Do not try it on the old-timers, you would be doomed to failure.

"Tarzan of the Apes" has made it; due to the influence of TV, children today accept an Oxford Don kind of character, but we older fry know too much to fall for that. You cannot be reared for years among

---

the apes and then suddenly become someone with a Lord Haw Haw approach. They have done with Tarzan what Bernard Shaw tried to do with Eliza in Pygmalion.

Recently I have been perusing a few copies of the Sexton Blake Library of yesteryear - the fourpenny type. Taking three copies at random I have picked isolated incidents that bring out the character of Sexton Blake. I have noticed that some writers just push ahead with the plot using the name of Blake and Tinker as the detectives but never mentioning a characteristic of either. They could use any other names for their tale, it would not make any difference, Blake and Tinker being mere names mentioned in passing. However, let me illustrate by passages from what I would call, true Blake authors. What is Sexton Blake's outlook? Here is a glimpse from "The Soho Cafe Crime" by Pierre Quiroule, chapter 4 page 20. "Do you think it is possible?" Tinker asked. "Nothing is impossible," was Blake's non-committal reply. Is Blake ever disturbed? Sexton Blake could hardly repress a grunt of surprise" or again "Blake was a little puzzled" or again "Blake was not easy in his mind regarding the problem."

From "The Truth About Lord Trench" by Donald Stuart, we all know that uneasy feeling in our mind on occasion, "You look worried," said Coutts, "I am," Blake admitted. Is Blake ever dog-tired? "The night was very still, Blake waited and waited, his thoughts began to wander, he closed his eyes and dozed. But years of experience had given him the power to sleep with one eye open" again from Donald Stuart "Hour after hour he sat motionless, his eyelids drooping, the only sign of wakefulness about him being the smoke that curled from his pipe and the occasional movement he made to re-charge it." The alertness of Sexton Blake? Again from Donald Stuart in a sentence "Blake pricked up his ears." Does the reader like coffee? So does Blake according to G. H. Teed in "The Crimson Belt;" "Yes, go ahead while I make some coffee, Blake busied himself over the coffee machine."

As in the case of all detectives Blake had cultivated the art of observance, the following quote from the Pierre Quiroule story shows - "That man has an interesting face," said Blake. "I think I have met him before" (after a comment that it was eleven years ago). "Oh eleven years is nothing to Blake," said Dr. Bailey. "He can remember the

---

colour of his eyes when he was born."

Donald Stuart gives another glimpse in "The Truth About Lord Trench," "Taking a swift glance at the new arrival as he followed the page-boy into the lounge, Sexton Blake observed Mr. Adolph Smith to be a man nearly 50 years of age, of medium height and of military bearing. A fair moustache closely clipped and turning grey, sprouted from his upper lip, there was a small cleft in his chin and his eyes were somewhat protuberant. He wore good clothes, in fact he was dapper, almost foppish in his dress and general bearing."

My reader will notice I have underlined "a swift glance." I think I would not be able to describe a person so, even after staring hard at him for a quarter of an hour. But then I'm not cut out to be a detective.

However, when next you settle down to a Sexton Blake yarn watch out for the little "asides" on the characters of Blake and Tinker. They show if the author is really interested in writing a "Blake" tale or just using the name to sell the story.



## THE RETURN OF SEXTON BLAKE

by J.L.

Although all our old beloved periodicals are alas no more, and although much as I liked reading the Magnet, Gem, Nelson Lee, and the rest, I think I was really more sad at the finish of the Sexton Blake Library than the others. It wasn't because I liked the Sexton Blake Library; in fact, the "Modern" Blake was one of my pet dislikes. After reading one or two of the "Moderns" I did not read any more although I still bought them to keep the flag flying. The old Union Jack and Detective Weekly had a special appeal of their own, and that's why I often wonder why these people who keep bringing back Sexton Blake for a short few weeks or months don't have a real try to bring him back for good. I know it would be a winner and when I have given you my ideas of how it could be done you may agree I have something.

Sherlock Holmes with his gas-lit streets and all the old-fashioned settings is still going strong, and much as the Holmes supporters shout about this I still say Sexton Blake was much better to read about and enjoy than Holmes, but I mean the old Blake not the

modern one.

To put Blake back on the map for many years to come I would launch "The Sexton Blake Weekly." It would be the same size as the Detective Weekly with a long complete story of pre-war and earlier, Sexton Blake. It would also run a weekly true life story of the most famous people of the times - TV stars, sports stars, stage stars, etc. I would put the cream of the earlier writers and stories that would make the "Sexton Blake Weekly" a must. There would be a cover second to none, and the most important thing of all, I would personally write to every newsagent in large print, asking them to give the magazine a prominent place on their book counter. I think 9p would be a fair price. I am sure such a weekly today would have a good sale, the old staunch readers would be there to a man/woman, and I think the new generation would take Blake to their hearts. To prove a point I would also now and then have a "Modern" Blake story and invite the readers to write to the Editor and give an opinion on the "Old" and the "New." I truly believe this new magazine would be a winner. What do you believe?



DID SEXTON BLAKE  
HAVE A BEST PERIOD?

by Gordon Scott

The answer to the question, "did Sexton Blake have a best period?" is, in my mind, "NO!"

For other characters of the past who have since ceased publication, the answer could be "yes." But for a character who goes on and on there can surely be no best period, and this I will attempt to prove.

For instance, take the words of the editor in a 1958 S.B.L. ... "On the other hand, an interest in the past decades of Blakian lore is perfectly reasonable - if accompanied by an equally healthy interest in the continuation of the Blake evolution."

The words he speaks are reasonable. One can't be a Sexton Blake fan and love, say, 1928, and hate 1971!

But just, for a second, suppose that Sexton Blake had stayed in one period. Do you know what would have happened? He would have



# Nelson Lee Column

A LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S

.....

from Jim Cook

EZRA QUIRKE! Will this junior ever be forgotten? Will he, like many famous and infamous characters that go to make up the history of St. Frank's, will he eventually be consigned to the limbo of the unrecalled? I don't think so. For his name is forever cropping up for no apparent reason whatsoever. An incident in the Junior Common room the other day will show you what I mean. I think it was Walter Church of Study D in the Ancient House who was in conversation with McClure of the same study and a break in the hubbub that was going on suddenly heard McClure remark ... "it was a quirk of fate..." Quirke! The name went round like wildfire. Was he back? Where is he? We don't want him here! Questions were being asked excitedly until Nipper put a stop to the babel by jumping on a chair and shouted for silence.

There have been some strange people at St. Frank's; headmasters, form masters, juniors and seniors, visitors and even domestics, but I doubt if ever there will be such a mysterious and exceptional junior as Ezra Quirke. I use the word exceptional with caution yet with confidence for Quirke was a character born far in advance of his time.

His knowledge of the Occult sciences was tremendous although it must be understood Quirke's supernatural powers were never recorded in depth by the chronicler. For obvious reasons only the lighter side of Quirke's actions and spiritual communication with departed souls was allowed to be published. But the whole of St. Frank's from the Head and Nelson Lee down to the fags and the domestics were not to know that in later years penetration into the Occult by deep study and scientific research would accept Quirke's powers as a prochronism.

It is rather a pity that many of the events at St. Frank's were recorded pro bono publico rather than the sad truth, but as the years were to advance the stranglehold that existed preventing the full story to be published were to loosen and a wide and more comprehensive survey of the St. Frank's saga would be encouraged.

The Ezra Quirke story demands fulfilment. There is a lot that

wasn't told. The account of this strange boy's short stay at St. Frank's was unjustifiably terse.

Quirke makes a reappearance later at Raithmere Castle and again gives a display of his extraordinary powers. But the record of this episode is fitted to the occasion although a glimpse of the future is there for everyone to see.

I wonder if Quirke will ever return to the school. He is certainly a striking personality. He has that magnetic aura that some people have about them, yet you feel a sort of discomfort when in his presence.

As far as I know, there is nothing to prevent him making a come-back. He was never put on trial by the police for his alleged conspiracy with his uncle to defraud Singleton and Lord Pippinton. The fact that Quirke's turning up again during the Raithmere Castle affair proves he is at liberty to go where he likes. He always pleads he was under his uncle's influence when he was at St. Frank's, so it could well be that with his uncle in prison still, his return to St. Frank's could be accepted by Dr. Stafford.

At present, Ezra Quirke still lives with an aunt at Market Donning, a very ancient village about 16 miles from St. Frank's. His actions at Raithmere Castle, near Market Donning, during a Christmas party given by Reggie Pitt, were ridiculed because what happened to create ghostly visitations and mysterious three-dimensional effects were in fact created from a material source.

This event rather detracts than highlights the supernatural powers of Quirke. It is to his credit that as he was fooled so was all the St. Frank's party.

Nobody knows what became of the owl that used to sit on Quirke's shoulder. We never saw it when Quirke was at Raithmere Castle. The question often is asked and even Quirke himself doesn't seem to know or won't tell.

Perhaps we heard it one night walking down Bellton Lane as we were returning from a visit to Bannington cinema. We heard a screech from Bellton Wood that was never made by an ordinary owl.

But I don't think we have seen the last of Ezra Quirke. We know where he lives and I am thinking of taking a small party to have our

future read. If I do I will tell you all about it for whatever old Quirke is he's certainly capable of acting as medium. Whether we will believe all what he tells us is another matter.



### BARRING-OUT

by R. J. Godsave

The writing of a barring-out in a school story offers very great scope to any authors and enables them to depart from the usual run of incidents to those of excitement and activity.

Nine months after the first St. Frank's story E. S. Brooks wrote the Hunter the Hun series which featured the first barring-out in the Nelson Lee Library. Although O.S. No. 151 was entitled "The Barring-Out at St. Frank's" it was more of a rebellion than a barring-out.

After receiving tyrannical treatment from Mr. Hunter the Remove rebelled and barricaded themselves in the old vaults beneath the monastery ruins situated in a corner of the Triangle. By throwing petrol over the faggot wall Hunter burned the defences down and caused the rebels to retreat through the old tunnel leading to the deserted quarry on Bannington Moor.

Had it not been for a secret cavern in the tunnel known to Nipper, in which the Remove were able to hide, the rebellion would have collapsed. In due course, the rebels were able to defy Mr. Hunter by holding the half-finished castle-like building known as 'Willard's Folly' on Willard's Island in the River Stowe against all-comers.

Making a comparison between this and the Howard Martin series shows that the unprepared rebellion by the boys in the Hunter series was not repeated. This second rebellion against authority was indeed a barring-out in its true sense, as the rebel Remove secured themselves in the West Wing of the Ancient House. Here they had a kitchen, store rooms stocked with food and a dormitory at their disposal, the result of some forethought on the part of the boys. Whereas, food and water supplies in the Hunter rebellion were, more or less, left to chance, the defences were of a frail nature, this was not the case in subsequent barring-outs in the Lee.

There is no doubt that as Brooks gathered strength as author of

---

the Nelson Lee Library he tightened up loose-ends that occurred in the very early issues.

\*\*\*\*\*  
 In this series, Eric Fayne recalls some of the cinemas and theatres he knew in the knockabout days of his youth.

### THE SHIPMAN AND KING CIRCUIT

I always look back wistfully to the family cinemas. In an article in our recent Annual I mentioned one such cinema at Sunninghill, and, in those days, there were a great many others. When I was a youngster, cinemas had individuality. Owners or managers did their own booking and planned their own special attractions to suit their patrons. The small circuits gave their managers freedom to paddle their own caroes, to plough their own furrows, and to mix their own metaphors. A.C. circuits swallowed one house after another, managers hardly seemed to have a voice of their own, let alone a soul.

It is difficult to think that, in later years, a great showman like Vernon Keith of the Kennington Theatre, would have been able to put on his fascinating shows which he often varied in timing and content from night to night.

One great exception to the soullessness of the circuits was that of Shipman & King. But this was a small circuit, and no cinema on the circuit was ever allowed to lose its individuality.

To the best of my belief, the S. & K. circuit started at Maldon in Essex. When I was a child they had a small cinema named the Hippocrene in Maldon. Not long before the war they closed it and opened the fine new Embassy in that quaint little town.

One of the best modern cinemas I know is the Embassy at Esher. This theatre is unusual in that the stalls are raked downwards and then raked upwards towards the screen. The result is perfect viewing for all. Even today, the Embassy at Esher caters mainly for the family audience. Nothing tasteless or merely sensational is put on at the Embassy. The manager there seems to be able to use his own initiative in a way which is denied most managers these days.

People who have driven along the A.3. may recall another S. & K. house - the Savoy at Cobham, also built just before the war. It has closed in comparatively recent years, and its charming architecture has given way to the monstrous ugliness of modern times.

The Savoy was a delightful house, but I think it must always have been a white elephant. Though on the main road, it stood badly for the little villages of Cobham and Spoke D'Abernon, which were well away from the A.3. I visited it a few times - I recall seeing the delightful "Robson's Choice" which much overrated "Mrs. Miniver" there - but I never saw the Savoy more than a quarter of an hour. I would imagine that it never was a flourishing house.

Shipman & King had their monopolies. They owned both the cinemas in Braintree, Reigate, Horley, Leighton Buzzard, and Ruislip. During the war I had a school teacher who lived at Eastcote, and, after driving her home, I would often drop in at the Pavilion or the Astoria at Ruislip. Many a time the air-raid warning sounded while I was in one or the other of the Ruislip cinemas. But S. & K. never made the mistake, where they had a monopoly, of letting one theatre become merely an overflow house for the other.

Of course, when I knew them, they operated solely in the smaller towns. Places like the Pavilion at Hoddesdon, the Savoy at Fareham, the Regent at Crowborough, and the Regent at Rye. Such places retained their charm, long after individuality became a rarity.

---

# DANNY'S DIARY

## FEBRUARY 1922

There is another scandal of sorts in Hollywood. A man named William Desmond Taylor was found murdered on February 1st, and film stars like Mabel Normand and Mary Miles Minter have been called to give evidence at the inquest. So far, nobody has been charged with the murder.

There has been another full month of the Rebellion Series in the Rookwood stories in the Boys' Friend. In "Jimmy Silver's Journey" Jimmy was being sent home, expelled by Mr. Manders. But Jimmy got away from the prefect who was seeing him off, and returned to Rookwood, and we had "Jimmy Silver's Barring-Out." In "The Fighting Fourth," Mr. Manders called in a number of tough bargees to help him put down the rebellion. In "A Fight to the Finish," Mr. Dalton took a hand, though he had been sacked by Mr. Manders. Mr. Dalton sent the bargees packing, stopped the rebellion, and took command of the school until the Head could return. This has been a long series (though each story these days has been pretty short). Though there is a sameness about barring-out series, this one has been quite good in its way.

The Schoolgirls' Own (2d) has given away a souvenir of the coming Royal Wedding. There is a new paper out called "Sports Fun" (2d) which is mainly about football. It contains two pages of drawings by Tom Webster, the famous cartoonist of the Daily Mail.

Flour has gone up in price, and the cost of a large loaf has gone up to tenpence.

A man named Edward Black has been found guilty of murdering his wife in Bodmin by putting arsenic in her food. An insurance company, the City Equitable Fire Insurance Co., has crashed, and several of the officials have been arrested.

The Gem has been absolutely first-class this month. The stunning series about rivalry between St. Jim's and Rylcombe Grammar School has continued for 3 more weeks. It has been a great series. In "Wacky Dang of Rylcombe," Gordon Gay turned up at St. Jim's as an Indian prince. In "Grundy and the Grammar School," the great Grundy decided to take matters into his own hands and deal with the Grammar

---

School. Needless to say, he was unsuccessful, but Gordon Gay was sentenced by his Headmaster to be flogged. In the final tale of the series, "St. Jim's to the Rescue," the St. Jim's chums had a plan to make Dr. Monk grateful to Gay, so that Gay might be let off his flogging. They failed. A really great series of its type.

Final of the month "Taking Down Aubrey Racke" was tip-top. Racke caused Grimes, the grocer's boy, to fall off his bike - and then disgraced himself when Grimes insisted on fighting him. The tale ended with Racke despised by everyone, but it will continue next week.

On the back of the last Gem of the month was a picture of Martin Clifford. He looks young, very good-looking, and really distinguished.

Landru, the Frenchman who murdered 10 women and a boy, has been executed in France.

The price of electricity has been decreased by 25% all over the country. The cheapest towns in the country for electricity are Wimbledon and Guildford.

A fairly good month in the cinemas. The one I really liked the best was George Arliss in "Disraeli." Lon Chaney was in "The Penalty;" Monte Blue in "The Fighting Schoolmaster" (that sounded like Mr. Dalton, but wasn't). Fay Compton in "Judge Not;" Anna Q. Nilsson in "Why Girls Leave Home;" and, finally, Jack Holt and Wanda Hawley in an exciting film named "Held by the Enemy."

A marvellous transformation has taken place in the Popular. It has been permanently enlarged to 28 pages, and the price has gone up to tuppence. The Cedar Creek series has started with the story where Frank Richards reaches Canada and first meets his cousin, Bob Lawless. The Greyfriars stories are a wonderful series where Vernon-Smith decides to get rid of all his enemies from the school. The only new tale is the one about St. Jim's, but that is not by the real writer of St. Jim's so it doesn't count for much. Rookwood is represented by an old series about an early Rookwood barring-out. There is a painting competition, a serial "Gan Waga's Island" by Sidney Drew, and a free plate of a L.N.W.R. engine. A splendid paper, and I have now ordered it every week. It also contains a 3-page Billy Bunter's Weekly, which is awfully silly, but awfully good fun. I have always liked the Popular,

and it is now better than ever.

While the Gem and the Boys' Friends and the Pop are so very good, the poor old Magnet limps along, a long way behind. First story was "The Remove Rugger Team." Then a new series started with "Mr Bunter - Form-Master" in which Wally Bunter comes to Greyfriars to become master of the First Form. I suppose we have to forget that Wally is Billy's double - and the same age. In "The Bunter's Conspiracy," Billy and Sammy Bunter plan to make things hot for Wally.

In "The Mystery of the Warning," Mr Wally Bunter gets a warning to the effect that "Someone is coming into your Form, and into your life, who will make things decidedly unpleasant for you. Be on your guard." Two new boys arrive - Newman and Smith. Newman is accused of stealing a stamp, and Smith and Loder plot to get Wally the sack. Newman is expelled, and Wally fights Loder - "a terrific sledgehammer blow swept Loder away." But the Head is displeased with Wally, and is also sorry that Newman was unjustly expelled. It all goes on next month, unfortunately.

Doug has some Sexton Blake Libraries this month. "The Case of the Cultured Pearls" introduced George Marsden Plummer. "The Derelicts" was a sea tale about someone named Laban Creed, and "The Motor Coach Mystery" was a good one about Kew and Carlac.

- - -

**EDITORIAL COMMENT:** Plenty of mysteries came out of Hollywood on celluloid, but none was more strange than the real-life death of William Desmond Taylor with a bullet in his back during the evening of February 1st, 1922. Taylor, himself, was a mysterious character. His parentage was English-Irish, but little is known of his life before he appeared on the Hollywood scene as a director. He directed many successful films, including several of Mary Pickford's. He had deserted his wife, and she heard nothing from him till she saw him one evening in a film some four years after he went out of her life.

The murder seemed to be motiveless. Nothing was stolen. The positioning of the wound in his back and the bullet-holes in his clothing proved that he had been standing with his hands above his head when the shot was fired. Taylor had been urging a drive against the narcotics racket, but there was no belief that his death was a result of his activities in that direction.

The inquest was something of a sensational trial. Mabel Normand was known to have called on him not long before he was killed. A 17-year old star named Mary Miles Minter was openly and passionately in love with him. Nearby neighbours were the Douglas Macleans and Edna Purviance and these people testified to hearing a shot while they were at dinner. It was a strange affair with many rumours. Mabel Normand had a film "Mickey" about to be released. It was delayed, but was eventually released and a success. To this day the murderer of Taylor has never been found, nor has any reason for the murder been discovered.

---

THOSE MAGNIFICENT MEN  
IN THEIR BORING MACHINES

by J.E.M.

Mole-like vehicles which can carry men beneath the earth's surface - ought one to call them "subterrines"? - are old favourites of popular fiction. Not so long ago, the T.V. puppet series "Thunderbirds" boasted a mechanical device of this kind. More recently the Black Sapper, who was delighting readers of the Rover a generation ago, reappeared complete with his underground machine, the "Worm," in the pages of Hotspur. Mention "boring machine" to any veteran reader of boys' papers and almost certainly it will be the Sapper's name which springs to his mind. But the Sapper never had the field to himself.

Around 1931, and only a year or two after he had made his bow in the Rover, another and similar character called Cordova popped up in the then new paper, Bullseye. The evidence, however, does not suggest that he was a crib from the Sapper. Quite possibly the reverse in fact. For, in 1927, approximately two years before the Sapper's debut and four years before Cordova's appearance in Bullseye, the Sexton Blake Library published a story called "The Case of the Human Mole" (No. 91, Second Series). This introduced a boring-machine operator to whom Cordova bears a particularly striking resemblance, but who might also have inspired the Sapper's creation as well. This character, named Steffson, was dubbed like Cordova as the "Human Mole," and even anticipated him in physical appearance. His underground machine, too, foreshadowed at least one characteristic of Cordova's in having only a single drilling-head (the Sapper's "Worm," by contrast, was a reversible vehicle with drills fore and aft). More remarkable and significant still, Steffson and Cordova each used his machine to effect the dramatic rescue of a criminal from the condemned cell, and this incident was only one of many narrative similarities between the S.B.L. story and the Bullseye series.

It is, in fact, arguable that apart from their different names, Steffson and Cordova were one and the same character. The writer of the S.B.L. story was Houghton Townley who had already contributed to the pre-First World War paper, Fun and Fiction - a paper from

---



# NEWS OF THE CLUBS

## MIDLAND

### Meeting held on 14th December, 1971.

Everyone would agree that the 1971 "Grand Study Feed" was as fine an introduction to the Festive Season as one could wish for and a fitting conclusion to the year's programme in the Midlands! In all, a dozen enthusiasts attended this very jolly party, all bearing offerings of varied suitable and seasonal nature, until our dining table was truly "groaning with good things" (as George Chatham has been known to observe).

Space precludes a full catalogue of all the Christmas fare we consumed, but mention must be made of Chairman Ivan Webster's now traditional giant pork pie; of President Jack Corbett's splendidly labelled bottles of remarkably efficacious "Cough Cure" attributed to one, Gosling, recently back from Jerez, one concluded; finally of Gerald Price's superb Stilton cheese, which could well have originated his quotation "England hath need of thee!" A wondrous repast indeed thanks to all who contributed such appetising fare.

Amid all the merriment, Tom Porter managed to present his customary Anniversary Number, Nelson Lee Library (New Series) No. 189, "The Peril of the Haunted Room," dated 14th December, 1929, plus the Collectors' Item being the Wernham Opus for 1971, "The Mysterious X," which was much admired.

We were also delighted to have with us Mrs. Hamilton-Wright with news of the impending publication of her biography of her famous uncle, Charles Hamilton, in the near future.

Ultimately, the last toast having been proposed, the final crumbs consumed, amid much well-wishing and great good humour, we all dispersed into the night, Christmas bound with our respective families (and many promises of a good read over the holiday, if personal conditions afforded that singular luxury, for singular it must be indeed).

Our February Meeting will take place at the Birmingham Theatre Centre on Tuesday, 29th (Leap Year!) from 7.30 p.m. onwards.

IAN BENNETT, Vice-Chairman.

### CAMBRIDGE

Six devotees have formed a Cambridge Old Boys' Book Club, and the President, W. O. G. Lofts, an authority in the field, has attended two meetings at the home of the Chairman, Danny Posner, at 3 Long Road, Cambridge.

Besides meeting monthly, members hope to take an active part in the hobby, and the first project will be a study of the life and background of John Nix Pentelow, who was born at Somersham, near St. Ives, 15 miles from Cambridge.

The Club hope to mark the centenary of Pentelow's birth on March 26, 1872, with a luncheon and exhibition in or near Somersham next month, and plans are in hand for a publication to celebrate the occasion.

Mr. Posner has promised to write an appreciation of Pentelow's work, Jack Overhill a retrospective piece on the stories as he remembers them from his youth, and Deryck Harvey a survey of memories of Pentelow in Somersham today.

Mr. Lofts will write a potted biography of Pentelow.

Founder members of the Cambridge Club also include Bill Thurbon (Secretary), Vic Hearn and Michael Holliday, and the Chairman has already been interviewed for regional television and radio, and a story has appeared in the local evening press.

Three new members, Harold Forecast of Cambridge, who has been writing for "The Rover" for the past six years, E. Armitage, headmaster of Soham (Cams.) Grammar School, and R. Underhill of Harlow, Essex, were attending the January meeting.

\* \* \*

### NORTHERN

#### Meeting of January 8th, 1972.

The raw, foggy weather did not deter a round dozen members attending the opening meeting of 1972.

After the Library had been attended to, we were formally welcomed by our Chairman, Geoffrey Wilde.

Correspondence included a letter of appreciation from Eric

---

Fayne of the Club's illuminated testimonial presented to him as a tribute to his editorship of the C.D. on the occasion of the 300th issue. He had received it (appropriately enough) on Christmas Eve and been greatly moved and pleased by it.

There was also a letter from Breeze Bentley with information that he has prepared a talk on the Rookwood Scene, which we look forward to hearing probably at our May meeting.

A long discussion on Modern Youth - Is It Illiterate? broke out spontaneously. No conclusion arrived at: best summed up by this limerick from Magnet 1268:

Dicky Nugent, of literary fame,  
As an author has made quite a name.  
His spelling - ah, well!  
It's so hard to tell  
Whether Dicky or Twigg is to blame.

After refreshments, John Cox gave us his selections of "Desert Island" books. His choice, which he made known with apt and witty comment, was "Boys Will Be Boys," the "Bunter Court" Magnets, and "William and the Evacuees." Like William, John overcame all difficulties and was "rescued" in time to go home at 9.20 with the rest of us.

NOSILLA JAY

\* \* \*

### SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

An unforgettable evening was enjoyed by members through the generosity of member Ron Brockman and his wife Marion. On the evening of Tuesday, December 14th, members pressed the button of the intercom at the door of The Graduates Club and, in the best Blake tradition, gave the secret password "Mr. Brockman party." Having gained admittance thus, they were ushered into the inner sanctum where the atmosphere of old world hospitality surrounded them with the Spirit of Christmas.

Seated at the tastefully decorated table in the soft candlelight, members were regaled with a rich and varied menu featuring gastronomical delights which gladdened the hearts of all. A fitting climax to

the meal was a giant Christmas pudding, which together with the "flaming" coffee, gave a charming Dickensian touch to this superlative evening.

Greetings from friends far and near were conveyed by the Secretary, including messages of goodwill from Arthur Holland of Wellington, N.S.W., Albert Vernon of Victoria, Jack Hughes of Queensland, Bill Hall of Hammondville, N.S.W., David Hobbs of U.S.A., Jim Cook, N.Z., and last but not least our good friend, Josie Packman. A very clever greeting card drawn by Bob Whiter was much appreciated, as was the Souvenir Menu of the Luncheon to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of Collectors' Digest for which thanks are due to Eric Fayne for his most thoughtful gesture.

Thanks were expressed to our most generous host and hostess, Ron and Marion, for a memorable Christmas Party, and the Secretary suggested that the next club meeting in February, 1972, be held at her home with members as her guests and the invitation was accepted with enthusiasm by all present.

B. PATE

Hon. Secretary.

\* \* \*

LONDON

East Dulwich once again and the hospitality of Josie Packman and with a good attendance to enjoy same. After reports from the librarians, there were discussions on "Man Alive" T.V. programme with one or two extracts played over by Brian Doyle, on who made the film "The Cheque Fraud" a Sexton Blake mystery, the new Howard Baker catalogue and Mary Cadogan's "Questions." The latter was the last item on the agenda and after Reuben Godsave answered the Nelson Lee questions there was quite a long informal discussion on the subject which everyone thoroughly enjoyed.

Previously, Roger Jenkins conducted a "Picture Quiz" which the late Gerry Allison sent him some time ago. Eric Lawrence was the winner of this enjoyable competition. Bob Blythe read extracts from the February 1954 newsletter, and whilst on the subject of news-

---

letters there was a copy of one from the newly-formed Cambridge O.B.B.C. available for members' perusal. A motion was passed wishing the Cantabs all the very best in their new venture.

The Annual General Meeting will take place at the Richmond Community Centre on Sunday, 20th of February. Kindly inform Don Webster if intending to be present.

A truly happy and jolly meeting to start 1972.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

\* \* \*

### A TOAST TO GRANDDAD

Congratulations to Don Webster, the London Club's latest grandfather. A bonny, bouncing grandson. Is he entered for Greyfriars?

\*\*\*\*\*

## *The Postman Called* (Interesting items from the Editor's letter-bag)

BILL LOFTS (London): Maxwell Scott, creator of Nelson Lee, stated that he lived at No. 131A Grays Inn Road - now the site of the Blue Lion public house. Curiously a place I have often had lunch, whilst visiting the Sunday Times building nearly opposite. Mr. H. W. Twyman, Editor of the Union Jack, was never quite happy with his serialisation of 'The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh,' and we discussed this often on its authenticity - personally I likewise am not too happy on a "James Tucker" being the true original author.

W. SHARPE (Box Hill, Australia): November C.D. is recently to hand. Harold Truscott's remarks, to me, savour of the very thing of which he accuses Roger Jenkins, i.e. arrogance. I have re-read Roger's remarks (to which H.T. takes exception) and must repudiate Harold Truscott's criticism of them. I particularly resent the imputation to Roger of the outlook "because I have been studying and writing of the Magnet for so long, I have a special right of proprietorship over the assessment of this magazine."

So far as I'm concerned Roger has provided more enjoyment, as well as meaty and fascinating theories, about the Magnet than any other writer in the history of our hobby, just as you yourself have done about the Gem.

H.T.'s remarks indicate a chip on the shoulder and bespeak an inferiority complex. Any mature student of Greyfriars, that I have ever had dialogue with, regards the post-war Bunter books as but a shadow of the best vintage Magnets (though indeed welcome for all that).

Equally do I resent the slur on Bill Lofts. Without Bill's research work the hobby would be far poorer and I believe the great mass of us view him as the peer of researchers.

No, sir. A challenger brash enough to take on both Roger and Bill, will have to be a man of stature who can logically establish his challenge, not one who hurls wild statements and unfair insinuations at them. I have no doubt that like the Rock of Gibraltar, they can stand wintry weather.

Fr. FRANCIS HERTZBERG (Wirral): Blake's brother Nigel appeared in Detective Weekly Nos. 1, 2 and 4. His father appeared as early as this, at least.

With regard to Howard Baker's novel 'Scandal Street,' the Street is of course that Fleet Street which is the setting for so many of the 4th and 5th Series: and indeed it includes Splash Kirby, and even a glimpse of Craille - but no Blake. (A situation paralleling the Watson without Holmes 'Angels of Darkness'.)

E. S. H. HOLMAN (Leigh-on-Sea): Many thanks indeed for the 25th Anniversary Number of Collectors' Digest.

The most interesting part to me was the career of Edwy Searles Brooks. Despite the fact that your contributor refers to this excellent author as having produced a story every week, I did have the privilege of 'butting in' to this sequence. A story of mine about St. Frank's, called "Saints versus Friars" appeared in a Nelson Lee about November, 1930.

LEONARD M. ALLEN (Bournemouth): Mention of the Firefly in the

---

Editorial last December reminded me of the day I purchased No. 1 instead of my usual comic. This would be Wednesday, March 14th, 1914; the main inducement was a gift of a large bar of Sharp's Kreemy Toffee given away with each copy. Remarkable value for one halfpenny it consisted of twenty pages although its predecessor, Fun & Fiction, had thirty-six but was double the price. Several thinly disguised characters from the latter were introduced in the Firefly including Abel Daunt, a nephew of Adam Daunt, both millionaire detectives; the Fire Fighters became the Fire Kings and amongst the comic strips Gertie Goodsort became Gertie Gladeyes whilst Daisy Dimple became Maisie Madcap. I continued with the paper for about another year until it changed to the full page comic. It wasn't until sixteen years later before anything similar was published and then two papers . . . the Bullseye and the Startler. Many of the old F. & F. and Firefly illustrations reappeared but with different more up-to-date stories.

DESMOND KADISH (Hendon): Regarding Mary Cadogan's interesting pen-sketch on Jemima Carstairs in the "C.D. Annual," I was struck by her disclosure that "Ida Melbourne" was really Mr. L. E. Ransome.

I ask because in 1968 I purchased a Merlin paper back for children called "Secret Agents All" by Ivor Melbourne, which featured an "up-dated" version of Susan Clifton and her Great Dane, who were popular in the girls' papers in the late twenties and early thirties. Who really wrote this - Mr. Ransome, or someone else?

Ivor Melbourne, I believe, wrote quite a few stories in such papers as "Champion" and "Triumph," and, of course, contributed as "Ida" to the girls' papers; so, too, did Ronald Fleming and his "sister" Rhoda!

It would be interesting to know how many pen-names were actually used by Mr. Ransome.

LEN WORMULL (Romford): Richard Barthelmess, star of Shore Leave with which you were associated as film accompanist (see Annual), was one of my earliest screen favourites. I have seen several of his films at the National Film Theatre, including Way Down East and Broken Blossoms (Lillian Gish), Tol'able David and Dawn Patrol. I was more often interested in the piano effects of veteran Arthur Dulay

