

STORY PAPER  
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL.  
26

Nº  
303

15p



MARCH - 1972

15p

# *This Month's Specials* ---

A selection of Bound Volumes, Mickey Mouse Comic. Publishers Yearly Volumes, 1936 to 1956, also 600 loose from 1939.

Modern Boy, 11 Volumes, Mint. Many loose.

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# COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by

W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by

HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 26

No. 303

MARCH 1972

Price 15p

## A WORD FROM THE SKIPPER

### THE BEST OF THE BEST

Mr. Harry Dowler tells us that the name of Charles Hamilton is not to be found in the pages of most Histories of Children's Literature. Of course it isn't. Hamilton has to contend with two forms of snobbery - direct and inverted. The upper crusties could never think it possible that a worth-while writer would be found in the flimsy pages of penny and tuppenny periodicals put out to capture the pocket-money of schoolboys. The intellectual



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lefties, on the other hand, have been denigrating everything pre-war-British ever since 1945. The school stories that Hamilton wrote would be beneath their contempt.

A reporter on the Daily Telegraph, commenting on the soccer successes of Hereford, remarked that it was like something out of "The Boys' Own Paper" or "Hotspur." I'm sure that there must be something to be drawn from that, if I could think of it.

### THE SCHOOLS OF WODEHOUSE

As a boy, I had great affection for the stiff-cover school stories of P. G. Wodehouse. They had originally appeared in the "classy" boys' magazines, but I only knew them in book form, except for the series which ran in the "Boys' Friend" during the twenties.

An Australian enthusiast, Mr. Stanley Nicholls, wrote me recently to ask whether short school tales of Wodehouse ever appeared together in book form apart from "Tales of St. Austin's." Well, to the best of my knowledge, they did not. At any rate, "Tales of St. Austin's" is the only collection of Wodehouse short school yarns on my shelves, and I believe my own collection is complete. But perhaps some other Wodehouse fan may know for certain. Mr. Nicholls mentions a book-length story "The New Fold." From what he says, this must be the famous "Mike," published in book-form complete, later published in two volumes, and quite recently issued as two paperbacks. But, once again, somebody else will probably know more of this than I do.

Wodehouse takes his place as a contributor of some of the finest school tales of all time. What a pity that he did not write a few more of the world of school!

### RETURN OF ST. FRANK'S

It is a great pleasure to see a St. Frank's volume figuring among the reprints, and there is no doubt that large numbers of our readers will welcome it warmly. Collectors' Digest has long advocated a wider range to be included in these reprint publications. Too many reprint Greyfriars items might cheapen the novelty of these particular delicacies, as well as running too quickly through the cream of the Magnet.

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A few readers have been critical that the non-Magnet items are smaller and do not offer such good value for money. There is not much doubt that this is due to the fact that the sale of Magnet items is likely to be larger than the others. If we want the reprinting of items which may be less generally popular, we must be prepared to pay for them.

#### THE EDITOR

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 S A L E : Nelson Lees O.S. 15, 20, 27, 61, 79, 80, 82, 87, 119, 127, 139. What offers? Would exchange any TWO of above for any ONE of the following O.S. Lees - 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 17, 18, 21, 23, 25, 26, 31, 33, 40.

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XX  
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#### SEXTON BLAKE SECTION

To all Sexton Blake fans who would care to borrow from this section of our Library I would like to say that I now have over a 1000 items available for their selection and enjoyment. New lists of recent additions to the Library are ready and may be obtained from me on request. These additional books are Union Jacks between 1920 and 1930, they include many of your favourite authors' tales.

**JOSIE PACKMAN**

27 ARCHDALE ROAD  
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 LONDON, SE22 9HL

# DANNY'S DIARY

MARCH 1922

The Rookwood tales in the Boys' Friend are good, but they are so very short. They only occupy 2 pages of the Friend, and those pages also contain the heading, the illustrations by the artist Mr. Wakefield, and some advertisements. So the Rookwood tales are only usually of four chapters these days.

To start the month we had the last of the rebellion series. It has been good, but it started before Christmas, so it has really gone on for too long. This final tale of the series is "Backing Up Dicky Dalton." Mr. Dalton had been sacked by Mr. Manders, but Dalton came back at the request of the other masters, and restored order. When the Head returned at last, Mr. Dalton told his side of the story. To everyone's surprise, Mr. Manders did not meet the Head with the Manders' version. It wasn't surprising. Manders had been tied up in his study by a number of unknown boys in Guy Fawkes masks. The Head suggested that Manders might like to take a few weeks' holiday. And the Fistical Four burnt their masks.

"Cuffy's Practical Joke" was good fun. Tommy Dodd, Cuffy's cousin, tried to rouse Cuffy, and told him to play some practical jokes. Tommy Dodd and Co. were the victims of a booby trap; they found the gas jet in their study blocked up with sealing-wax; they found gum and ink all over the study; and they found fireworks in their grate. They blamed the Fistical Four. Guess who it was?

Then started a new Erroll series. Lucian Durie was a guest of the Head. The Head knew his father, and knew Lucian since a boy. But Erroll recognised Lucian Durie as Slippery Smith, a man he knew in his old days in the underworld. But nobody would believe Erroll, and least of all the Head. In "The Man With a Secret," Slippery Smith tried to do away with Erroll, but luckily Jimmy and Co. and Mornington had followed Erroll and heard everything and saw all that took place.

To their surprise, Durie had gone back to the school, and had once again got his tale in first. But Jimmy had informed the police. The series goes on next month.

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The price of "The Times" has gone down from 3d to 1½d, but we don't take that paper. There has been an explosion in a small workshop in Dudley Port, and 13 girls have been killed.

The Grand National was won by "Music Hall," and "Drifter" came in second. I asked Doug if he had put his shirt on the winner, and he told me loftily not to be a vulgar little boy.

All our cinemas have been showing the special film of the wedding of Princess Mary and Viscount Lascelles. The big pictures have been fairly good. We have seen Mary Pickford in "The Ragamuffin;" Billie Burke in "Peggy" (Billie Burke is a great favourite of mine); Buck Jones in "Firebrand Trevison;" Tom Mix in "Three Gold Coins;" Larry Semon in what I think is his first full-length picture "The Rent Collector." The most elaborate picture was "A Thousand and One Nights." which is made all in colour and is very beautiful.

The Gem is really great these days. It seems to have taken a new lease of life and is as good as I have ever known it.

The first tale was "Racke to the Rescue" and it was a sequel to the Racke story of last month. I don't like Racke as a character, but these tales are very good. Racke is unpopular for running away from the grocer's boy. He proves his pluck by rescuing Trimble from the icy river - but it is all a put-up job. This story was followed by a delightful tale "Chumming With An Outcast" in which Gussy, sorry for Racke, makes friends with him.

This was followed by "Gussy in a Fix." Grimes, the grocer's boy, rescues Gussy's hat - and that touches Gussy's heart. So Gussy promises to play for Grimes' football team. This annoys Blake & Co. - who make sure that Gussy does nothing of the sort.

Final of the month, "The Fifth Form Mystery" is the start of a new series. Darrell needs £50 to give to an actress friend, and Cutts needs £50 to pay a bookie. Both enter for an exam which carries a £50 prize. But Cutts tries to cheat, and is foiled by Wildrake. But neither Darrell nor Cutts wins the prize.

Queen Mary has opened the magnificent new station at Waterloo. It is a memorial station to the memory of L.S.W.R. men who died in the war, and it is the finest station in London. The King was to have opened it, but he is ill, so Queen Mary acted in his place.

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There is a splendid new story of Granite Grant and Mlle. Julie in the Sexton Blake Library, which now has five new issues every month. This story, entitled "The Phantom of the Pacific" was given me by my brother. It is very creepy, and I loved it. Another very good S.B.L. this month is "The Case of the Bendigo Heirloom." It is about the Kestrel Syndicate. I always enjoy the tales of Leon Kestrel.

In the Magnet the series has continued about Wally Bunter as a form-master. In "A Form-Master's Fate," Wally is worried about the fag Willie Newman, who has disappeared. Wally finds his stamp album which he thought Newman had pinched, he knocks down Loder, and then tries to find Newman. The Head dismisses Wally, but is full of remorse when Wally brings Newman back. In "Wally Wins Through," all the masters go down with flu - except Wally - and Wally conducts an examination. An enormous task.

In "Billy Bunter - Film-Star," Billy Bunter is mistaken for Fatty Fisher, a famous pre-war film-star. Bunter acts successfully on the films.

"Bunter's Bolt," the final of the month and the first of a new series, was a welcome change from the recent tosh. Bunter prepares a booby-trap for Coker, but, owing to Skinner, Mr. Quelch gets it. To escape punishment, Bunter runs away from school. This promises to be a great series. Things are looking up.

The Popular is still going strong in its enlarged form (2d) and is still giving away coloured pictures of railway engines. And Mum has Answers every Monday. The Boys' Cinema is giving away art plates of film-stars. The first was Tom Mix.

The clocks went on an hour on March 26th, so now we have an extra hour of daylight in the evenings. But it makes the mornings a bit cold.

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WANTED: 1930-50 Champion, Adventure, Rover, Wizard, Hotspur, Triumph, Champion Annuals, Champion Library, Boys Cinema, Boys Cinema Annuals, Books by E. R. Home-Call.  
E. L. DARCY, 47 FISHER ST., MAIDSTONE, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA, 3012.

XX  
WANTED: Good loose copies or volumes containing one or more of the following: GEMS 817, 826, 828, 832. BOYS' FRIENDS issues between Nos. 1182 and 1256 (inclusive). Good copies essential.

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# BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

Once again we have to thank Eric for the delightful Union Jack pictures with which he decorates our section of the C.D. and also the cover. I think it is very kind of him to do this for us.

Now, I have a problem for someone to solve. Recently I was sent a copy of Pluck dated 25 September, 1915. It contains an episode of a Sexton Blake serial of which I had never heard, called "The Great Cheque Fraud." The caption reads as follows: "A thrilling new serial from the famous film of the same name introducing Sexton Blake versus George Marsden Plummer." The other criminals in this tale are Jack Dennis and Flash Kate. The author's name is not given. Now I have not been able to track down this film at all. The earliest one I know of, as stated in my Supplement, was "The Clue of the Wax Vesta" which appeared in April,

TWO COMPLETE SEXTON BLAKE STORIES! SEE INSIDE!



1914. The story is written in the style of the early Plummer ones, so as he appeared in the U.J. in 1908 then I can only conclude that the film, if there ever was one, appeared between those dates - 1908 and 1914. Can anyone help to solve this mystery?



## THE MYSTERIOUS MISS DEATH

by Derek Smith

In 1929 Sexton Blake did brief but conclusive battle with one of the strangest opponents of his long career: the mysterious Miss Death. Also known as our Lady of the Skull, from her disconcerting practice of appearing to associates and victims in the guise of a grinning death's-head surmounting a scarlet cloak, she ruled a desperate band of criminals by the sceptre of fear, and held court in a darkened room like a charnel-house. "In the centre of the room was a long, oblong-shaped box that had a horrifying familiar shape ... round it were grouped six empty chairs... 'That is only my coffin ... I will be occupying it very shortly - for ever!'"

Beneath the hideous mask was the face of a young and attractive girl named Diana Temple. "The delicate pallor of her complexion had the faint creaminess of old ivory, enhanced by the dark curling lashes that veiled eyes of deep cornflower blue. Her nose was straight and delicately chiselled, and her red lips soft and alluring." But the counterfeit skull was grimly prophetic: the twenty-two year old Yorkshire lass had been given less than six months to live. The sentence had been delivered by the greatest heart specialist in Harley Street, and from that verdict there was no appeal.

From that moment Diana Temple was no more: and in her place was born the mysterious Miss Death. Utterly unselfish, yet utterly unscrupulous, fearless, and quixotically foolish, she was determined to devote the rest of her life to crime. Those last few months were to be allotted to raising no less than a million pounds for the poor and unfortunate of her native county of Yorkshire. She would force the war profiteers, the unscrupulous financiers and shady company promoters to disgorge their ill-gotten gains for the benefit of hospitals and sanatoria in the Industrial North.

She was well provided with the sinews of war. Another strange

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turn of fortune's wheel had placed in her hands the "Book of Death," a blackmailer's compendium of shady secrets and hidden crimes. "Never since the infamous book of the 47,000 which had nearly wrecked an Empire during the war, had so many disgraceful and sensational secrets been gathered and tabulated together in one volume." Thus she held sway over a dozen of the cleverest and most desperate crooks in Europe. The contract was simple: they would serve her till she died, for refusal meant prison or the hangman's rope.

Their first victim was Sir Julius Schonberg, a Leeds manufacturer and sweet shop proprietor who had made a fortune from profiteering in war material and shoddy products. An ingenious campaign forced from him a donation of £20,000 to the local infirmary, but Sexton Blake's intervention resulted in the capture of three gang members. Whereupon Miss Death made the biggest tactical blunder of her short career, she issued a challenge to Sexton Blake. Far from warning him off, the ultimatum merely reinforced the detective's resolve to see the case through to the bitter end. It was to be a grim struggle, with Death the only final victor.

But the next round, oddly enough, was a much more light-hearted affair. It revolved around an ingenious confidence trick to extort sixty thousand pounds from the Sheffield steel kings - allegedly to suppress a non-existent hair-remover that would make razors redundant. Blake wrecked the scheme in the nick of time, and Miss Death reproached him bitterly for an empty victory: "You have spoiled a great project, deprived thousands of poor people of benefits I would have showered on them . . . for this you will surely pay."

Sinister doings marked the next adventure in Bradford. Miss Death was in temporary and uneasy alliance with Sir Hector Jarman - the maddest titled surgeon since Oppenheim's infamous Sir Joseph Londe. Sir Hector's own "Terrible Hobby" was no less than the projected destruction of "Woolopolis" itself - Bradford - or the city of Baal, as Jarman preferred to regard it. Miss Death's target was a decidedly unpleasant wool manufacturer named Lord Fairleigh (nee Bill Craske) who was doing his best to steal the secret of a new wool cleaning process from a young inventor named Jem Stapler. Everybody's schemes fell short of fruition with Sir Hector's final descent

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into madness. His next to last act in a night of mania was to release a dragon lizard of nightmarish size. "A great scaly thing, fully fifteen feet long and jet black in colour, with a nightmare head, its little pig-like eyes gleamed angrily. A huge yellow, double-forked tongue worked continually between its hideous foam-flecked jaws."

Fortunately, the ghastly creature was no match for Blake's bullets, and Sir Hector himself came to a messy end when he fell into a pool which he had thoughtlessly stocked with deadly piranha fish. Lord Fairleigh had died when Jarman ran amock, so Miss Death was unable to cash the cheque she had extorted, and she sent another reproachful letter to Blake, ending: "Morturi te salutat!"

Death's grisly clutch was almost upon her, but there was time for one last adventure. It centred about the London and Yorkshire Railway, bedevilled as it was by Hogan Flint, a newspaper magnate with a vested interest in road transport, and by a malignant "Phantom of the Footplate" which had inexplicably claimed the lives of two successive drivers in the cab of the Black Prince, Britain's fastest locomotive. Miss Death knew that Flint had hatched a plot to wreck the train on its southward run by tampering with the points, and determined to extort one hundred thousand pounds as the price of her silence. Despite her careless contempt for death and its terrors Diana Temple would not allow scores of innocent passengers to be trapped in a rail disaster. Accordingly, she placed a warning in the cab of the Black Prince and that brave gesture was her last. Pursued by Sexton Blake she eventually died in his arms. "Blake gazed down compassionately at her pale, wan face. She was very near the end, he saw, and his heart ached for the strange wilful girl whose life had been so tragically fated to disaster. Suddenly she smiled, and her whole face was irradiated, then, very softly she murmured: 'Goodbye Blake, Death wins,' and was suddenly very still." So passed one of the strangest - and certainly the most tragic - of Blake's many adversaries. "A plain stone slab in a simple village churchyard in the Yorkshire dales she loved so well marks the resting place of Diana Temple. Once a year there is placed a tribute of flowers on her grave, bearing a card with the simple inscription: 'In memory of a brave and chivalrous soul, from S.B.'"

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These stories are contained in the following:

Union Jack No. 1323	The Book of Death.	By Gwyn Evans.
" " No. 1324	The Case of the Hairless Man.	" " "
" " No. 1333	The Case of the Bradford Dragon.	" " "
" " No. 1341	The Phantom of the Footplate.	" " "

\*\*\* SEE PAGE 19

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WANTED: MAGNETS 1303, 1307, 1317-1348 (incl.), 1510, 1526.

R. W. RICHARDSON, TOLWORTH JUNIOR SCHOOL, DOUGLAS ROAD, SURBITON.

XX

W A N T E D, the following Magnets, Nos. 1301-4 inclusive, 1308 and 9, 1316-18 inclusive, 1320 and 21, 1323-27 inclusive, 1336, 1341-44 inclusive, 1354, 1356, 1360, 1377 and 78, 1391, 1394, 1402, 1404, 1476, 1499. Will either purchase or exchange for other Magnets. Please write to -

JACKSON, 12 NORRICE LEA, LONDON, N2.

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WANTED: Buy/exchange, Bullseye, Film Fun, some Magnets, 1930/33; Boys Mag. 1931/6, some comics. For exchange Bullseye, Magnet, N. Lee and oddments.

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# NELSON LEE COLUMN

## EARLY STRUGGLES

### THE UNION JACK

by Robert Blythe

When E.S.B. made his first tentative approaches to Mr. Back, the editor of the "Union Jack," it is obvious that neither he nor Back could envisage the future. Even though the U.J. in 1911 had already established itself as a popular detective story paper, I imagine that everyone on the A.P. staff would have been amazed to know that the characters of Sexton Blake, Tinker and Pedro would still be going strong 60 years from then. Certain it is that Edwy would not have considered it possible that he would be writing another detective story with the same characters in the same paper in the very last issue but one in 1934.

In the years to come he was to emerge as one of the U.J.'s most popular authors and to write 70 stories of the illustrious trio for that paper.

However, no such thoughts as these were going through our young author's mind when, in September 1911, he wrote to, and later visited, Mr. Back with two suggestions for "Union Jack" stories. These were not accepted but he was invited to send in other ideas. As a result, he wrote as follows:-

Suffolk. Oct. 3rd. 1911.

Dear Mr. Back,

I enclose herewith a rough sketch of "The Motor-bus Mystery," for the purpose of ascertaining whether you have already had a story on similar lines. If not, I feel quite sure that I can make a good story out of it. Of course, I have outlined no incidents - but if the plot is acceptable I should like to write the prologue and first chapter and send it to you with a complete and detailed chapter-by-chapter synopsis of the remainder. If well worked up, there would be plenty of mystery in the story, as well as a considerable amount of detective work for Sexton Blake and Tinker - in addition to a little tracking by Pedro.

I am, etc., E.S.B.

The idea was favourably received, but needed the guidance of an experienced hand. Alterations were tactfully suggested.

Fleet St. Oct. 11th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Brooks,

Thanks very much for the enclosed synopsis. It is very much on the lines of what we talked over when you were last in the office, with the exception of the prologue, which I do not care for at all. This contains two love scenes and although a love interest is desirable, it is not wise, at least so far as the U.J. is concerned to start

off with a love scene.

It seems to me that the prologue should open with a short scene between the baronet and the villain in which the latter offers to lend the baronet a large sum of money. The latter refuses and says, "No. I have a perfect horror of borrowing money and I will be under a debt of gratitude of this sort to no man. I will sell my family jewels, etc. They are worth fifty thousand pounds." A valuer is called in who, of course, only offers about twenty thousand. A friend of the baronet is a big West End jeweller and he arranges to give one of his windows in order that the jewels can be exposed for sale and thus fetch a bigger price. Frustrated, the villain arranges to get the jewels by working the motor bus affair, etc. Blake and Tinker happen to be passing at the time and are called in and so on. Then the story can be made breathless and exciting by means of Blake's adventures tracking the villain down, etc. - the side interest coming on with the troubles of the old baronet, his daughter, and the hero, who should also play a part in the story.

I shall be glad if you will send me a carefully worked out plot for the whole of this story.

Yours very truly, W. H. BACK

As was usual with Edwy at this period, he was always ready to take, and profit, from advice offered by those whose experience was greater than his own. As a result the opening chapters followed very closely the outlines as suggested by Back, although whether the finished product was "breathless and exciting" is open to debate. However, it was competently written and held one's interest. It was, after all, his first full length detective story!

Suffolk. Oct. 26th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Back,

I fully intended to let you have the first 30,000 words of THE MOTOR-BUS MYSTERY by this same post. Unfortunately, however, I have been laid up for a short while with a very nasty influenza cold - which seems to be a pretty general complaint just now. And, as you know, one cannot be at one's best under such conditions. Therefore, as you said you were in no hurry, I had no hesitation in postponing the despatch of the MS. until Sunday evening next. So you may absolutely rely upon receiving the 10,000 words by first post on Monday morning next.

I am, etc.

Suffolk. Oct. 29th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Back,

As promised I herewith enclose the beginning of THE MOTOR-BUS MYSTERY for your perusal. I think I have got the style you require, and as I wish to lose no time on the story now that I have got into it, I propose to call at your office at about twelve o'clock to-morrow (Monday) morning - when I hope you will have had time to glance through the enclosed.

I am, etc., E.S.B.

Suffolk. Nov. 13th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Back,

I am sending up herewith the bulk of THE MOTOR-BUS MYSTERY, and am sorry that I cannot enclose the lot as I promised. From this I do not wish you to gather that this is my usual method of sending in an MS. I honestly tried to get it done in the time specified. But this is the first Sexton Blake yarn I have written, and naturally I am somewhat slower over this story than usual. And besides this I have twice had to break off to send Mr. Hinton the first two short stories of a new series of Frank Kingston

yarns. I only did this because you gave me to understand that there was no immediate hurry for sending in the enclosed.

I will post off the remainder of the story sometime on Wednesday, and call at your office on Thursday, when I hope you will have time to see me.

I am, etc., E.S.B.

Suffolk. Nov. 15th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Back,

I enclose herewith, as promised, the concluding chapter of THE MOTOR-BUS MYSTERY. As I mentioned in my last letter, I shall be in the city to-morrow, and will drop into your office sometime during the afternoon.

I am, etc., E.S.B.

As this story was evidently considered good enough for publication in the Union Jack, he was asked to submit another synopsis before the first was published. ("The Motor-Bus Mystery" appeared in U.J. 431, dated 13.1.1912.) However, owing to the family's frequent moves, this was delayed somewhat, as Edwy explains.

Brockley Rd., S.E. Dec. 10th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Back,

I enclose herewith the complete synopsis of THE COFFEE STALL MYSTERY for your perusal. I regret that I have been unable to carry out my original intention of sending you the prologue and first chapter with a synopsis of the remainder. But as everything is at present rather upsidedown in my parents household I did not deem it wise to start upon the actual writing of the story under the circumstances. I know that I could not have put my best into it. However, we are leaving for Bures to-morrow afternoon, and once there I can go right into it without interruption. I will call upon you about three o'clock to-morrow and hope that you will not be too busy to see me.

I am, etc., E.S.B.

Having settled in Bures (the house is still there. A large square building, standing in its own grounds, but rather run to seed today), he produced the required synopsis without delay.

Bures. Jan. 7th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Back,

As promised, I herewith send you the first chapters of the COFFEE STALL MYSTERY, with the remainder of the story in synopsis. Until I hear from you I shall not go on with the story, in case you require some little alteration. But as I have not got into it, I hope you will write me as soon as possible.

Haven't heard from you yet with regard to that school-story synopsis. I trust it is suitable for the "Friend" and that I shall be allowed to submit the first instalment.

I am, etc., E.S.B.

The school story referred to in that letter was "The Shadow of St. Asaph's," but I have been unable to trace it. Knowing Edwy, he probably rewrote it and sold it to the A. P. under another name!

Hearing nothing by return, he wrote again in another few days (an impatient lad, our Edwy, but at least he got things moving, and, after all, it was his bread and margarine!).



Dear Mr. Back,

Bures. Jan. 11th, 1912.

I have heard nothing from you up to the time of writing with regard to THE COFFEE STALL MYSTERY, the first chapters of which I sent you on Sunday night last. I have been wondering if you received the MS. in safety. If so I suppose I shall hear something from you in the course of to-morrow.

I am, etc., E.S.B.

This did the trick, and Back gave him the go-ahead.

Fleet St. Jan. 12th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Brooks,

Herewith the opening and synopsis of "The Coffee Stall Mystery." Please finish the yarn and let me have it at your convenience.

Yours sincerely, W. H. BACK

Within a month he had the story written and accepted. Then, of course, he had to start again his eternal struggle to get another story accepted.

Bures. Jan. 14th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Back,

Thanks for your note received yesterday, enclosing the first chapters and synopsis of the COFFEE STALL MYSTERY. I will get right ahead with the work and turn it in to you as soon as possible. Bye-the-bye, you said nothing about the SHADOW OF ST. ASAPH'S synopsis; do you think this will be any good to you?

I am, etc., E.S.B.

Bures. Feb. 8th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Back,

I am sorry I have been unable to send you the MS of the COFFEE STALL MYSTERY until now. I enclose it herewith, however, and trust it will prove satisfactory. I think you will find that I am not too short with the story this time.

With regard to another Sexton Blake yarn, how would it be to introduce into it - or rather, make it the leading feature - the new wireless telephony? I think I can get a good yarn out of this subject, and there is plenty of scope in it for Sexton Blake.

Will you let me know what you think about it?

I am, etc., E.S.B.

Bures. Feb. 11th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Back,

An idea for the basis of an adventure story struck me, and I have mapped out a synopsis of the first instalment, with an idea as to what the story will be about. I'm keen on getting a serial running somewhere and I'm quite sure I could write a story on the lines suggested in the synopsis which would be as good as anything I've ever done - better. Will you look at it, and let me know what you think? If you are too full up with stuff for the "Friend" perhaps you could kindly suggest somewhere else.

I'm wondering what you think about that wireless-telephone idea, as a groundwork on which to write a Sexton Blake yarn. If you consider there are possibilities in this, I will send you a full synopsis.

I am, etc., E.S.B.

Bures. Feb. 15th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Back,

Have you had time to glance over that adventure-story synopsis, which I posted off on Sunday, yet? And that Blake suggestion too. If you're not too busy I should much appreciate a line from you in regard to these.

I am, etc., E.S.B.

CONTINUED NEXT MONTH

No. 97 - The Great Sports Series

Old readers of the Digest will recall the excitement aroused by the publication of Frank Richards' autobiography. It is generally accepted that this volume is full of tantalising omissions, and the most tantalising of all are the missing chapters about J. N. Pentelow, the man who was Magnet and Gem editor from 1916-1919. Charles Hamilton declared that he had been persuaded to omit these chapters on the advice of friends, on the grounds that they would give offence to any relatives of Pentelow who might still be alive, and collectors used to wonder considerably about the missing chapters in the locked drawer. This manuscript must have been destroyed eventually, for there was no trace of it after the death of Charles Hamilton.

But if we can only conjecture about this particular gap in the autobiography, we can at least be quite certain that during Pentelow's regime some very unusual customs were inaugurated in the editorial office of the companion papers. Not only were substitute stories interpolated into genuine Hamilton series, as happened more than once, but Hamilton wrote some stories himself to be interpolated into a substitute series. This occurred in the notorious series about the great sports competition in the Gem.

So far as I can discover, the series began in No. 527 and ended in No. 551, though it definitely tailed off at the end, and not all the stories between these two numbers were connected with the sports theme. The stories were nearly all by Pentelow, and the theme was a sports competition between the Shell and the Fourth, with Lefevre, Wally D'Arcy, and Frank Levison acting as a managing committee. Descriptions of sports events arouse very mixed feelings, but there can be little doubt that if the main interest in the tale is the result of a race it is very likely to be a dull story.

Charles Hamilton's own contributions are interesting as examples of the way he adapted himself to someone else's requirements. No. 533, for example, was an amusing impersonation story with a twist at the tail - all part of the form competition. Nos 537 and 538 dealt with a chess competition which revealed his keen interest in the game,

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with its various opening gambits. Even he could not avoid ending 537 with the description of a race, but 538, with its rare inclusion of Koumi Rao, was certainly a fascinating story. 540, which revolved around a missing manuscript of Skimpole's, was also highly entertaining. As points were awarded for the correct solution of the mystery, it was still classed as a form competition.

In later years, Charles Hamilton made no concessions at all to the substitute writers and ignored their work completely, but during Pentelow's regime he seems to have been obliged to adopt a radically different attitude. For example, in 542 he wrote a sequel to Pentelow's series in 506-8 about the St. Jim's parliament and Pepper's hoard of sovereigns. It has been said that Pentelow issued an ultimatum to Hamilton: either co-operate with me or I shall write all the Magnet and Gem stories myself. Whether this is true and accurately explains the very bitter feelings that undoubtedly existed we shall probably never now discover, but it is at least certain that the Great Sports Series revealed a very curious state of affairs at the Amalgamated Press.

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### ADDENDUM

#### SEXTON BLAKE FILM "THE GREAT CHEQUE FRAUD"

Showing Autumn 1915. Produced by Charles Raymond for Great Davidson Films. Raymond also produced "The Mystery of the Diamond Belt," September, 1914. This appeared as a serial in Dreadnought in October, 1914. The Great Cheque Fraud appeared as a serial in Pluck from September, 1915 and was still running at the beginning of January, 1916. The serial was stated to be by the author of "Under Sealed Orders," etc., etc.

I cannot find this title either in the U.J. or the Penny Pictorial, so assume it may well have been a serial in Pluck at some earlier date. The tale and the film introduce George Marsden Plummer and has all the appearance of being written by Norman Goddard. Can anyone recall the film or recall the ending of the tale in Pluck?

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 168. THE SCHOOLBOY INVENTOR.

Roger Jenkins has written that he finds the stories of Bernard Glyn are usually tedious. I, myself, have a very soft spot in my heart for Glyn. I think it possible that Roger may have reached the status of adult before he met Glyn, in which case he would undoubtedly have viewed the character with a more critical eye. Whereas I first met Glyn when I was a small boy - and old affections last long.

Not that I ever liked stories of very clever boys who succeeded in doing impossible things. I liked Glyn when his inventions failed. I was always left cold by mechanical Mr. Lathoms which deceived the school, or by aeroplanes and gliders.

But I recall with joy a delicious episode - I fancy it was in that little blue cover masterpiece "By Whose Hand?" - in which Glyn invented a powerful explosive. He had it in a jar. If that jar should drop, the whole of St. Jim's would be blown to Kingdom Come. The jar dropped - possibly as a result of Gussy's antics - and nothing happened, except the smashing of the jar. In the same story, Glyn made fireworks - wonderful set-pieces. Gussy assisted him - and, as a result, the reading of the set-pieces got mixed up. "The New House is a rotter" blazed across the November sky, plus "The Head is requested to go and eat coke."

Martin Clifford was sometimes very farseeing in the various things which Glyn invented. His bowling machine - it ran amok and smashed dozens of windows - was a novelty then, a real invention. Fifty years later, many clubs have bowling machines which are uncannily like the one which Glyn once invented. Glyn's line-writer looked ahead to the duplicating machine. Macdonald's pictures of it remind one oddly of Gestetners and the like. The only incredible factor was that masters would be deceived by lines turned out on a duplicator. In fact, Mr. Railton was not deceived for long. Two gleeful little tales which looked well into the future.

Charles Hamilton rarely stepped into the world of fantasy, but he wrote two delightful stories of this type for the Holiday Annual. One was "Glyn's Greatest" in an early edition. It was a superb piece of nonsense. Glyn's invention was, so he informed some gullible friends,

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one that would take them back through time. Actually it would give them an electric shock. But Gussy dreamed that he was on the Time Machine, going back to help King Alfred burn the cakes.

A very popular story in the Mr. Buddle series was "Mr. Buddle's Greatest." Mr. Buddle read "Glyn's Greatest" and then fell asleep. Even now, the occasional reader writes in and asks "Please let Mr. Buddle have another ride on the Time Machine."

I don't suppose it will ever happen. After all, people never dream the same dream twice. Or do they?

An asset to the recently re-published Captain Mellish series (The Mysterious X) was Glyn's idea of fitting up the studies with telephones. It provided an amusing sequence in the story, and was, in fact, Glyn used by the author in the very best way possible.

One of my own favourite Glyn stories was "Glyn the Gold-Maker" - rather a crude title for a mini-masterpiece of the mid-twenties. Glyn was seeking to discover the secret of the transmutation of metals. Circumstances made it seem that he had actually discovered it.

This was a glorious little romp, with no contrivance and nothing far-fetched. It was as natural as tomorrow. It is stories like this - and there were scores of them down the years - even more than the great and memorable series, which are the basis for the claim that Charles Hamilton is the world's greatest writer of school stories.

To any unbiased reader, who regards Hamilton as rather small beer, I would recommend such unpretentious little offerings as "Glyn, the Gold-Maker," "Glyn's Greatest," and "By Whose Hand?"

Later on, he could pass on to the giant series which stand alone in school literature.

The unbiased reader might remain unbiased. On the other hand, it is just possible that he might find himself as biased as I am.

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 WANTED TO COMPLETE MY COLLECTION: No. 1's of Boys Papers. Especially  $\frac{1}{2}$ d Gem,  
 $\frac{1}{2}$ d U.J., Dixon Hawke Library, Schoolfriend, (1919) Dandy, Larks and Comet. Write with  
 prices to:

W. O. G. LOFTS,

56 SHERINGHAM HOUSE, LISSON STREET, LONDON, N.W.1.

REVIEWS

MAGNET COMPANION

(Howard Baker Press  
£1.05)

It is with a sense of wonder that one browses over this attractive and well-produced book. Wonder that the Magnet, over 30 years after it ceased publication, is still giving birth to additions to its remarkable family. Wonder, as was the case when a book named "Prospectus" came on the market, that anything of the sort can be put on the market on a professional basis with an expectation that it will be financially successful.

This sort of thing is proof, if we needed it, that the Magnet was the most remarkable paper of its type in the world.

"Magnet Companion" contains a complete list of every Greyfriars title in the paper's history. It indicates the writer of every substitute story so far as they are known. It has brief histories of the substitute writers and of the various editors of the Magnet.

There is probably nothing new for the C. D. and Annual reader of long-standing, but it has the considerable advantage of bringing these items of Magnet history together in one book, which will be convenient for the student and a pleasure for the inveterate enthusiast. There is, in addition, an alphabetical index of all Magnet titles, which must have meant a mountain of work for someone unnamed. Some errors might have been avoided by more careful proof-reading, perhaps.

At a guinea, the book is reasonably priced in these days of astronomical publishing costs.

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THE BARRING-OUT AT ST. FRANK'S

Edwy Searles Brooks  
(Howard Baker £2.75)

Today is surely a day worthy of being "marked with a white stone."

For the very first time since S.O.L. 411, in 1940, (unless one except a brief flirtation in Film Fun in 1961) a St. Frank's story is now available on the bookstalls. Some may quarrel with Howard Baker's choice of story for this first effort, but whatever our individual preferences, there is no doubt that he has made a first-class job of it.

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The cover by Valda is eye catching and conveys the excitement of the rebellion admirably.

As these stories originally appeared in 1919 they are, by far, the earliest to be reproduced in this series of reprints. By the same token this is very early Brooks, and not to be compared with his later stories. Nevertheless the hand of the natural story writer is apparent.

Briefly the plot is the familiar one of a tyrannical new Headmaster and the inevitable revolt. However, although there are no subtleties of plot, the story is written, as only Brooks can write, with plenty of action from beginning to end.

The "Barring-Out at St. Frank's" is labelled NELSON LEE VOL. 1, and if we want to see VOL. 2, then Howard Baker deserves to be supported. It is well worth the money. Buy it, and get your local library to stock it as well.

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## PALS

by W. O. G. Lofts

Dear Old Pals, Jolly Old Pals,  
 Clinging Together, in all sorts of Weather.  
 Dear Old Pals, Jolly Old Pals,  
 Give me the Friendship of Dear Old Pals.

A popular music-hall act was the drunk sketch. The comedian would stagger about on the stage, complete with top hat. After an amusing act, the 'drunken' comic, who had been accompanied by a melody of drinking songs from the pit orchestra, would stagger off the stage to the singing of 'Dear Old Pals.' Less than top of the bill artists did not earn much money in pre-war days, but even they must have earned more money than Charles Shurey's short-lived boys' paper PALS.

Charles Shurey, was one of the many publishers, who had sprung up in the early 1890's. Seeing the success of Cassells' boys' paper CHUMS, which came out in 1892, prompted him to go into boys' publishing, and he brought out COMRADES in 1893. The ill-fated publisher Guy Rayner had brought out a similarly titled paper in 1886/7. A familiar trend of the middle-period Victorian papers was that they had a habit of reverting to No. 1 again with a change of title. Comrades

was no exception, when after 142 issues, the first number of PALS appeared on the 7th October, 1895. Apart from giving away a free art plate, they also presented No. 2 free with No. 1. A most generous offer! But whereas COMRADES had only cost  $\frac{1}{2}$ d the new paper was double that amount with the same number of pages. All the serials were simply continued from where COMRADES had left off. PALS was a black and white publication edited by Chas. Shurey. Completely undated, its rather cleverly drawn mast-title was well thought out. This had the song and words of 'Dear Old Pals' covered over with the large script-written word PALS. The cover illustration was a scene from the main serial 'Caradoc the Briton,' by Charles Stevens, a former editor of Brett's BOYS OF ENGLAND, whose speciality was stories of Ancient Rome and Greece. The artist was W.M.B. (W. M. Bowles) who drew for boys' papers for over 40 years. He was an expert on criminology. Other serials included 'The Young Blue-Jacket,' by Charlton, (H. Charlton Emmett) one of the famous Emmett Brothers, and a school series entitled 'Timothy Teasers - and Adventures at Dr. Cutemwell's Academy' - a sort of forerunner of St. Sam's. The author Ralph Rollington (J. W. Allingham) was an old boys' book collector who wrote THE HISTORY OF OLD BOYS' BOOKS in the early part of this century, which proves that our hobby is far from new. The rest of the paper was made up of anonymous short tales and articles. No. 3 saw Vane St. John as editor, when Shurey found the publishing and editorship too much to handle. Later issues saw him, Ernest Brent, Cyril Hathway, H. Clinton, Brenchley Beaumont (author of Silverspear) and Allan West as contributors. West wrote a series of detective tales entitled 'Secrets from a Detective's Diary.' It was obvious that Charles Shurey had decided to end the paper after 31 issues, as all the serials and stories finished in that issue, but the reader was not left in mid-air in a serial as in the case of so many short-lived publications. Giving the boys' paper market a rest for a while, Shurey revived COMRADES in 1898 for exactly one year (52 issues) when it was continued as BOYS' MONSTER WEEKLY. Whilst he was unsuccessful with boys' publications, Charles Shurey was successful with his girls' and women's periodicals. GIRLS MIRROR (continued as ROMANCE) ran for 948 issues; POLLY'S PAPER - 261; and his family publications such as

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YES OR NO had very long runs.

There was another boys' paper entitled PALS published by E. HULTON in the 1922/3 period, but that of course is another story.

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## *The Postman Called*

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

VICTOR GILES (Barking): Charles Hamilton isn't the world's greatest writer of school stories, says Harry Dowler. If he were his books would fill the shelves of our libraries and booksellers!

Almost the only Hamilton hardbacks in existence are the post-war Bunter books and the Magnet reprints. The former, it seems fair to say, are not really representative of the author's finest writing, and it is not too surprising if they have achieved no great general acclaim; the excellent Howard Baker reprints are limited in numbers and relatively expensive. The best of Hamilton has never been available in book-form to any appreciable extent, mainly because he hardly wrote for that particular market. Nor is it likely that with today's ever mounting printing costs, and the decline of interest in the school story, that any publisher would venture on really large scale book publication of the magazine stories. The author's most effective work has to be sought in the three thousand and more issues of the Magnet and Gem.

This state of affairs sufficiently explains any lack of intelligent discussion of Hamilton in the histories of Children's Literature. The compilers of such efforts would doubtless consider it demeaning to their literary dignity to give much, if any, attention to juvenile story papers and their contents! What would such critics know of Charles Hamilton?

It's all a matter of opinion in the end, no doubt, but of those in a position to judge fairly a significant majority seem to accept Charles Hamilton as the outstanding writer in his field. Such popularity is not necessarily an indication of greatness, but in the circumstances it is no bad criterion, and certainly not to be denigrated!

GEOFFREY WILDE (Leeds): I confess I find myself puzzled by Mr. Dowler's article on Hamilton. He starts out by reminding us that in the arts popularity is never a reliable criterion of quality: and he is absolutely right. There follows a dedicated attempt to contradict the

very point he has just made. We are implicitly invited to re-consider Hamilton's literary standing, on the grounds that his work is rarely to be found in the bookshops and suffers a lack of critical acclaim. But these facts, of course, tell us nothing whatever about the author's merits. Music and literature are rich in masterpieces that the critics have ridiculed, the scholars savaged and the general public ignored.

Suddenly returning to the idea that he first thought of, Mr. Dowler encourages us to stick to our own convictions despite the critics. Nevertheless, we are bewilderingly warned to bear in mind that we "are not reading literature!" He really must tell us what we are reading - and it would be useful at the same time to have his definition of 'literature.'

The Mrs. Margery Fisher he quotes suffers I suspect, from an acute case of toffee-nose. Otherwise her verdict can only be attributed to critical incompetence or simple ignorance of Hamilton's work: a charge I am prepared to substantiate in public debate with the said lady at any time and in any place she cares to nominate.

A quite different curiosity crops up in the new Howard Baker St. Frank's volume. A biographical note tells us that E. S. Brooks was born in 1889 and was an avid reader of the Gem and Magnet "as a boy." By my arithmetic the Magnet did not commence publication till the year of Brooks's 19th birthday. Did boyhood last much longer in those days, or is there some error in the date? One for Mr. Lofts to clear up, perhaps!

EDITORIAL COMMENT: We have received a number of letters concerning Mr. Dowler's article, but none agreeing with him. We thank all who wrote.)

LEN WORMULL (Romford) In your excellent series on the old cinemas I have noticed one omission - the "chucker out." The Gattis cinema in Westminster Bridge Rd., which you mention, employed more than one. Apart from being a notorious "flea-pit," it was a rendezvous for trouble-makers. The Grand cinema, Bermondsey, engaged a walking Goliath to keep law and order - and heaven help the Saturday afternoon kids if they got out of hand! The local "warriors" used to taunt him, and I can remember him taking on three at once in the middle of the road - in full uniform! Tommy Steele once demonstrated on TV how

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he used to "bunk in" round the back of his favourite cinema. This, too, was a common enough dodge of youngsters in the poverty-ridden areas.

HAROLD TRUSCOTT (Huddersfield): Had Mr. Sharpe kept cool he might have done some good for Mr. Jenkins and Mr. Lofts, and also avoided the rather ridiculous "hands off our sacred deities" scream which emanates from his letter. It is not arrogance for me to state that I find a certain quality in some of Mr. Jenkins' work. It would be arrogance if I expected everyone to agree with me. I have the same right to make such a statement, about work which has been made public, on my own account, as Mr. Sharpe has to resent my doing so. The difference is that I gave certain grounds for what I said, and only lack of space prevented my giving a good deal more. Mr. Sharpe gives us no grounds at all for his resentment - he simply resents. Mr. Sharpe makes no attempt to refute my remarks about either writer - a poor attitude on the part of a defence counsel; at least, I would not care to trust my life or reputation to such an advocate.

Since Mr. Sharpe has called on Mr. Lofts' research, I will point out that there is a sharp distinction between the ability (or, as it more often is, the opportunity) to search out facts and the faculty of critical assessment. Occasionally, one finds the two in the same person, but very rarely.

I have never liked so-called general histories, or general criticism, mainly for the reason that they are impossible, and only manage to pretend that they are possible by avoiding all specific examination (the sort of examination that sweeping condemnation of the post-war Bunter books never accords those works) and relying on generalisations. An example is Mr. Sharpe's remark that "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." "Any mature student," etc., is question-begging, as well as having been put in to make me feel inferior, and small - but I do not feel inferior to anyone merely because I differ from them, and small is a very good thing to feel, at times, and I dutifully feel it. That's better. Now I feel more comfortable, thank you. But the quoted phrase implies that the number of mature students of Greyfriars Mr. Sharpe has had dialogue with (they must do

these things very peculiarly in Australia) is large, whereas Mr. Sharpe has carefully avoided saying how many he has conversed with (I prefer "converse" to "have dialogue with" - just my peculiarity). I have never claimed that the Bunter books were the equal of the best MAGNETS, (although I would be willing to bet that there are a good number which, if they had been served up as MAGNETS, would have been welcomed into the fold without criticism); the remark I quarrelled with in Mr. Lofts' letter was not so accommodating as is Mr. Sharpe in his bracketed addition. Mr. Sharpe, in fact, simply resents my having criticised his two idols, and is prepared to ignore facts in order to castigate me. Well, if it helps him to sleep at night - - -

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: These are extracts from a very long letter from Mr. TRUSCOTT. We are giving him the last word. This discussion is now closed.)

C H MATTHEWS (Market Harborough) I have just read a few more sub Gems of the 1930 s. The issue of November 15th 1930 with its story "School in the Clouds" a world tour in the Airship S1000 was very topical at that time, five weeks after the R101 crashed in France.

I suppose the story must have been written and the magazine gone to press before the disaster of the R101. I was expecting to read a lot about the safety of the rigid airship but very little description was offered - totally unlike the wonderful stories of a similar nature by E.S.B. with their very full description - School Ship. School Train for instance.

In fact very little is said about the airship or its capabilities which was most disappointing, as I am very keen on the Rigid Airship - a subject which is one of my many hobbies.

Miss E. B. FLINDERS (Hitchin). I liked the article about Jemima Carstairs. She was my top favourite character when I was about fifteen. Those strange sort of characters always fascinated me. I have a feeling I should dislike them intensely in real life. In the old days we realised the difference between fiction and real life but with all this "realism" on T.V. I can't help wondering if youngsters get a bit muddled with what they watch. Crooks are made to seem too human and ordinary by half. I'm sure it's very dangerous to weak minds. I think if Women's Lib. want a job they should concentrate on T.V. After all, half the population are women and young girls who really hate all the violence and sex they see.

# NEWS FROM THE CLUBS

## NORTHERN

### Meeting of 12th February, 1972.

Some fourteen members attended the meeting despite the perils of power cuts and strikes.

After the formalities, a lively but brief discussion took place on the subject of the recently published "Greyfriars Companion." It appeared generally agreed that the offering was something of a disappointment. The size was wrong for display on library shelves, the format was not convenient and there were obvious inaccuracies in spelling of names in particular 'Hazledene.' The book was more of a 'passing acquaintance' than a 'companion.'

Reference was made to a book "The Classic Slum" by Robert Roberts which concerned working class life in Salford and contained a passage devoted to the way in which the lives of boys in that area were influenced by the writings of Charles Hamilton. This subject drew a number of anecdotes of yesteryear, one female member making the admission of having changed her own name to 'Bob Cherry' somewhat to the bewilderment of her parents.

Jack Allison gave us his selection of "Desert Island Books" and this was to the meeting somewhat of a surprise since a wartime experience had provided him with all the necessary background and salvaged books to boot. The books were produced for all to see together with a Malayan type bamboo recorder upon which he rendered "Drink to me only" in time to welcome in refreshments. His choice of a Malayan type song book, Vergil Book IV and Masterman Ready were not perhaps to everyone's taste but the latter had at least a practical virtue in the description of how to turn turtles.

Harry Barlow presented a Quiz of 25 questions based on the Lancaster Series, which severely taxed the capacities of all present. The ultimate winners were Geoffrey Wilde and Elsie Taylor.

## CAMBRIDGE

J. T. Edson, the Western author, formerly a D. C. Thomson

writer, was special guest at the February meeting.

Mr. Edson, 43, of Melton Mowbray, has more than 70 Westerns continually in print, and he is proud of being a full member of the Western Writers of America.

He had, he said, contributed story-lines to "The Victor," the Thomson picture paper, for three years before becoming a full-time author.

His Floating Outfit characters, and Jack Tragg, the sheriff of Rockabye County, a modern-day peace officer, had first appeared in "The Victor," but later he took them up for his paperback series.

Mr. Edson, wearing a tassled cowboy outfit and - much to the members' delight - totin' replicas of several guns, claimed only to write escapist and adventure stories, although he tried to make them as accurate as possible.

The club will hold a party at the home of Danny Posner, chairman, on Sunday, March 26th, to mark the centenary of the birth of John Nix Pentelow.

Pentelow was born at Somersham, Huntingdonshire, 15 miles from Cambridge, and members had hoped to arrange a celebration luncheon in the village, but were unable to find a suitable venue.

On the club's behalf Mr. Posner had written to D. C. Thomson, of Dundee, pointing out that "The Rover" would reach 50 years of continuous publication on March 4th, and that "The Topper" was approaching its 1,000th number.

The editor of "The Rover" had replied saying that the occasion was unlikely officially to be recorded in any way, in accordance with the group's policy. But he has sent us a magnificent display board, expressing the compliments of "The Rover," recording the anniversary dates (March 4, 1922 - 1972) and reproducing title-pieces of the stories that appeared in issue No. 1.

We were delighted with this gesture, and it seemed appropriate that the meeting was attended by Harold Forecast, a current "Rover" writer, and Mr. Edson.

Bill Thurbon, gave six copies of "The Marvel" (circa 1906) and three copies of "Union Jack" (1922-32) to the Allison Library. (In January, the club library was named after the late Gerry Allison, whose

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widow had, unexpectedly, forwarded the basis of a collection for the purpose.)

Next month (March 12th) Mike Holliday will speak on comic strips in newspapers.

Bill Lofts, president, has also promised a quiz, of general appeal, with a copy of one of his books as the prize.

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### LONDON

A welcome personality at the Richmond meeting was Howard Baker, to whom all members and collectors owe a debt of gratitude for the fine facsimile reprints that he has published from time to time.

With Brian Doyle in the chair, numerous questions were asked by the majority of the 35 members present. The discussion was long and it dealt with all possible subjects for future publications. Howard Baker was suitably thanked at the conclusion on a proposition put by Bob Acraman and seconded by Brian Doyle.

After refreshments, Bob Blythe conducted a couple of hands of bingo, the numbers being various characters and locations for the old books. Ray Hopkins and Ben Whiter were winners.

Mary Cadogan read a paper as to which was the oldest character in old books and papers. Don Webster was elected Chairman, unopposed, for 1972. All other officers were re-elected en bloc.

Next meeting at the Kensal Rise residence of Larry and Gladys Peters. Kindly let the hosts know if intending to be present.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

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### MIDLAND

Our first meeting in 1972 was a great success despite the fact we were few in number. Only Win Partridge, Ivan Webster, Tom Porter, George Chatham and yours truly Norman Gregory managed to avoid the sundry coughs, colds and flu bugs which plagued the remainder of our regulars or their immediate families and turn up at our old rendezvous 'The Theatre Centre.' Special mention should be made of

Win who turned up on a pretty foul evening on her first outing after a bout of pneumonia.

As this was one of our informal evenings we had the opportunity to chat a little longer between the excellent picture quiz devised by the late Gerry Allison, a reading by Tom, and browsing through the Collectors' Item and Anniversary Number before we went our separate ways.

Next Meeting same place, same time, March 28th, despite the power cuts!

NORMAN GREGORY

Special Reporter.

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WANTED — Copy of Collectors' Digest for February 1968 —

E. HOLMAN, 10 GLENBERVIE DRIVE, LEIGH-ON-SEA, ESSEX.

XX

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XX

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