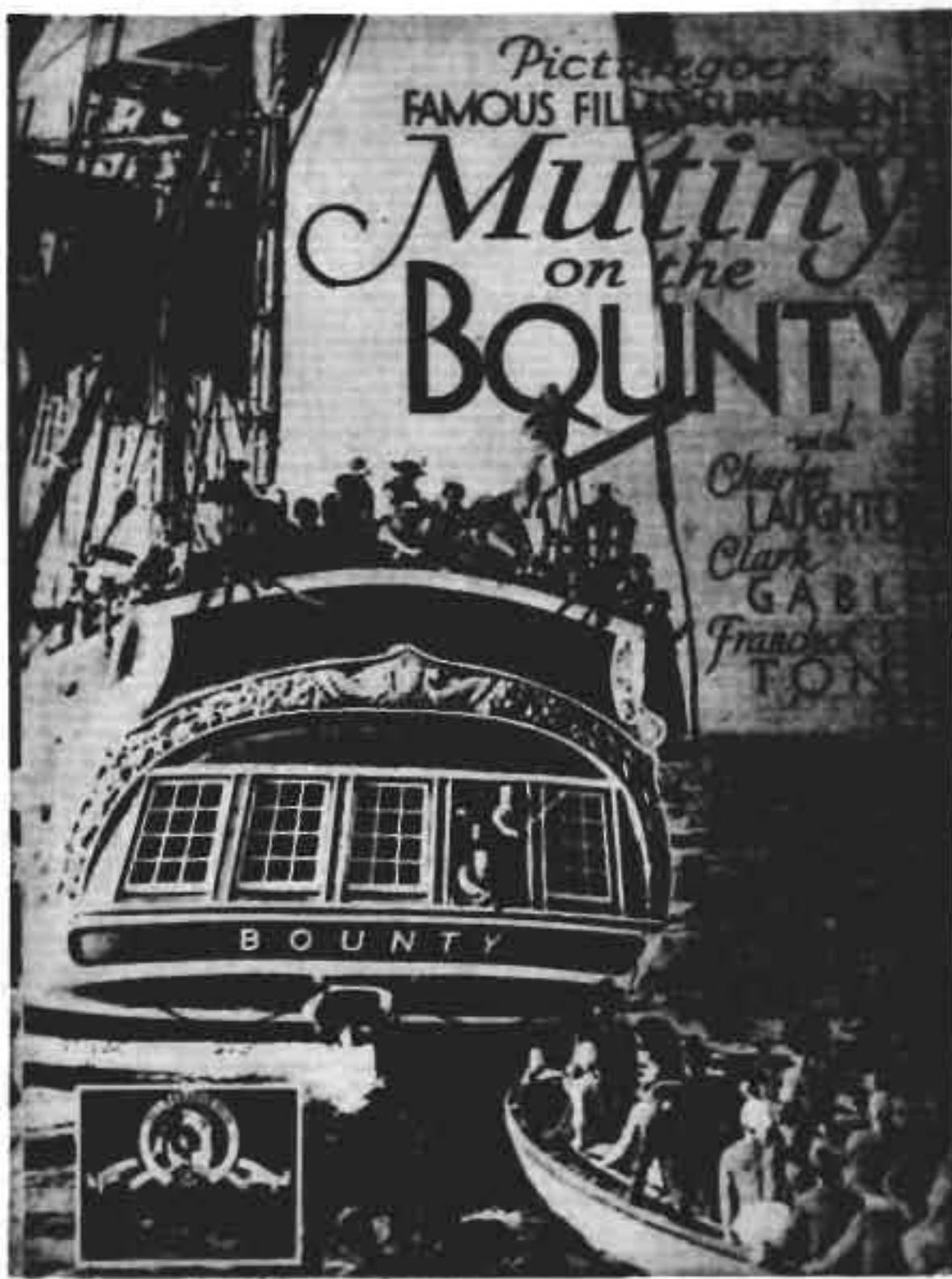


STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS' DIGEST
Vol. 26 No. 306 JUNE 1972



15p

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by
W. H. GANDER

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HERBERT LECKENBY

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JUNE 1972

Price 15p

LIVING MEMORY

Recently I read a fascinating book concerning the movie moguls. It told the early history of the American film industry.

The author of that book was born in 1931. Therefore he could have no living memories of the period of which he wrote. He could have no personal knowledge of the silent film era, or of the effect that those silent films had on the people who paid their few pence once or twice a week to go to see them. The writer probably did some research among the elderly who actually remembered, but most of his facts and figures must have come from books and articles written by authors, long gone.

Is it necessary for anyone to have known from personal experience, for him to write with real warmth on any particular subject? The periodicals for young people in the first forty years of this century were remarkable, and it is likely that nothing like them will ever appear again, so it is certain that professional writers will be studying them and trying to make money by writing about them, long after all of us have

passed on. The pro writers of 50 years hence will have a glance at the papers in the museums or in the private collections, they will con over the articles which we have written down the years, they will select items from our articles, and they will come to certain conclusions. Is it possible that they will be able to put warmth and love into their finished products?

Even today, 50 years ahead of the time I have specified above, we read most weird and wonderful statements in articles by people who have no first-hand knowledge. In an article in a newspaper, under the title "The Legend of Billy Bunter and Greyfriars" (the cutting was sent to me by our reader, Mr. T. Johnson of Wirral), the author says: "Although the Magnet, the epoch-making picture comic that popularised the school stories, printed its last edition in 1939"

Two mistakes in less than a couple of dozen words. If they make mistakes like that in 1972, what will they do in 2022?

Lillian Gish, in her delightful autobiography, has said: "I've lived long enough now to know that the whole truth is never told in history texts. Only the people who lived through an era, who are the real participants in the drama as it occurs, know the truth. The people of each generation, it seems to me, are the most accurate historians of their time."

Lillian has a point.

ONE HUNDRED MEMORIES

This month Roger Jenkins' famous series "Do You Remember?" reaches its hundredth edition. It is an achievement of no small merit. Almost every month for many years past this magazine has been privileged to bring you an article in which Mr. Jenkins has looked at a story or a series of stories, mainly Hamiltonian though there was one occasion when a Nelson Lee tale was examined. Now the century has gone up on the scoreboard.

With his knowledge of the wide range of Hamiltonia, his gift of shrewd appraisal of characterisation and atmosphere, and his scholarly and charming style of writing, Mr. Jenkins has made each article a treat for the reader. Thank you, Roger Jenkins, for a hundred lovely memories.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Last month a contributor to our Blakiana Column told us of a Sexton Blake Omnibus which he borrowed from his public library. In passing, these pleasant omnibus Blakes are available at many public libraries, including the one here at Fleet.

For some years, authors have been trying to get some arrangement made law by which they get a monetary return out of books borrowed from libraries. They get a small royalty on each book sold, but one book, bought by a library, may be read by hundreds of people. And most people who can borrow a book free are not going to buy a copy in a bookshop. Possibly the authors have a point.

Apart from any consideration of authors and their rights, I cannot see why, in these days, a small charge should not be made for books borrowed. Such charges could be ploughed back into the library for the provision of more books.

The free library at Fleet (one of the Hampshire Group) seems to be absurdly generous. Each borrower is given no less than 7 tickets. The 4 tickets for fiction do not bear the name and address of the borrower. Each book may be kept for 4 weeks. This clearly restricts the circulation of the books.

It is a system, also, which encourages theft. A man who likes a book very much may decide that it would be nice to keep it. It is no great hardship for him to have 6 tickets to use instead of 7.

In Surbiton I often had the experience of students who had tickets from several libraries. They would borrow books and never bother to return them. On many occasions I returned a dozen or so expensive books to Surbiton Library, leaving to the librarian to see that they eventually went to the libraries which owned them.

This sort of thing has to be paid for by the ratepayers - you and me. Irresponsibility with public money never seems to be checked. No wonder our rates escalate.

Mrs. W. Morss of our London Club has written me an interesting letter. She feels very strongly that we should all ask our libraries to stock the Howard Baker reprints. The plan has its merits, and I pass it on to you.

One snag is that most librarians will not accept requests for books

of fiction these days. A personal chat with the librarian might overcome that. Another is that librarians, with only a limited annual amount to spend on books, do not spend anything like what a reprint costs for one book of fiction. Would plenty of people still buy their personal copies, if they could get them from a library for nothing?

At any rate, it's worth having a chat with your local librarian.

THE EDITOR

 FOR SALE: MAGNETS: 15 issues of the Lamb series (one copy is missing from series), some copies rough, one with front cover missing, but stories complete: a bargain at £2.35, the lot. No. 690 (supplement missing, but story complete) 15p. Magnets 1645, 1649, 1650 (3 of the Water Lily series) & the 3. 2 excellent copies of the Marvel (18 & 19) of 1904: 50p the 2. Boys' Magazine No. 92 (1923): 25p. School Cap No. 1: 20p. Magnet 166 (good copy but covers missing): 45p. Girls' Own Annual (1992-93), nice book 75p. Golden Annual for Girls 1925: 25p. B.F.L. 680 "Pete's Wireless," nice copy without covers: 15p. Postage extra on all items.

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danny's diary

JUNE 1922

The Gem, of course, is just terrific these days. But even the poor old Magnet is picking up again, too.

The opening tale of the month, "For His Father's Name," was a bit dreary. Mr. Vernon-Smith's diary, giving particulars of the shady deals of his early days, had been stolen. A man named Callaghan was trying to get it, but eventually it got back to its rightful owner by way of Billy Bunter.

After this, "Bunter the Crook" was really awfully silly, but it was great fun and I laughed my head off. Bunter saw a crook film at the cinema, and decided to become a crook too. Next week came "De Vere of the Remove." De Vere is a new boy, a snob. Ponsonby & Co. make De Vere believe that Cliff House is Greyfriars, and there is an amusing chapter in which he meets Miss Primrose who thinks he is a masher after her girls. Mr. Chapman, the artist, makes Miss Primrose look a fearful old frump, not a bit like the Miss Primrose as drawn by Dodshon in the School Friend. De Vere saves Bessie Bunter on a railway crossing. Last of the month was "The Snob's Secret." De Vere insults Jimmy Vivian, but Mauleverer recognises the snob as Perkins, the son of a footman. Mauly keeps the secret, though he calls De Vere an upstart. The series continues next month.

Best coal is cheaper. The price is now 55/- a ton. A large loaf has gone down from 5d to 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. All in the right direction.

At the pictures there has been a lovely picture. It is Mary Pickford in "Little Lord Fauntleroy." Mary plays two parts. She is Cedric and also his mother, Dearest. There is some wonderful trick photography in which the mother kisses the son. I loved it.

Pauline Frederick was in "Mistress of Shenstone;" Norma Talmadge in "The Sign on the Door;" Harold Lloyd in "Now or Never;" and Agnes Ayres in "Forbidden Fruit."

Doug went to see Ralph Lynn and Tom Walls in "Tons of Money" at the Aldwych. He says it's the funniest play he has ever seen, and he talks of nothing else.

In the Boys' Friend, the grand new Mornington series has

continued. Just as the juniors are about to leave Rookwood to play cricket at St. Jim's, Jimmy Silver receives a telegram to tell him that his father is seriously ill and that he is to go home at once. He instructs Erroll that he is to skipper the team in his, Jimmy's, absence. Mornington expects Erroll to give him a place in the eleven, but Erroll refuses. The two quarrel. Rookwood is defeated by St. Jim's. Jimmy goes home and finds that the telegram was a forgery.

This story was entitled "Left Behind." Next week in "Sentenced by the Fourth," the form deals with Mornington, and sends him to Coventry for his treachery. Then, in "Not Wanted," Morny finds himself barred from the cricket. Mr. Dalton, sensing that something is wrong, tries to act as a peacemaker, but without success. Last of the month was "Mornington's Temptation," in which Mornington contrived matters to make it appear that Jimmy had stolen Monsieur Monceau's watch. It looks as though there is serious trouble ahead for Jimmy. A grand series.

In the Nelson Lee Library, which is now enlarged while the price has gone up to tuppence, they are giving away 2 free photos of sportsmen every week. In fact, all the papers are giving away various photos now as gifts. I think I like the engines in the Popular the best.

One of the famous officers in the war has now been made Lord French, Earl of Ypres. On a level crossing at Swansea, an engine collided with a lorry, and six people were killed.

A glorious month in the Gem. "Out of the Depths" was the final story of the kidnapping series. Rogue Rackstraw was at last brought to justice by Inspector Troope as a result of the farsightedness of Wildrake.

"Trimble's Treasure" was a little gem of a single story. Trimble found counterfeit money, hidden by a criminal, but the real worth of the tale came in the activities of Cardew who saved Trimble from trouble.

Finally, a dream of a new series. The first tale of the series was "The St. Jim's Teashop." Tom Merry & Co. - hard-up - decide to open a tea-shop in the barn of Mr. Pepper. Stunning teas, eat and drink as much as you like, a bob a time. They borrow £5 from Cardew in order to stock the shop. Unfortunately, their first customers are a hungry tramp and Fatty Wynn. They have nothing left for any other customers. This gorgeous tale was followed by "The Stony Seven." Cardew has to be paid his £5, and Mr. Pepper has to be paid his rent. Mr. Pepper is very

REVIEWS
"A PEEP BEHIND THE SCENES"

Mrs. O. F. Walton
(Lutterworth Press: 50p)

It is pleasant to see another new edition of this very charming old story, even though it is doubtful whether it has ever really been out of print. The book is a simple expression of great faith and does not preach to a mawkish extent. This story, since it was first published, has sold over 2½ million copies, a truly staggering figure.

The reason, of course, is its strong story-line, its marvellous atmosphere of the travelling fairground, and characterisation which puts the writer into the front line of writers for young people. The central figure is the little girl of the fairground caravan, Rosalie, but just as memorable are the small-part players in the tale - the unforgettable Little Mother Manikin, not to mention Betsey Ann, Toby, Jinx, and several others. And at the end, there is not one loose end. Even the old gentleman who comes to the caravan at the start of the story is rounded up and brought in again before the story closes.

"A Peep Behind the Scenes" was made twice into a silent film, the second time starring the British actress, Ivy Close. It used to be performed on the stage. Maybe one day the B. B. C. will dramatise it to join some of the other famous old tales which have brightened tea-time on Sunday afternoons.

BILLY BUNTER AND THE
GREYFRIARS MUTINY

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker Press: £2.75)

Of the same excellent all-round qualities as its predecessors in this run of re-prints, this one is the High Oaks series of seven stories from the Magnet of early 1928. The opening two stories are glorious vintage Hamilton showing how Dr. Locke and Mr. Quelch became estranged through the wily actions of Skinner. In writing of relations between masters, Hamilton was unequalled. As the series progresses and the juniors take themselves off to High Oaks, under the leadership of Lord Mauleverer, the high level of quality, almost inevitably, drops a little, with emphasis on impersonations and fun and games. But, all told, it is a worthy example of the Golden Age of the Magnet, with the plot developing all the way through.

Though the magic name of Billy Bunter has been inserted into the 1972 title (we hope it doesn't put anybody off), it is by no means a Bunter story. In fact, the star is probably Mauleverer, with Mr. Quelch leading the supporting players. The artist throughout is Leonard Shields.

THE STARTLING YEARS

by O. W. WADHAM

THE 1930 decade - the first half of it, at any rate, was a great time for boys' papers. They were all getting even more exciting as the decade commenced, and none were more thrilling than one that commenced publication in February of 1930 - it was called THE STARTLER. Priced at two-pence in England it was a 28-page effort with seven stories per issue, one a serial. There was also a joke page, Editor's chat, a comic strip, and a page of "Chin-wag With the Chief." With so much variety the fiction only ran to three or four pages for each item; too short to be of much interest to most boys those years, but I must say those yarns were quick moving, and covered everything from aeroplanes to school tales. The serial was one in the Tarzan style, then so popular with boys and girls everywhere, and was called "Targa - Giant of the Jungle." Targa was sure a tough customer - the heading to the yarn shows him lifting a one ton rock over his shaggy head to hurl at someone.

He also fought six hefty men with ease. No authors name was given to the story, but I hardly think it was Edgar Rice Burroughs.

Animals seemed to feature in all the complete stories, and big wild birds also flitted through the pages. There was a school yarn, of course, about "Bungo Bang, a boy conjurer, and a new type of detective tale in the S. Hook-Clarke manner, "The Hobo Tec," concerning one called Rob Saunders and his Negro assistant, Rufus Napoleon Washington Rufe. I have number 8 of volume one of THE STARTLER. I hardly think that many volumes were published, but it sure set out to startle readers from the word go. The back page advert. would hardly meet with the approval of Harry Wharton or Tom Merry - it urged boys to be sure and get Dad to smoke "Turf" cigarettes and thereby secure free genuine foreign and colonial stamps.

NELSON LEE COLUMN

THE CARLTON GANG

by R. J. Godsave

One would hardly expect early Nelson Lees to be the same in style or format as in later years. After a span of thirteen years, or so, new characters must necessarily evolve.

In No. 15 of the 2nd New Series, May 1930, Brooks introduced the 'Carlton Gang.' This comprised twelve juniors who had left Carlton College to become scholars at St. Frank's. Led by Kirby Keeble Parkington, known to his followers as "K.K." who was for his age of fifteen years a young giant, they immediately adopted a warlike attitude on arriving at St. Frank's.

Jimmy Potts was knocked down by "K.K." for speaking to him without being addressed, and to the rest of the St. Frank's juniors, who had gathered round at their entry, he announced that he was now junior captain - and the sooner that was understood the better.

To old readers of the Nelson Lee this arrival of a group of boys from another college was reminiscent of the Buster Boots series of 1923. A similar set of circumstances, and a desire to become form-captain culminated in a boxing match between Nipper and Boots to settle the question. O.S. 435 "The Battle for Captaincy."

Unlike the bitter feeling which existed at first between Boots with his friends of the College House and Nipper with the Ancient House juniors, "K.K." was a sportsman at heart (as was Buster Boots for that matter) and the following Lees of the 2nd New Series were of good natured japes between the "Red Hots," as the Carlton boys called themselves, and the "Old Timers," which referred to the old scholars of St. Frank's led by Handforth.

This was a period in the Lee saga when quite a few of the leading 'Lights' at St. Frank's were members of Nelson Lee's famous Detective Academy. After the disastrous fire which has destroyed much of the school, quite a few of the cubs returned on the opening of the Ancient House and West House. The other two Houses were still in the builder's hands. This accounts in this series for the presence of Handforth & Co. who were cubs of the Academy.

The Nelson Lee of 1930 would have been practically unrecognisable to the old series reader. The St. Frank's stories occupied a mere six or seven pages. These were the excellent stories of the japes between the "Red Hots" and the "Old Timers." The rest of the Lee was occupied by the detective cases upon which the Detective Academy were engaged. Two or three short stories, some of which were in serial form, completed the contents. The St. Frank's portion being cut down to so few pages could only allow short stories of incidents at the school.

The end of the Lee was soon to come with its amalgamation with the 'Gem.' Whether the drastic change in the Lee was made to compete with the adventure type of paper would seem possible. Unfortunately, in this world nothing stands still, and a certain amount of modernisation is necessary. Perhaps too much of the adventure type of story could be responsible for altering a paper out of practically all recognition.



BROOKS, BOND and NODDY

by William Lister

(NO - NO - NO, not "BROOK—BONDS" AND NODDY,
but BROOKS, BOND and NODDY)

The excitement was terrific! No doubt when you were a robust schoolboy, back in the nineteen-twenties, you would get in some corner on the dark evenings of October or November, or better still, go to bed by the light of a candle, and take with you your current copy of the "Nelson Lee." At least, if you were like me, you would.

I can remember those nights even today. The wind rattling my window, sometimes even moaning as it tried to get in. Outside a full moon and scurrying clouds; inside a lighted candle by my bedside; snug? you bet. My heart would stand all the fluttering that Edwy Searles Brooks and his tales could give it, as I lay, propped against my pillow.

I must warn my readers that if they have reached their declining years and are subject to weak hearts, they must take it steady when they read Brooks, especially when he moves out of St. Frank's; and get out of St. Frank's he does in "The Island Above The Clouds" 2nd Series, No. 141-146, October 1st, 1932.

Nelson Lee, Nipper, Lord Dorrimore, Umlosi and Handforth

are the only five to take this six-episode trip into the unknown. St. Frank's and its schoolboys are left far behind. However, in case some readers get homesick for St. Frank's, the editor runs a serial, concurrently - "Cock O' the Remove" featuring the old school.

One thing puzzles me! Whenever I read one of the old St. Frank's tales, certain passages, situations or illustrations, come back to me over the years, but perusing this copy I recall nothing. The stories, the covers, the inside illustrations are all new to me, and I wondered why.

I found the answer in the date - October 1932. For many years I had taken the "Nelson Lee" on order, but by 1932 I was twenty, and as the poets say, "A young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love." I would think more than "lightly." What I had was a "heavy crush" that took up all my spare time. During this period I purchased my papers only on occasions. They were my whirlwind courtship days, if you can use the word "whirlwind" to describe a four-year courtship. You know how it was in those days. No job, no prospects - only "hope."

I must have missed this series. I remember not a word. However, better late than never. I wonder what you do when you come across a series of your favourite old paper?

Look at the covers? Examine the inside pictures? Read the editor's chat and then get down to business?

Exactly! and I find prehistoric monsters roaming over the covers of the first three copies, their long necks stretching to reach the small aeroplane overhead, their cruel jaws champing. A huge monster rising out of the sea, like a giant lobster, delights the eye, on the cover of copy four. While copies five and six, scenes of pirates, of walking the plank and an invasion of giant rats.

Between the covers a large Fungus Tree (man-eating type) has Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi in its grip. Turn over the page and see our party of five crouching against a rock while hordes of prehistoric monsters thunder past.

Turn again, and three horrified figures, lashed to posts, watch as the boiling underground waters rise to engulf them. Yet again, gaint bats carrying Nelson Lee into the air, or Handforth and Lord Dorrimore dropping at the end of a rope into a two-thousand foot deep cavern. While above cave-men dance their wild "Dance of Death." Below, many

hundreds of feet, the secret lair of Black Hawk, the pirate.

James Bond? By the time you have read our Edwy Searles Brooks it will make James Bond look like "Noddy."

I give this "five stars."

ECHO ON "THE TWILIGHT YEARS"

from P. Tierney

The only St. Jim's stories by Francis Warwick which I read as a boy were S. O. L. reprints. I think they were well written stories but agree that he should not have tinkered with traditions by removing established characters and replacing them with new ones.

I presume it was Warwick who expelled Rocke and provided Crooke with a new friend in the shape of a Bolsover-like character called Burkitt.

Rocke was certainly not a nice character but I felt sorry for him in the story of his expulsion. He had developed a genuine affection for Ethel Cleveland and was madly jealous of George Tiggers.

I was about sixteen years old when I read that story and fully understood the lengths to which Rocke's jealousy drove him because I was in exactly the same position at the time.

However, Rocke successfully engineered Tiggers' removal from St. Jim's after which he was blackmailed by Trimble.

When the plot was eventually exposed Rocke was expelled but Trimble was not. That seemed to me to be unfair and it still does.

Base as Rocke's conduct was, he was motivated by strong and understandable emotional reasons, whereas Trimble was just an unscrupulous blackmailer.

** ** *

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

Thank you to the very kind people who have complimented me on the high standard of Blakiana. I like to get the best I can for everyone and I hope you have been interested in the new items of the Blake Saga that have appeared. It certainly is a Saga without end. No doubt you are all looking forward to one of Mr. Howard Baker's reproductions, this time with Sexton Blake stories reprinted.

I would like to remind you that I have a large selection of Sexton Blakes and Union Jacks in the Library, over 1000 items, all ready for borrowing.

* * *

THE TORRID ZONE

by J. E. M.

Back to those happy, innocent days and those happy, innocent old boys' story papers Innocent?

'Her will seemed to be submerged..

THRILLING COMPLETE DETECTIVE NOVEL, INTRODUCING
SEXTON BLAKE, TINKER, AND PEDRO!



She allowed him to lift her once more to her feet, and then began that slow, swaying progress round the room... Then she was caught up in the arms of a languorous wave... She yielded to it... Then sweet and utter oblivion while the hungry arms of that thing of evil beside her caught hold of the garland of drugged blossoms, hurled them across the room, then swept her body to him while he babbled incoherent madness...' The poor helpless, light-headed girl is June Severance, her would-be despoiler 'that thing of evil' Caspar Nigan, a heavy-breathing half-caste of European and Chinese parentage. The episode is from Poisoned Blossoms, written by G. H. Teed almost 44 years ago for Union Jack No. 1305. The U.J.'s cover, one of Eric Parker's superb efforts, shows a swooning blonde in the arms of a swarthy character whose intentions are all too clear, while a sexy hula-hula girl looks on. However one chooses to describe all this, "innocent" would hardly be the first adjective to spring to mind.

In the stories of G. H. Teed, the lascivious and sensual characters were often those of "impure" race. Back in 1924 (The Street of Many Lanterns, U.J. 1064), another villainous half-caste, this time called Ligan - clearly an earlier incarnation of Nigan - was casting a lubricious eye on Mlle. Yvonne. And the same theme was given yet another airing in The Brute of Saigon (U.J. 1383), with Mlle. Roxane as a half-caste's intended victim. Again set in the Orient, this sultry tale runs a high temperature in more than the climatic sense.

It is anybody's guess whether Teed's racial preoccupations would have upset the Race Relations Board, had that body existed a generation ago. One does feel, however, that if Mrs. Mary Whitehouse had been on the scene in those days, she might well have raised an eyebrow at the sex he injected into Sexton Blake stories. For, in its time, the kind of writing I have referred to was pretty hot stuff.

The supreme Blakian exponent of the torrid, G. H. T. did not always confine his accounts of passion to half-castes, or even to criminals of "purer" racial origins. As we know, Blake himself was more than once roused by the flesh, perhaps the classic case being that famous interlude on Roxane's yacht, immortalised by Mr. E. S. Turner in the Blakian section of his book, Boys Will Be Boys. Not even Tinker was permitted to escape the temptations of the carnal. Though his relationship with the exotic Nirvana may have been a chaste one, there are enough

melting kisses, intimate embraces and pounding pulses in Teed's account of this youthful affair to hint otherwise. One way or another, most of Teed's ladies played havoc with male emotions.

A sex interest was not neglected by other Blake writers. Lewis Jackson, for example, introduced the alluring Olga Nasmyth, 'Girl of Destiny,' while Gwyn Evans' strangely appealing Miss Death exercised a novel glamour. But Teed remains unquestionably the doyen of sexual daring. Of course, in the company of Sexton Blake, even with Teed as our guide, we are always a long healthy distance from present-day porno. But, innocent? Well...

* * *

MY FIRST SEXTON BLAKE STORY

by John Bridgwater

I was introduced to Sexton Blake in Union Jack of April 1928. At the age of 10 it was my first "Boys' Paper." I had read Playtime, Bubbles and Tiger Tim's when younger. Also I had read bits of a thriller serial about a safe in an underground vault, published in the old Daily Chronicle, because I had heard Mother and Dad discussing it, but the Union Jack was my first paper with a long story, meant to encourage me to read rather than look at pictures.

I remember being taken to the local paper shop by my Mother to choose which paper I should have weekly. We selected the Union Jack, the reasons being, firstly, because I was flattered to see my name at the top of the front cover. I was called Jack in those days. Secondly, we liked the patriotic sound of the name. Thirdly, (this I realised years afterwards) because my Mother was an inveterate reader of detective stories. The third reason weighed most heavily as Mother provided the 2d.

Today, April 1972, I have just finished a second reading of U. J. No. 1279. It contains a Peter Brim, The Spider, story called the Adventure of the Gold Bars by Ladbroke Black. What an excellent introduction Mother gave me to Sexton Blake! In this Union Jack he is shown as a young, eager-looking, pipe-smoking detective in the illustrations. This impression is confirmed by the story. He is eager to clear a man accused of complicity in a robbery of gold bars from a train, simply because he shares his train compartment with the man's unhappy wife

PRINCE EDWARD THEATRE.

Sexton Blake.

Muriel Raeburn	Eve Gray
Sexton Blake	Arthur Wontner
Tinker	John Roderick
Paul Cairns	Wilfred Babbage
Detective-Inspector Coutts	David Hawthorne
Leslie Waring	Arthur Macrae
Mrs. Bardell	Dora Gregory
Lydia Carrington	Pauline Loring
Creep	Harcourt Brooke
Selton	Frank Tennant

The play is, itself, a double-barrelled weapon. Those whom it fails to thrill may be amused at it. Competence is all that it demands from the cast, but Mr. Wontner, as Blake, is extremely competent. Mr. Arthur Macrae as Leslie Waring is an admirable sketch of a bright young man from Fleet-street, but his further essay in the manner of the late Mr. Lon Chaney is less successful.—*The Times.*

"Sexton Blake" suffers from a plethora of talk which does not help the mystification. Its form is too much the form of a serial.

It really becomes dramatic, as distinguished from sensational, in the last act, when Sexton Blake and Mr. Midnight fight their duel of wits. Until then one had no clear idea of Mr. Midnight's identity, and it came as a surprise, because of several unlikely people he had seemed the most innocent.

The play is full of crude excitement, and was received with great enthusiasm. It will probably bring success to this new theatre.—*News-Chronicle.*

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: The press report on the Sexton Blake play of 1930 is sent to us by Mr. A. Holliman. At that time, the Prince Edward Theatre was brand-new. It had opened with a musical, "Nippy," about Lyons' waitresses which had a fairly short run. Later the theatre became the London Casino, and the home of Cinerama.)

and is moved by her tears. He generously provides a refuge for the couple in his country cottage, appoints himself their champion and impetuously flouts the authorities when told by Inspector Coutts not to interfere. He cruises about the West country on a bicycle, looking for clues. Those he finds lead him to investigate a totally different crime under the impression he is still working on his original quest. His attempt at disguise is easily penetrated by the suspect, a smuggler named Captain Bull. Sheer luck saves the situation and Bill is used as an ally after agreeing to give up smuggling if Blake makes no report to the Authorities. This is achieved by Blake using Bull's greed for gold. It is pure chance that the Spider's men pose as police to retrieve the gold they had stolen. They so put the "wind up" Bull by handcuffing him that he completely forgets how he has been bamboozled, in his relief at finding he is still a free man.

However, at 10, I was not concerned with the ethics of the case. Blake had befriended a couple in the depths of despair, successfully foiled the master criminal and made fools of the authorities. What more could a boy wish for in a hero? I fancy the fact that he could make mistakes, go off on the wrong track, use questionable means of persuasion and ride a bike, endeared him to my young heart as much as

anything.

It is not uncommon to be disappointed by paying a return visit to childhood in this way. Not so in this instance however. I found the story just as good as I remembered it, recapturing some of the original feelings it aroused in me. Also I had the pleasure of appreciating a good tale from an adult viewpoint.

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

DR. B. KELION,

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DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 100 — Magnet No. 100 — "Nugent Minor"

At the end of 1909 and the beginning of 1910, the $\frac{1}{2}$ d Magnet was frequently publishing double numbers, no doubt with a view to ascertaining whether the Magnet could be permanently upgraded to a penny paper like the Gem. Magnet No. 100 was one of those double numbers, a story of twenty-one chapters, and the experiment must have been considered a success, for the Magnet was duly upgraded a few weeks later. It is pleasant to think that the story entitled "Nugent Minor" played an important part in establishing the fortunes of the Magnet at this critical juncture.

Charles Hamilton once confessed to me that Frank Nugent was based on his 'own diffident self.' It seems equally likely that Harry Manners was even more of a self-portrait, with his love of photography, music, and chess. Each was encumbered with a younger brother who was adored at home but inclined to be thoughtless, selfish, and generally troublesome at school, thus causing the elder brother considerable anxiety. It is tempting to wonder whether Charles Hamilton himself was ever burdened with looking after his younger brother, but it must be admitted that this is mere speculation. What is certain is that Nugent minor came on the scene long before Manners minor, and Magnet No. 100 is a classic exposition of this particular theme.

Bulstrode was still smarting at having been ousted from the captaincy of the Remove, and he was quite willing to lead Dicky Nugent astray by offering him cigarettes and inciting him to take no notice of his elder brother. Skinner persuaded Bunter to play a trick on Nugent minor, who sneaked about the matter, and in the end the Second Form were bent on ragging him. Frank Nugent's dilemma was highlighted in a most convincing manner, and his well-meant attempts to rescue his younger brother often succeeded only in making matters worse. The story was set against a panoramic view of many outstanding Greyfriars characters like Dr. Locke, Mr. Prout and his rifle, Mr. Quelch, and Wingate, as well as the Second Form and Remove characters, and it moved swiftly to a fine climax with a surprising twist at the end. Even after this passage of time, it still reads convincingly, and there can be

little doubt that it was equally appreciated in 1910.

After this story, Charles Hamilton began introducing a series of younger brothers. Hop Hi arrived in No. 117, Bunter minor in 144, Bulstrode minor in 178, Inky minor (a tale of impersonation) in 183, Bolsover minor in 206, Coker minor in 241, and Wingate minor in 265. Bulstrode minor died, and many of the others were characters intended for use in one story only, but Dicky Nugent was continually featured throughout the Magnet's run, though Frank's attitude to him changed over the years. Frank was always worried about Dicky, but in No. 100 he clearly recognised the defects in his younger brother's character; he was prepared to admit that Dicky was spoiled, wilful, and troublesome, and at the end of the story he spoke his mind clearly to his younger brother. In later years he was always finding excuses for Dicky, and the other members of the Famous Five found it tactful not to discuss him in front of Frank. Whatever Frank Nugent's attitude, however, there can be no doubt that Charles Hamilton made the most of the dramatic possibilities that the situation afforded, and it is very satisfactory to record that the Magnet scored a century with such a memorable hit as "Nugent Minor."

DEATH OF F. ADDINGTON SYMONDS

It was whilst having lunch with 'Pierre Quiroule' the famous Sexton Blake writer, at the Victory Club, London, that I learned of the death of F. Addington Symonds on the 23rd December last. He was 79, and he and Mr. Sayer (P.Q.) were both fellow-members of the Crime Writers' Association. Mr. Symonds needs no introduction to older readers of the C.D. as he was the creator and first editor of The Champion. Later The Triumph, Rocket, and Pluck. He did indeed write up the whole history of how he founded these money-spinning Amalgamated Press boys' papers in the early Annuals. Mr. Symonds' large personal collection of boys' papers were sold many years ago to collectors in our circle, and are now proudly on the shelves of the present-day enthusiasts. Mr. Symonds was a writer also in his own right, and wrote amongst many boys' stories, novels, and of course Sexton Blake stories. And so yet another link has gone with the past.

W. O. G. LOFTS

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIALNo. 171. SHADOW OF DOUBT.

I hold no brief for Pentelow. As a youngster I detested his substitute stories and found them almost unreadable. Today, for me, those stories show up pitifully as poor substitutes for the real thing. His editorials were turgid, and though they display affection for the Hamilton schools, there are times when those editorials ooze conceit in the light of what we know now. Of the man himself, I know nothing. He was dead long before even his name meant anything to me.

On the other hand, I have loved and admired the work of Charles Hamilton all my life. In my view he was a genius in his own sphere and, without any question, the world's greatest writer of school stories. Throughout the last twenty years of his life I was always in close contact with him, and my love for his work became entwined with a deep affection for the man himself. I was the only one of his readers who went through snow and ice and chaos on the railways to attend his funeral.

I mention these points merely to show that I am not anti-Hamiltonian when I say that we should treat with mild reserve some of the things of which he wrote us in the nineteen-forties.

My personal opinion is that Hamilton, smarting bitterly over the dog-in-the-manger attitude of the Amalgamated Press in the forties, took a jaundiced view of things which had happened a quarter of a century earlier, and that we, his loyal fans, encouraged this by our shoals of letters in which we damned the sub-writers.

Readers will recall that Roger Jenkins recently, recalled the old belief that Pentelow blackmailed Hamilton by saying that unless Hamilton co-operated with him, presumably by using Pentelow characters and carrying out ideas thought out by the editor, he, Pentelow, would exclude Hamilton from the Companion Papers and write all the stories himself.

If I hedge a little over accepting it, it is partly because I just cannot see our favourite writer kow-towing to a blackmailer. Brooks, certainly, cringed before domineering editors - Bob Blythe has made that very clear - but such an attitude would be quite alien to all I know of Hamilton. In later years there were many occasions when we saw him rush into the fray fearlessly to defend himself against any form of attack.

I cannot see him licking Pentelow's boots.

I think there was no love lost between Hamilton and Pentelow. Some of Pentelow's editorials seem to display jealousy of his star writer, and I cannot believe that Hamilton, many years later, would have written as he did about a man with whom he had ever been friendly.

Roger Jenkins, in his splendid History of the Magnet, wrote, of the Great War period: "The uncertainty of the author's movements and general wartime factors all tended to take some of the shine off his stories. In all these circumstances, the wonder is that the Magnet kept going at all. Yet it did, and it was during the latter part of the war that it outstripped the circulation of the Gem."

That might seem to suggest that Pentelow himself had plenty of difficulties in keeping the papers going and that he did the job passably well. There seems to be no evidence in the papers themselves that Hamilton and Pentelow were not working together in harmony.

In fact, it was not until quite a time after Pentelow ceased to be editor that the Magnet reached rock bottom, with Hamilton writing very little indeed for either the Magnet or Gem. But, in 1922, when Hamilton was writing almost every story in the Gem - long past Pentelow's time - we find Hamilton starring Erasmus Zachariah Pepper and his famous barn in the lovely Stony Seven series in the Gem. Would Hamilton, quite unnecessarily, have introduced into his stories then the creations of a man whom he despised and detested as a thief and a blackmailer? To me, it seems very unlikely.

Some seven years ago, we published the comments of another A. P. writer, John Wheway. He wrote of Charles Hamilton: "He was a law unto himself. He was almost Fleetway's bread and butter. It is not generally realised with what awe Hamilton was regarded at Fleetway House. Can you imagine how he was regarded by the rank and file? He came when he liked, and said what he thought, and departed, and yet he was revered for the sheer brilliance of his writing."

Even if we come to the conclusion that Wheway was exaggerating, our common-sense tells us that Hamilton was a very bright jewel in the A. P. crown. Would such a man have hopped vigorously when Pentelow or anyone else cracked the whip?

Last month Roger Jenkins quoted from letters in which Charles

Hamilton accused Pentelow of theft, forgery, and swindling. (There is, of course, no question that the author made such comments in the forties, and, by any yardstick, they are serious charges.)

Charles Hamilton may well have had reason to dislike Pentelow during the period of the latter's editorship, but if the charges were based on the fact that Pentelow published his own stories under the Hamilton pen-names, they seem exaggerated. Substitute stories were appearing in the Gem and Magnet long before Pentelow became editor.

I believe that Pentelow may have been guilty of publishing his own stories when genuine stories were available. I think it probable that he had the odd idea that his own tales were as good as or even better than those of Hamilton. But popping in sub-tales in this way was not peculiar to the period of Pentelow's editorship. For instance, Bernard Glyn was mentioned in a sub-story the week before he was introduced as a new boy in a genuine story, in blue cover days. This seems to indicate that the genuine tale was waiting ready to be used. And, years later, a sub-tale was published in the middle of the Toad of the Remove series.

Hamilton had too many irons in the fire sometimes, and it is just possible that his manuscripts might have arrived late, now and then.

Charles Hamilton was, I think, the victim of the medium in which he chose to work. He was, as most of us have long seen, so very much superior to that medium. He brought a respectability to weekly papers which they would never have enjoyed but for him.

Nobody, least of all Hamilton himself, can have foreseen in early days that Greyfriars and St. Jim's were to become a vast industry all on their own as time went by. The system of including sub-tales under the Hamilton pen-names became the normal practice, possibly by default or protest on the part of the author.

Personally, I doubt whether he bothered about this while the old papers were appearing, week in, week out. In his own particular sphere, he was the king of the school story, and he was able to write competently to the popular taste on other themes. I imagine that he felt that life had been good to him and that he had been good to life.

But by the early forties, when he found himself with no source of income and with his right to pen further stories of his own schools banned by the very medium to which he had devoted his life, his bitterness is

understandable. And, when we started to write to him, with our diatribes against the sub-writers, his cup of bitterness may well have flowed over. Perhaps, when we look back on what might have been, it is only human that we blame the failings of others, and seldom our own.

I cannot help feeling that we have always regarded those series in the old papers as of far greater importance than the publishers, the editors, and, indeed, the writers, considered them all those years ago. And that our letters to Charles Hamilton in the forties persuaded him to think as we did.

Though over 50 years have gone by since Pentelow ruled the roost in a Fleetway office, there must still be some left who remember. Maybe one day someone may prove me wrong in trying to think not too harshly of Pentelow, and then I shall enjoy writing this column in sackcloth and ashes.

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

M. MILSTON: A man has a collection of Magnets. One day he finds them gone. His attachments, each special, are now destroyed and can never be returned. Does not Charles Hamilton have the same attachments to the characters he created? How must he have felt when Pentelow killed one of the characters he had nurtured for ten years? What right had Pentelow to destroy Hamilton's attachment? The basic moral part is that a creation belongs to its creator and only he, or someone with his blessing, can tamper with it. One may ask what is the alternative? I reply that one does not try to find excuses for someone guilty of theft. We may understand why he stole, but we still condemn it. In killing Courtney, Pentelow did not merely steal. He stole on a level which would not disgrace the Great Train Robbers.

(Eric Fayne adds: If a man loses his collection of Magnets it is at least possible that he has not looked after them very well.)

I have no time at all for the wretched "Very Gallant Gentleman," but, personally, I do not believe that any of us is justified in making so extreme an accusation as Mr. Milston makes above. We cannot be certain under what circumstances "Gallant Gentleman" was written and published. It is wishful exaggeration to claim that Hamilton had "nurtured Courtney for ten years." After "The Road to Ruin" in the Spring of 1912, Hamilton did not, to the best of my knowledge, star Courtney again. Courtney died almost as much from the neglect of his creator as from the activities of Pentelow.)

The Postman Called

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

W. LISTER (Blackpool): The outstanding item of the excellent May C.D. was "Horatio Bottomley." I was about 10 years old, and still remember the family discussing the matter. They took "John Bull" regularly. "The St. Frank's Saga" by Jim Cook gave us a charming pot-pourri of so many characters that we Lee readers loved so well.

H. P. CLARK (Nuneaton): As far as I am concerned an author's style and characters are all important - the plot secondary. The three authors whose styles appeal to me most are Charles Hamilton, Edwy Searles Brooks and - to move from the realm of old boys' papers - Jeffery Farnol, particularly the latter's books written in the style of his first novel, *The Broad Highway*.

We "old faithfuls" are often told that our interest in the old papers is purely nostalgic, but I very much doubt that this is entirely the case. I am quite sure that had I not had the good fortune to read Hamilton in my youth, but had read him for the first time as an adult, his cheery, refreshing style would have appealed to me instantly.

So, for me at any rate, Hamilton is the greatest. But every man to his own taste.

To change the subject. As a cat lover, I always read with great interest your references to the progress of Mr. Softee. Your remarks about cats in April C.D. are certainly apt. For a great part of my life I have been owned by cats - one owned me for 17 years. Now I am owned by two cats - to say nothing of a dog.

Incidentally, I have often wondered what happened to Charles Hamilton's own cat, Sammy. Was it still alive when the author died?

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Sammy died some years before his master. The famous picture of Sammy with his master (plus the chess board which has been made into a small table and is now in the editor's den, a cherished possession) appeared in a recent lovely book entitled "Cats! Cats! Cats!" Mr. Softee is still going strong. We had no mice at Excelsior House till he took over. Now he brings them in from the fields and lets them go in the middle of T.V. programmes. He brings them over a 7-foot fence, and through his own cat-door. Any solution to the problem?)

Fr. FRANCIS HERTZBERG (Wirral): A reader once wrote to ask about Desmond Reid, and commented that his photograph was never printed;

not surprising perhaps as, of course, 'Desmond Reid' was just an editorial name. But the same editor who did not print a photograph of the non-existent 'Desmond Reid' managed to print one of the equally non-existent 'Peter Saxon' - who was himself. (See S. B. L. 4th series No. 395, 'The Last Days of Berlin, with its (?) old picture of the author, upturned collar, turned down hat brim; and Crime is my Business, No. 408 with a more recent picture.)

JACK HUGHES (Queensland): From a recent issue of FLAIR, an Australian Mod. Fashion magazine. "Another meeting place for the young in Adelaide, is BILLY BUNTER'S in Gouger Street, most attractively done with tiled floors, dark wooden beams, white archways, and even stained glass windows in a closed-in courtyard. At night there's a guitarist and you choose from a luscious assortment of Italian-style dishes. There's also a wine bar inside. The Billy Bunter in Adelaide really swings."

I suppose that 'Billy Bunter the Gay Blade' would really approve.

H. BLOWERS (Leeds): When are we going to have another old, old serial in the Digest? I used to look forward so much to reading it. I really enjoy "Danny's Diary," but those disagreeable letters between author and editor leave me cold.

T. M. COCKBURN (Ayr): My exhibition of comics, so successfully held in Craigie College in June 1971, has been of equal success at Park Primary School, Stranraer. The children have been eagerly reading Chips (1936), Film Fun (1941), Dandy (1940), and Beano (1946), as well as many old issues of Eagle, Lion, Radio Fun, Knockout, Micky Mouse, Rainbow, Tip-Top, Jingles, and, of course, the Magnet (included as a story-paper along with Rover, Wizard, and Hotspur.) The children did not just show polite interest to humour me as a kind teacher, but pronounced the old comics as "much better than the ones now."

A. HOLLAND (Wellington): I thoroughly enjoyed the clever cartoon on the C. D. cover for May. I would like to see more of Mr. McSavage's work.

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

MIDLAND

Meeting held on 25th April, 1972.

Again eight members attended, though we might have achieved double figures again had it not been for the unavoidable absence of a few regulars, notably Tom Porter, who hadn't missed a meeting for ages.

Being without Tom, we also missed the monthly Anniversary Number and Collectors' Item which our worthy librarian normally produces. However, under our Chairman, Ivan Webster, a lively meeting ensued to which all present contributed appropriately as the opportunity arose (which it seemed to pretty constantly!).

The welcome attendance of Gerald Price with a small recorder resulted in an animated pre-recorded reading by him from "The Court-field Cracksman" much enjoyed by all and, as a finale to the evening, excerpts from a radio programme about the great Caruso.

George Chatham produced his splendid electronic wonder box again, this time featuring a recording of the Midland O. B. B. C. Christmas party from Jack de Manio's "Today" programme of 15 December, 1970, and also the undersigned's talk "Lasting Loyalties - A Personal View" recorded in September 1968.

Our A.G.M. is on 23 May and the next regular meeting on Tuesday, 27 June, at the Birmingham Theatre Centre, starting at 7.30 p.m.

IAN BENNETT

Vice-Chairman.

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CAMBRIDGE

Ken Roscoe, assistant publisher, I. P. C. Magazines Ltd., has asked Danny Posner, Chairman of Cambridge Old Boys' Book Club, for an outline of the sort of periodical collectors would like. Reprints would obviously feature largely in such a publication, but room might also be found for collecting interests. But the idea is only tentative, and I. P. C.

would need to be convinced of the viability of such a project before they considered launching anything on these lines.

Bill Thurbon delighted members with a scholarly address, "Some Thoughts of an Amateur Archivist." He claimed that the mass media, including television, too often cast a "condescending eye on what they regard as a childish interest." Mr. Thurbon quoted titles of Sexton Blake stories published before the First World War: "Sexton Blake Territorial" and "Sexton Blake in Zululand," and referred to his own favourite characters, S. Clarke Hook's Jack, Sam and Pete.

The club were disappointed that their Pentelow centenary booklet had not yet appeared, but Mr. Posner offered an apology and said that he had held publication back so that corrections could be made to the text, and the photographic reproductions improved.

Bill Lofts recalled the golden days of Will Hay who, he said, was at the peak of his popularity between 1935-37. Charles Hamilton was given the job of writing some of the Bendover School stories featuring Hay.

The talk was followed by gramophone records, provided by Harold Forecast, of Hay at his funniest - or corniest!

The club's next meeting will be on June 25, at 3 Long Road, Cambridge (3 p. m.).

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NORTHERN

Meeting held 13th May, 1972.

A gathering of regulars were in attendance when the Chairman opened the meeting. He recalled that it marked the anniversary of our special birthday celebration of 1971, held that year on Cup Final Day. This time we were meeting with a much more significant Cup Final fresh in our minds.

The main matter outstanding was the election of a Secretary. So far, private difficulties had prevented an appointment being made to this office, and these were far from resolved. In the end, however, Geoffrey Good most gallantly offered to come to our rescue. Knowing the heavy burden of pastoral duties that Geoffrey already carries, members warmly acclaimed his election.

There was warm acclaim, too, for the speaker of the evening. J. Breeze Bentley, who has regretfully been an infrequent visitor of recent years. We were quickly reminded of our loss when the speaker addressed us on "The Rookwood Scene." Within moments we were entirely held by the speaker's clarity, wit, deftness of phrase, and sheer authority over his material. From the inception of Owen Conquest and his new school in the Boys' Friend of March 28th, 1915, Breeze traced the outstanding episodes in the history of the least-known of the three main Hamilton schools, and offered lucid and penetrating portraits of the chief characters. Always a gripping entertainer, he gave us extra food for thought this time. Keen discussion followed Mr. Bentley's excellent paper.

We shall look forward to the speaker's next visit. Next Meeting, June 10th.

JOHNNY BULL

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SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

Tuesday, May 2nd was a black day for the members of The Golden Hours Club . . . they arrived at the rendezvous which had been the setting for so many happy hobby discussions to find that "Progress" had placed its implacable finger on their long time meeting place. The demolishers had boarded up Cahill's Restaurant in Castlereagh Street, Sydney, so, with many a nostalgic back looking the members trooped around the corner to Tudor Hall. And here in an atmosphere of pseudo-Scotch wedded to Tudor England, Syd Smyth, Stan Nicholls, Ernie Carter, Ron and Marion Brockman with Victor Colby and Bette Pate, proceeded to enjoy their hobby.

Main topic was the experience shared by all members recently when Ron and Marion extended an invitation to attend the biannual Book Fair held by the University of New South Wales late in April. . . there were over 60,000 books beautifully classified and displayed with plenty of time, room for browsing and a most amiable crowd. Of course there wasn't an abundance of hobby material but Marion Brockman found a treasure, a "Chatterbox Annual." Ernie Carter was gloating over a carton of his "finds."

Going from the joys of yesteryear to the stark reality of 1972, members discussed the latest publication to titillate the minds of young Aussies... "The Little Red School Book." Can't tell you what was in it as the chaps read it and censored it for the females present, but judging from their very expressive eyebrows which disappeared completely, it is a far cry from Charles Hamilton's schoolboy heroes' innocent exploits. Currently our politicians are crossing swords on "The L. R. S. B." Will the oldies of 2002 be searching for copies to add to their collections of childhood literature?

B. PATE

Hon. Secretary.

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LONDON

The Charles Hamilton Museum "At Home" to members and friends of the Old Boys' Book Club, as the souvenir menu card, kindly supplied by the president, John Wernham, put it was an unqualified success. A large gathering with names that have been known for many years now became reality, Tex Richard and his wife from Vancouver, Jim Cook from Auckland, Mr. and Mrs. Alan Cooke from Melbourne and Deryck Harvey and Jack Overhill from Cambridge. Plus Bob and Roger Whiter, home on vacation from California. Don Webster officiated in the chair and made an address of welcome. The president, John Wernham, also welcomed the distinguished gathering and mentioned the plans for his next opus. Then grace was said and the company enjoyed a very fine luncheon, well served by the staff. Mary Gadogan proposed the toast of the Museum and later Josie Packman proposed the toast of the club. After lunch there was an inspection of the museum and then a couple of films featuring, among others, Frank Richards and C. H. Chapman, pictures of some of the seaside luncheon party meetings, many of Mr. Chapman's drawings and then the film of Billy and Wally Bunter changing places, originally shown on T. V. There was a bookstall in operation, Bob Whiter distributing some of his excellent character cut-out figures; club badges, also supplied by Bob, were given to those missed out last time. Now it was time for tea and more happy conversations and get-

together. Then it was into the coach and a short ride to see Mr. and Mrs. Wernham's thatched cottage ere the journey back to town. Whitsuntide, 1972, a date to remember in the annals of the club.

Now for the Berkshire home of Eric and Betty Lawrence on Sunday, 18th June. Kindly inform if you intend to be present.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

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REVIEWS

"EXPELLED"

Edwy Searles Brooks
(Howard Baker Press: £2.75)

Howard Baker is to be congratulated on a first class production in this - the second in the Nelson Lee reprints, although, strictly speaking, this is the first reprint of the Nelson Lee Library as such.

He has chosen two very popular series from the first N.S. - "The Feud of the Fourth" and the very dramatic "Death of Church." Both of these series are very worth while and E.S.B. is at his best, which is to say, very good indeed, in these two series.

£2.75 may seem pricey, but it is in fact good value, for you would certainly not get mint copies of the originals bound so handsomely at this price.

As you know, Howard Baker hopes to reprint further St. Franks stories, including the Ezra Quirke series, but this will only be a commercially viable proposition if he can see such reprints being well supported. Therefore, ask your libraries to stock them and buy one for yourself - particularly if you've never read a St. Franks story - it will be a revelation.

"SIX COMICS OF WORLD WAR ONE"

(Great Newspapers
Re-printed, 20p.)

The idea of reproducing a package of the real old comics - from the time when comics really were comics - is a dead-cert winner, and it is a funny wonder that nobody has chipped in with it before.

Here we have the Rainbow, Lot-O-Fun, Comic Life, Chips, Funny Wonder, and Picture Fun. The coloured comics are startlingly better than anything regularly on sale today - the Henderson papers were so exceptionally well printed originally. Only Chips and Funny Wonder, printed on white paper, have a slightly unreal appearance. I had never before heard of Picture Fun, though it clearly ran for a very long time. The whole thing is a great big packet of joy for young and old, and at only 20p, it is in reach of everybody's purse.

The papers are entirely unstapled, which is an advantage as one can separate the various comics. But a word of warning. The fact that I purchased two copies enabled me to see something which I might otherwise have thought was intended - the centre sheet was missing in one copy. Back at the newsagent's, we went through the whole stack on his counter, and found that more than 50% had the centre sheet missing. But for my second copy, I should have assumed that they had cheated by reprinting an incomplete copy of Chips.

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