

STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Vol. 27

No 321

September 1973

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THE POSTMAN STAGGERS

A very, very heavy mail this month. Our monthly postbag is always large, but it varies from month to month. Oddly enough, it is normally the items which have little to do with the main hobby which bring in the largest number of letters.

Not long ago we published an article entitled "Charlie and

Agatha," which brought in a mass of letters concerning the ever-popular Agatha Christie. Readers seem to like our various comments on the indestructible Agatha, and, though it is impossible to run a Christie column, as some have suggested, we shall go on turning up little items about her novels. This month, while re-reading "Parker Pyne Investigates," I found the lovable Ariadne Oliver, perhaps an autobiographical detail of Agatha herself, introduced. Surely this must be the first mention ever of Mrs. Oliver.

This month it was our reference to Shoreditch Empire which brought in a load of letters, with much fascinating information, though some readers contradict one another. All I recall about Shoreditch myself is that Jane Shore was the mistress of Edward the First (or some other king), and after he died she was cast out, penniless, by his wife, and died in a ditch. Hence, the place where her body was found was named Shoreditch.

Many readers, too, refer to the Steinie Morrison case. Famous writers, of whom Lustgarten and Symons are only two, have written long articles on that old mystery and trial.

It occurs to me that old trials, - like Charles Hamilton and Greyfriars - are considered permanent grist for the article-writer's mill. The writers never stop, even though most of them crib ideas from somebody else or shamelessly benefit from someone else's research. Most of them reap where someone else has sown. And they tend to spread a great many weeds in the shape of false details.

Few of them bring to bear any real reasoning, but I would except Yseult Bridges who, in my view, has written the finest narratives of some of those famous old cases.

DONALD PEERS

Our readers show such wide and intense interest in the old music halls that it is, possibly, not out of place to mention that, with the death of Donald Peers, a link with those old halls has been severed. Music Halls enjoyed a boom in the eight years following the end of the last war, and Peers was one whose name at the top of the bill was sufficient to fill any theatre. I saw him many times at Kingston Empire, and he and his family lived in the Kingston area for a long time.

He had a pleasant singing voice and a style all his own, and the songs he sang had nice melodies and charming lyrics, being written by people who could write songs. My old friend, Jack Frere, whose sons were educated in my school, was the Musical Director of Kingston Empire, where he went from the Conductor's seat at the London Coliseum. He always described Donald Peers as "mean", because Peers did not show his appreciation of what he owed to the orchestra by bestowing a lavish tip to be distributed among the gentlemen thereof at the end of the engagement. Maybe Peers thought that people who are paid for their work should not expect to receive generous tips in addition. He had a point.

It has been suggested that rock 'n roll ended Donald Peers as a star attraction. I would doubt it. More likely I think that his real stardom ended when he had a domestic upheaval which received a good deal of publicity. He might have got away with it today, but twenty years ago things were different. He spoiled his image of a singer of songs of everlasting fidelity and true love. So, from two points of view, he may have been born just a few years too soon.

But he leaves behind the memory of a delightful entertainer.

JACK, SAM & PETE

In a 1911 Magnet story, "The Rival Weekly," Bunter produces a serial he claims to have written for the school magazine. It features Jack, Sam and Pete. "Don't you know," demanded Wharton, "that Jack, Sam and Pete are famous all over the world wherever the English language is spoken? You fat plagiarist, that story was entitled 'Pete's Bad Bargain,' and it was in my copy of the Marvel."

Charles Hamilton referred to Jack, Sam and Pete on other occasions in his own stories, and once featured the famous comrades in a Tom Merry story.

When "The Rival Weekly" was reprinted in the S. O. L. some fifteen years later, Bunter's plagiarised serial was altered. It became "The Digger 'Tec." "That story was by Hamilton Teed," declared Wharton. "It was in my 'Boys' Friend' last week. Don't you know that Mr. Hamilton Teed is famous all over the world."

Popularity can be short-lived - and time changes everything.

Danny's Diary

SEPTEMBER 1923

A new weekly paper has started and it gives all the coming week's programmes on the wireless. It is a big aid to wireless fiends like my brother Douglas. The new paper is named the "Radio Times."

There has been a most terrible earthquake in Japan, and it has struck Tokyo and Yokohama. The reports are that half a million people have died in the disaster.

The clocks went back on 16th September, when summer time ended, and, now that the longer dark evenings are here, it is nice to be able to read or go to the pictures. There is a wonderful new Granite Grant - Mademoiselle Julie story in the Sexton Blake Library this month, entitled "The Case of the Five Dummy Books," and it is a truly great tale for autumn reading.

I always think that cricket ends much too early. After all, we get lovely weather in September and often well into October, and it's far warmer than in early May when the season starts. Yet cricket is really over by the end of August. So silly. The winners of the County Championships this year are Yorkshire, with Notts 2nd, Lancashire 3rd, Surrey 4th and Kent 5th. Bottom - whisper it - is Northants.

Good, as always, have been the stories in the Boys' Friend of the Fistical Four in Canada. First of the month was "The Missing Heir." A scamp named Pedlar Smith overhears Baldy Bubbin, the cook, bragging that he is the lost heir of some English nobleman. So Smith turns up at Windy River and pretends that Baldy is the missing heir of De Courcy. It is a plot to kidnap Baldy and make him pay for release. Then an excellent 4-story series about a gang of scoundrels who are smuggling whisky to the Canadian redskins. Lovell plays a big part in this series. The titles are "Smugglers of the West," "Rookwood to the Rescue," "The War Trail," and "Lone Wolf's Capture." (The "capture" was poor pig-headed old Lovell!)

Lord Derby's horse "Tranquil" has won the St. Leger, but I am not a Bounder so I did not bother much.

There has been a big court case at the Old Bailey. Madame Fahmy shot her brutal Egyptian husband at the Savoy Hotel in London. I'm sure he deserved it, but Mme. Fahmy rather spoiled her case as a weak little woman by shooting him six times. However, she was brilliantly defended by Marshall Hall, and was found not guilty.

In the Union Jack, Sexton Blake and Tinker have been solving a case in the Australian bush. All about mysterious bushrangers and help-up stage coaches. It had the unusual title of "Bail Up." The following week the U. J. gave "The Hawk of the Peak" starring George Marsden Plummer, who gave up being a criminal and made his home with the Riff Tribe of Morocco, becoming their chief. Plummer turns up in London in all his native robes and with a big retinue. Thrilling tale.

Mrs. Margaret Bondfield has become the first woman chairman of the T. U. C. This means she is the head of the Trade Unions, I think, and she tells people when to go on strike for more money.

The railways are expanding. A new service has started between Wimbledon, Ludgate Hill, and London Bridge, and the Wimbledon and Tooting line, which had closed down some time ago, has now been re-opened.

The Gem is absolutely terrific this month. There is flowing one of loveliest series I have ever read. In "Chums of the River," the Terrible Three and Blake and Co. take a boat, named the Elizabeth Ann, but re-named the Old Bus by the boys, on a river holiday up the Thames, starting from Kingston-on-Thames. And Gussy insists on announcing all the points of interest on the places they pass through. In "Trouble on the Thames," the Old Bus party falls foul of Cutts, St. Leger, and their cronies near Staines.

In "Seven Boys in a Boat," the party meets up with Coker and Co., and there are fun and games as they approach Sonning Lock. In "Tracked up the Thames," it is Coker and Co. who do the tracking, and the Old Bus is getting towards Oxford before Coker is finally damped down. Last of the month was "Tom Merry's Passenger," which was none other than Billy Bunter of Greyfriars. He causes much rocking off the boat before Tom Merry finally shakes him off.

This series, one of the best holiday series ever, continues next

month.

Some tip-top films this month at the town's cinemas. Alice Terry and Ramon Novarro were in a grand one called "Where the Pavement Ends;" Percy Marmont was in "If Winter Comes;" Pola Negri in "Mad Love;" Hoot Gibson in "A Gentleman from America;" Jackie Coogan in "Daddy;" and a grand one named "The Bond Boy" starring Richards Barthelmess.

Doug has a new girl friend named Edith Gill. He took her up to the Gaiety Theatre in London to see Josie Collins in "Catherine." I suggested I should go too, but Doug said "buzz off, you."

The Magnet started the month with the final story of the series about the chums, with Sir Jimmy Vivian, in the mysterious House of Pengarth. This was entitled "The Secret of the Caves." Harry Wharton & Co. get on the track of the ghost of Pengarth, but end up buried alive. They are saved by Levison, Cardew, and Clive of St. Jim's, who are on holiday, and the big mystery is solved. A novel bit in this tale was the mention of Tom Merry & Co. being on holiday on the Thames. I liked this series, even though the ghostliness was more suitable for a Christmas story.

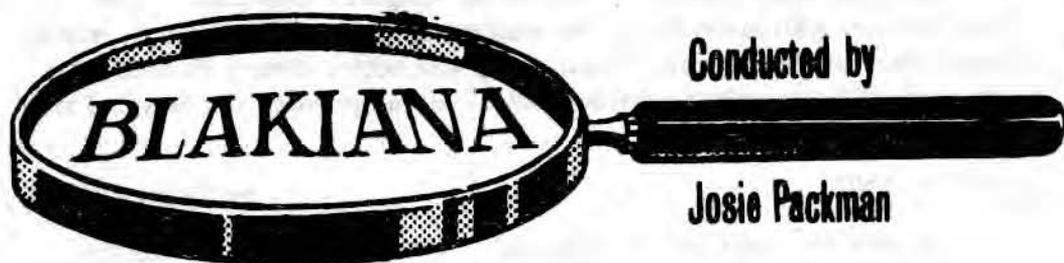
Next came "The Heart of a Hero." The hero was Bobbie Severn, a twelve-year-old fag who idolised Coker and who saved Coker from a watery grave. At the end Coker wept by Bobbie's bedside, and asked for forgiveness. Then Bobbie made a speech which made it seem impossible that he was on the way out.

"Forgive you? Why, I've nothing to forgive," said Bobbie Severn. "Don't give way so, Coker, old man. I know I'm not going to live, but it's all for the best. I'm not afraid to take the road that we all must take sooner or later, even the strongest of us. And why should I be? You remember what the hero of 'Peter Pan' said? 'Death will be an awfully big adventure.' That's just how I feel about it. The only thing that upsets me is to see you take it to heart so. It's the same with the mater. I've tried to convince her that it's all for the best, and I wish she wouldn't take it so hardly."

The author reminded us that the good die young, and ...

"He was a very gallant little genettleman," murmured the Head.

After this came a quaint little tale "Montague and Mysterious." Montague Snooks is a new boy in the Remove, and he is put into No. 1 study with Wharton and Nugent. But Snooks pretends to be what he isn't.



In December of this year it will have been eighty years since Sexton Blake first appeared on the scene. Unfortunately for the last five years no new Sexton Blake stories have been published but at least we can always delve into our own collections and read our favourite stories. I present Deryck Harvey's article in this issue to stress this fact and maybe one day we shall see more paperbacks containing Sexton Blake stories, possibly with the old Baker Street background. Even reprints would be better than nothing as then some of us could fill the gaps in our collections. Most certainly we could do with a new TV series and one put out in the later evening not relegated to the so-called Children's Hour. Sexton Blake was never meant for children.

TEED'S TIBETAN TALE

by Josie Packman

Browsing through my C. D's recently I came across an article by our good friend Cyril Rowe. He mentions the fact that Sexton Blake and Tinker appeared under many other names and cited the incidence of the story "The Terror of Tibet" which was published in the Boys' Friend Library, No. 254, in 1930. Now several people had asked me to find out why a certain serial in the Union Jack had never been reprinted as so many others had. Here in this B. F. L. was irrefutable fact that it had been reprinted, but alas, cut almost by a third and Blake's name changed to Ferrers Locke, Tinker became Jack Drake. The serial was "The Black Abbot of Cheng Tu" and had deserved better treatment. A great deal of the more fantastic adventures had been omitted, presumably by permission of the author, Mr. G. H. Teed, who much also have penned

the new paragraphs linking the remaining chapters together. The writing was so obviously his. But why were the names changed, surely a Blake story of that vintage would have sold better than a Ferrers Locke tale with no author's name given. Strange were the ways of the old A. P. Yea verily!

BLAKE'S END

by Deryck Harvey

Is this the end for Sexton Blake? With trepidation, I ask the most important question of the famous detective's eighty-year career. It is a mystery that he himself isn't here to solve. Consider the evidence. It is two or three years since Blake appeared in his own series on Television. He is no longer featured in a picture-strip in any boys' comic. His paperbacks have long since ceased publication.

Blake's only appearance in print in the past year has been the magnificent Howard Baker reprint of a number of "Union Jack" stories.

No-one, as far as I know, has any plans to bring the most-loved detective of them all out of an unnecessary retirement, and quite frankly, I begin to wonder if the writing is on the wall. Just why such a character should fade away - is there any other way to describe it? - is beyond my understanding. His adventures have proved popular with generations of devotees.

But fate has dealt cruelly with Blake in the past few years and a hammer-blow, I feel, came when Laurence Payne, the actor who portrayed the detective on Television, lost the sight of an eye whilst filming one of the stories.

At a time when the fifth and final series of the Sexton Blake Library was failing due to inefficient distribution, television exposure had potentially given Blake a new lease of life. His new audience could be reckoned in hundreds of thousands, most of them youngsters, for the series was deliberately put out in the children's programme schedules.

Unexpectedly, the series was produced as a period piece, clothes, cars, gentlemanly attitudes, and even the colourful villains, evoking the roaring 1920's. Why? My theory was that Blake could not have survived as a modern character in competition with James Bond and other overdrawn heroes of the day.

We've come a long way since then. Detective fiction is again popular, in books and films and on television. The secret agents and spies are thankfully out of fashion. Yet no-one has thought of casting another actor in the role of Sexton Blake, who remains inactive when he should be soaring to new heights of popularity.

International Publishing Corporation holders of the Blake copyright, presumably know their business, which is to sell popular juvenile papers. So where is Blake, if only in picture-strip form? Out of the vast range of IPC juveniles I can't for the life of me believe that a single or two-page weekly feature couldn't be given over to him. At worst, from a collector's point of view, (even if Blake were not our much loved character of old) he would still be introduced to an eager young audience.

If Blake was a success on TV then he should be re-instated; and the same sound reasons for this success should make his re-appearance in print inevitable. Ideally one might complement the other.

I have deliberately refrained, so far, from giving the Howard Baker imprint too much "stick" for the failure of the Sexton Blake Library (5th Series). At least they tried to perpetuate the legend.

Blake fans must, however, now face the fact that a regular supply of new paperbacks is economically out of the question. We have seen the last of them.

But no, I cannot believe that its the end. Blake is hovering in the wings somewhere, waiting to be re-discovered. If only the powers-that-be would realise his potential!

TINKER'S BOYHOOD

by S. Gordon Swan

Discussions on Tinker's early days in recent issues of the C. D. remind one of the various stories dealing with this topic. There was "Cunning Against Skill" in No. 53 of the 1d. Union Jack, in which Herbert Maxwell introduced Tinker for the first time. Then there was Cecil Hayter's version of Blake's meeting with the boy who was destined to be his young assistant. This took place when Blake was studying at Oxford, though Tinker was described as a London-born orphan.

Following this were two serials in The Boys' Friend, dealing with the schooldays of the young detective-to-be. These yarns were

"Tinker's Schooldays" and "The Four Musketeers," and were reprinted in abridged form in The Boys' Friend Library. After these there appeared a tale called "Tinker's Boyhood," which dealt exclusively with the boy's adventures before he teamed up with Sexton Blake. Some years later it was to re-appear in the pages of the Union Jack.

Immediately following this story was another serial entitled "Tinker Abroad," which dealt with the young detective's exploits in handling the first important case on his own, after Sexton Blake had disappeared. Reference was made to Tinker's "first" encounter with Blake at Oxford, for all four serials in the Boys' Friend were by Cecil Hayter, who stuck to his own version of the beginning of the partnership.

The early days of Tinker do not seem to have figured again until G. H. Teed revived them in the Nirvana series, and then there was a long lapse until 1960, when Martin Thomas provided Tinker with a family background and endeavoured to adapt his past to modern conditions.

The story with which I wish to deal here is "Tinker's Boyhood." It began in Boys' Friend, No. 607, dated 25th January, 1913, and ended in No. 628. One can only estimate his age at being in the early teens, and he describes himself as having been on his own since he was ten. He was paying fourpence a night for a bed, and far from being a seller of newspapers, we find him acting a role on the stage as a "carrot" in a pantomime. Previous to the opening of the story he had earned his living as a "knocker-up" of people who had to get to work early.

His prowlings in the small hours while following this occupation had made him acquainted with the existence of a fat man who carried a bag. Something about this character made him appear sinister to Tinker and, after losing his job at the theatre, the boy followed the fat man the next time he saw him. The fat man entered the basement of a building by means of a grating in an alley and Tinker, on his track, found him in an underground office, interviewing various men. The fat man was known as The Baron, a master-crook who ran a gang of criminals from this subterranean retreat. In his bag the fat man carried a pet white rat which ran messages for him.

While watching, Tinker saw several members of the gang, one called The Toff and the other, a new recruit, being known as The

Doctor. Later, Tinker encountered the latter in the street and learned that he had actually joined the gang to break it up and bring The Baron to justice. The Doctor, who called himself Mr. Nemo, employed Tinker to help him fight the organisation and some exciting adventures ensued, in which both Tinker and Mr. Nemo nearly lost their lives.

Contrary to expectations, Mr. Nemo does not turn out to be Sexton Blake masquerading under an alias, but Richard Allandale, whose brother had lost his life owing to The Baron's scheming. To hide him away from the gang, Tinker was sent down to the country, where he underwent some extraneous adventures: in one instance he found himself in an aeroplane and was instrumental in bringing down a German airship. This had no connection with the main plot, but in the same neighbourhood Tinker was destined to make contact with the gang again, in the person of The Toff, who was planning a bank robbery.

Having thwarted this last crime, Mr. Allandale and Tinker, in conjunction with some newspapermen and Scotland Yard detectives, raided The Baron's headquarters, but the master criminal escaped to a barge on the river. However, Allandale and Tinker pursued him on another vessel and eventually Allandale fought a pistol duel with The Baron, wounded him and handed him over to justice.

The story ended with Tinker being congratulated in the offices of the newspaper which had been working in co-operation with Allandale throughout the latter's campaign. Once again there was no Sexton Blake making a last minute appearance. The narrative was confined exclusively to Tinker's activities before he met the great detective and thus remains as a record of part of his early life.

* * * * *

Nelson Lee Column

A DANGEROUS PATH

by R. J. Godsave

In the autumn of 1925, E. S. Brooks introduced the rebuilt St. Frank's which consisted of five Houses - instead of the former two. O.S. 537 "The New Houses at St. Frank's".

No doubt Brooks thought that such a transformation would give

greater scope in using his imagination and writing ability. At this period in the life of the Nelson Lee, Brooks was riding on the crest of a wave and probably at his best. The series to follow the "New Houses at St. Frank's," which mainly dealt with Fullwood's reformation, was to be what many consider to be Brooks' best work - the Ezra Quirke stories.

At this period his link with his readers was his weekly chat "Between Ourselves" in which he invited readers to express their likes and dislikes regarding the St. Frank's stories. In my opinion he leaned over backwards in pandering to the whims of his correspondents. In his anxiety to help make a success of the St. Frank's League he had little option but to adopt his somewhat overfriendly attitude. Such a path is fraught with danger, as no doubt other authors of weekly papers fully realised. I know of no other author who took their readers into their confidence as did Brooks.

In his enthusiasm he was tempted to make promises that he could not always keep, although he states in his weekly chat that a promise made by him and the Editor would always be kept. A case in point is the Map of St. Frank's. The proposed map was to be published in sections which when placed together give an enlarged map of St. Frank's and district. This is rather difficult when discrepancies creep in from statements made in earlier stories which could prove to be a night-mare to the map maker.

Although Brooks did everything in his power to make a success of things it is possible that he did not always have Editorial backing in carrying out his ideas.

"ABOVE IS AN AIRSHIP"

by William Lister

It could have been a coincidence, and I admit I did think I was imagining things. I had just commenced reading, (what is known among the fans of St. Frank's as the "Northestria" series) in which Lord Dorrimore, Umlosi and a St. Frank's party make their way to the North Pole by airship!

Nothing unusual in that! Airships were reasonably commonplace in the late twenties. At least, until the ill-fated R.1001 came down in flames! What with that, and a couple more unfortunate

incidents, the airship went out of favour. By-the-way, the first airship I ever remember seeing was in London. As it is one of my earliest memories I must have been very young. It was during the 1914-18 war. Being German it would be known as a Zeppelin.

However I digress, so back to the St. Frank's airship trip to the North Pole in 1927, and back to my reading of it in 1973.

Now believe it or not! right away in chapter 1, those St. Frank's boys spot that airship. E. S. Brooks comments "A great shining monster up above. She was an airship of the rigid type, with enormous saloons, compactly arranged flush with the keel, and with three independent engine gondolas - two in the rear and a long one in the front. In the very nose was another compartment which was the navigating cabin.

She was gradually drifting overhead on a faint breeze of the upper air. Here engines were silent and she was two or three thousand feet up."

Now, you are not going to believe this! but it is said that truth is stranger than fiction. There came a sharp rap on our back window, and if you know what sudden sharp raps on back windows - doors, etc., do to me these days, you just wouldn't do it. You would find some other means of drawing my attention.

However, coming out of the petrified shock to which that rap had reduced me, I realised it was our neighbour frantically trying to draw my attention by means of mouthing some words and pointing desperately towards the sky. For a moment I thought my chimney was on fire, and then I realised there was no fire in the grate. I rushed outside - and there it was! like some monster gliding overhead - my airship!

I stood transfixed. After all, you don't see many airships floating around these days. I could almost imagine the chattering of Nipper, Handforth and Co. and see the figures of Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi.

The neighbour broke my reverie. "I thought you would like to see it. I spotted it from my bedroom window," she said. It was not so elaborate as E. S. Brooks airship. It was reasonably big and did glide overhead like some huge monster. "Goodyear" was written on its side, and according to our local paper the following day, it was

filled with this new inflammable gas. So we might see more airships in the future.

I watched my airship fade away in the distance, and returned to my story, which had been so rudely and yet so thrillingly interrupted.

Written in 1927, of the 1st new Series, No. 36 and dated 8th January, "The Knights of Northestria" was all set to launch me into the thrills of a country lost in the North Pole, a country of Knights and Serfs.

Well! you know how it is, I mean, even at the age of 61, the old blood stirs at the thought of Knights in Armour, and if our Edwy Searles Brooks is prepared to escort me through a series of eight yarns, well I am prepared to go.

I almost feel like Don Quixote, so if I run into anything worth writing about on my journey, I'll let you know.

* * * * *

DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 112 - Gem No. 311 - "Earning His Living"

It has often been claimed that St. Jim's was much more self-contained than Greyfriars. Whereas Frank Richards continually needed outside characters as the mainstay of a series, Martin Clifford was able to use the existing tensions within St. Jim's as the basis for many stories of a high quality. If this is true, it is nevertheless quite clear that Gem No. 311 was an outward-looking story - indeed, most of the scenes took place some distance from the school.

The story began on a familiar note. Gussy was hard up, and Lord Eastwood, instead of sending a remittance, wrote a long letter of advice on the subject of extravagance. Gussy thereupon decided to find part-time employment for himself, but little success attended his efforts at first. Perhaps the most unusual episode was outside a Wayland bootshop where in chapter 5 Gussy found a long queue of boys, some in tattered clothing, and all anxiously hoping for the job. Apparently there was plenty of unemployment even in January 1914, and it was at this point comedy came up against social reality, and the stability of the plot was threatened. The point was made that Gussy

looked upon a job as an adventure whereas these boys looked upon it as a necessity. Insults led to fighting, and the resentment that the poor felt for the very rich came to the surface in an ugly fashion. It was a curious chapter, and utterly out of harmony with the rest of the story.

The other jobs that Gussy applied for had no other applicants, and consequently the note of high comedy was resumed. He soon received the sack from Mr. Piper, the newsagent at Rylcombe, on account of his failure to deliver all his morning newspapers (Levison had gummed some of them together), and his employment with Mr. Mopps, the local barber, terminated when he cut a customer he was shaving, and he was chased up the street by a man whose face was still covered with lather.

The St. Jim's juniors had a number of regular contacts with the outside world, but these were nearly all on the adult level with people like Mrs. Murphy and Mr. Joliffe. They seldom met their contemporaries, but when they did the reader of today becomes uncomfortably aware of the immensely privileged position enjoyed by boys in public schools in those days. It is curious to reflect that today, when the gap between the social classes has narrowed so much, the public schools are under greater attack than ever. In the heyday of the Gem, the average reader's loyalty was unquestioningly demanded - and freely given - on behalf of those privileged schoolboys. It may well be that the average reader of 1914 enjoyed chapter 5 as little as I did.

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 184. CREDIT - OR DEBIT?

Just on fifty years ago a rather odd little tale appeared in the Magnet. In the title heading, the editor described the tale as "Related by Frank Richards."

It is by no means a famous story. In fact, I do not recall it ever having been discussed previously, even though the theme was the favourite one concerning Harry Wharton's uncertain temper. The title of the yarn was "Condemned by the School."

A brief synopsis of the plot - and there was plenty of plot in the

ten chapters which the story covered - may be useful here.

The Famous Five, walking through the woods, come on Bolsover and Snaith (the latter reintroduced from much earlier days when he was expelled from Greyfriars). Snaith is tormenting Nugent Minor. Later, Wharton and Bolsover clash, because Bolsover is left out of the football team.

"Wharton, his eyes blazing with ungovernable rage, brought the palm of his hand across Bolsover's face with a crack like a pistol-shot.

'Take that, Bolsover, for your impertinence!' panted the young Remove captain, his chest heaving."

They fight, Mr. Quelch intervenes, and Wharton is ordered to miss the game at Redclyffe. He breaks detention to cycle over to Redclyffe, is met on the way by Snaith who pulls him off his cycle, and Harry sprains his ankle. Harry is thrown out of the captaincy, and, in a new election, Bolsover is elected Remove captain. Wharton is accused of getting into Wingate's study and falsifying the ballot. Bolsover, out for a walk near the mill-stream at night, is brutally attacked by someone who, as shown by a flash of lightning, is wearing the uniform of a Greyfriars junior. Wharton is accused of the attack, and is expelled. He waylays Snaith in the dark, and keeps him captive in a barn till he confesses that he attacked Bolsover and also that he falsified the ballot. Wharton is restored to the captaincy. And all in ten chapters.

Charles Hamilton, of course, never wrote this tale, any more than, I am sure, he wrote the silly "Wingate in Love" series of the Schoolboy Film Stars in 1920.

But there is a striking similarity between that 1920 story and this one of 1923. Both introduce a long-abandoned character of much earlier days - Miss Locke, in charge of the Cliff House girls in the former tale, and Snaith back for a gallop in the 1923 one. Both tales are packed with melodrama, and heavily over-written. Both have extravagantly-written fights. Both are stacked with hammy dialogue. Both are top-heavy with rhetorical questions.

"Wharton's heart beat fast. Who could it be, prowling in Wingate's room at dead of night? Could it be someone after the ballot box?"

Hark! It was a sound in the room."

Both are remarkable for speedy tempo and compression of much plot into small space.

Mr. Lofts does not include "Condemned by the School" in his list of substitute stories, but he does have this to say about it in a footnote:

"No. 817, 'Condemned by the School,' was an old Charles Hamilton slightly rewritten. It is believed that the story got mislaid somehow during the editorship of Pentelow in the war years. But as Mr. Hamilton was paid for the tale originally, he must be credited as having written it."

I must say that I find Mr. Lofts's footnote vague and mystifying. If Hamilton was paid for the tale "originally," just when was he paid for it? That date should make evident just when the tale was "mislaid."

Why should anyone find it necessary to "slightly rewrite" a story by Hamilton? It does not make sense. In fact, it clearly did not happen. If Hamilton had anything to do with the writing of the story, it was not "slightly" rewritten before publication. It was made into a hash. And what reason could there possibly be for such a hash? When Hinton tinkered about with an old Hamilton tale to produce "Bunter's Baby," his motives were obvious, and he paid rather a stiff price for his tinkering. There were no such motives in this case.

It would, perhaps, make things a little clearer if Mr. Lofts told us the source of the information given in his footnote. It would seem certain that there was something odd about the tale for such information to be noted at all.

As I have said, it seems to me very probable that the same author wrote both the 1920 Wingate - Film Stars series and "Condemned by the School."

Mr. Lofts has said that Mr. Hamilton was paid for the 1920 series and for this 1923 single. There is no reason to doubt Mr. Lofts's information to that effect, but, if Hamilton was paid for them, then, so far as I can see, there is only one conclusion to be drawn, strange though it may be. Hamilton accepted these tales from some writer, whether he commissioned them or not, sent them to his editor as his own work, and was paid for them.

As for Hamilton being "credited with having written it," well! Even in his most trivial little pot-boilers, Hamilton was never guilty of dubious grammar. In the opening chapter of "Condemned by the School" we find the following sentence:

"Walking through the quiet, peaceful wood, that howl broke in with startling suddenness."

Nearly as good as Meredith's essay in which he wrote:

"Being a Christmas pudding, his sister accepted the present."

Of course, good may have come out of it. If, as is possible, this rubbishy "Condemned by the School" gave Hamilton the seed of the plot for his wonderful First Rebel series, just a year later - a magnificent turning-point for the old paper - then it is worthy of a white stone.

* * * * *

REVIEWS

A HISTORY OF THE GEM & MAGNET

Hamilton Museum Press:
£1.50 inc. of postage.

This is a magnificent book for the Hamiltonian fan. It should be assured of great success. The main body of the work comprises the history of the Gem and the Magnet from start to finish as contained in articles by Roger Jenkins and Eric Fayne. These articles are reprinted from Collectors' Digest Annual of the Fifties and early Sixties, and, in their day, they were the most popular items ever to feature in that famous Annual of ours.

Our authors take a critical look at all the series and at most of the single stories in the world-renowned old papers; a criticism which is never fulsome but always constructive. Though the views are the authors' own and tastes differ concerning individual yarns, nobody can doubt the affection and sincerity with which our authors write. Down the years, hundreds of letters have come into the Digest office praising these histories, and there has been a wealth of acclaim for their prose.

Perhaps, just here and there, slight amendments might have been made to allow for our extended knowledge since the articles were originally written. For instance, there is no doubt now concerning the authorship of the substitute tale "Misunderstood;" and whatever may

have been the reason for the indifference of plenty of the white cover stories, it was not Hamilton being called up for the army, for he was never in the army. However, this is only a minor detail.

All in all, these articles, now brought together in one volume, are invaluable to the student and collector of the Gem and Magnet.

In addition, this book contains the script of a radio discussion of 1962. Those discussing have more famous names than the writers of the main part of the book, but it is doubtful whether they have as much real knowledge of the Hamilton saga.

There is a tremendous collection of cover pictures which will warm the heart of every enthusiast.

We repeat, a magnificent job. No praise is too high for its producer, John Wernham. (Order from 30 Tonbridge Rd., Maidstone.)

PLAY UP AND PLAY THE GAME

(review by Deryck Harvey)

Patrick Howarth
(Eyre Methuen £2.75)

This book gives honourable if not over-generous mention to Hamilton and his schoolboy character, Billy Bunter, and to Sexton Blake.

"Collectors' Digest" readers would expect nothing less, and I don't think the author means to be disparaging when he claims that Hamilton chose a "safe formula for success" and "strict orthodoxy in the choice of hero."

At this point, Mr. Howarth is comparing Hamilton to Kipling and Wodehouse, writers of unusual distinction, able to command large sales from books whose boy heroes, it is stated, did not conform to a standard pattern.

It may be a backhanded tribute, but in such a context, I suppose we can't doubt its fairness.

"He was too the creator of a schoolboy who seems more certain of immortality than any other in English fiction, Billy Bunter.

"But for schoolboy heroes Richards knew what his readers wanted, and he had no hesitation in giving it to them."

Mr. Howarth quotes from Hamilton's autobiography, finding nothing more controversial than that Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was introduced as a member of the Famous Five to help "rid the youthful mind of colour prejudice."

He adds: "Throughout the Frank Richards schools, a moral code is accepted, by the heroes in the observance and by others in the breach, which is a reflection of a common outlook in life."

This is the tone of Mr. Howarth's book: he's seeking to explain, perhaps even to justify, the concept of "stiff upper lip," so popular in all forms of popular English fiction for more than half-a-century. But he goes to exceptional (unnecessary?) pains to describe this attitude as "Newbolt Man" - the title of the book is a quotation from a famous verse by Sir Henry Newbolt.

It's difficult to know when stiff upper lip came in. Thomas Hughes certainly introduced it into "Tom Brown's Schooldays," Talbot Baines Reed into "The Adventures of a Three-Guinea Watch," and G. A. Henty into a popular series of books.

And it was there, as much as anywhere, in detective and adventure fiction, from Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, Rider Haggard and John Buchan, Edgar Wallace and Sapper, right through to Leslie Charteris' The Saint.

Blake is not very well considered. Mr. Howarth notes that the Sexton Blake industry seems to have been established in 1893, the year following the publication of "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes," and that Blake very soon changed his address to Baker Street.

"Kindred spirits to Sexton Blake were Nelson Lee and Dixon Brett and Falcon Swift. All belonged to a type educated at public schools - Sexton Blake, it seems, attended several - as well as Oxford or Cambridge (or both)."

Not the Blake I know: a man of action, integrity, compassion. Really, I think this is a slight on his character. The great detective's two million words are put aside in only half-a-page.

Nevertheless, anyone who dotes on these particular realms of fiction, as I do, will revel in the book, although the main sources of reference are familiar and easily accessible, and its conclusions unremarkable.

* * * * *
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The Postman Called

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

GEORGE BEAL (Winchmore Hill): The Shoreditch Empire was another name for the London Music Hall, which was in Shoreditch High Street. It was quite a small place, wide but not deep; that is, the proscenium arch was not far distant from the back of the stalls. I remember being taken there by my father, who was in the CID at Bishopsgate Police Station, (City Police), not much farther along from Shoreditch High Street. You may be interested to know that he was involved in the Steinie Morrison case as a young PC.

BEN WHITER (Bethnal Green): Within a short distance of the Shoreditch parish church of St. Leonard's there are six music halls. The Britannia in Hoxton Street, the Variety in Pitfield Street, the Foresters in Cambridge Heath Road, the Cambridge in Commercial Street, the Shoreditch Olympia and Shoreditch Empire in Shoreditch High Street. The Shoreditch Empire, known to the locals as the Old London was situated on part of the ground now occupied by Jeremiah Rotherham, a textile firm and who took the ground for extensions when, I think, the Empire was bombed during the last war. Nearby is an old pub the Bull and Pump. My mother took me to the Olympia several times in my youth, I saw pantomimes at the Britannia and saw silent films at the Variety, one film, a western about Broncho Bill, the man who made the first western and I think attended on one of the Saturdays when we had the children's matinee for a penny a head. However the Shoreditch Empire was a popular place with Eastenders and I recently met an old acquaintance who sold programmes there.

During the 1920's when my father was a licensee in Coutts Road, off the Burdett Road, property that was owned by the Baroness Burdett Coutts, some of the professionals were customers. One of these was Sam Springson, who appeared with his wife in "The Heart of a Jew." I remember several of our customers and father going to see it at the Shoreditch Empire.

The Old London, Shoreditch Empire is still remembered with affection by quite a lot of us old Eastenders.

ARTHUR MARISON (Enfield): I was very interested in your paragraph in the August "CD" re Steinie Morrison.

The alibi he tried to establish concerned the London Music Hall, which was in High Street, Shoreditch.

This was quite a famous Music Hall. Belle Elmore - the wife of Dr. Crippen - had a disastrous debut then.

There was a Shoreditch Empire - this was further down the High Street, and on the other side.

A. PACKER (Southgate): Shoreditch Empire stood at the North End of Bishopsgate, opposite Bishopsgate Goods Station. In the early 1920's it was closed as an Empire and was later reopened as The Standard, where Boxing, Wrestling and the like, took place. It was finally closed in 1938, and was badly damaged in the air raids. It was cleared away after the War and a garage now stands on the site.

G. BEST (Enfield): Originally known as the London Music Hall, opened in 1896, and changed its name to the Shoreditch Empire in 1916. It was located at 95/99 Shoreditch High Street, that is between Shoreditch Church and Bishopsgate. It closed in 1934, and this is the only part I'm not absolutely certain of. It is believed to have been destroyed in the Blitz.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: My quotation concerning the Steinie Morrison case came from the book by Julian Symons. He referred to the Shoreditch Empire, perhaps not knowing that at the time of the case the theatre was named the London Music Hall. Many readers have written in on the subject, and, though it is not possible to quote from all the letters, I am grateful to all who wrote.)

P. TIERNEY (Grimsby): The very interesting article "Hearts and Flowers" made me feel thankful that it was in 1933, not 1923, that I discovered the Magnet. I hated sad stories which introduced death when I was a child. "Eric" is a very good story from an adult point of view. It horrified me at the age of twelve.

I was over forty when I read the Bulstrode Minor story for the first time. It shook me even at that age. How would it have affected me just after my delightful discovery of Greyfriars, when I was ten? I hate to think.

The word "horrible" is not intended in a wholly derogatory sense. Charles Hamilton's handling of the Bulstrode Minor episode was admirably

realistic in its way.

But whatever induced him to write such a story?

BILL LOFTS (London): The first tales that Charles Hamilton wrote for the Amalgamated Press were pirate stories in the old Union Jack published under his own name. His first school story for the firm was in Marvel, No. 503, 27th June, 1903. This was of Cliff House, a boys school in Devonshire. Charles Hamilton's output in the early days was fantastic - more so being a two-finger typist. As our editor says so correctly, one finds it a big difference when one has to type long manuscripts, despite the claim that the two-finger-brigade can type as quickly as a trained keyboard operator.

JACK OVERHILL (Cambridge): What a fine editorial! Another one to the long list you have written. How I agree with you about the old Gems and other weeklies before the first world war. There was a delightful air about the Gem before Talbot came and though I was always in his shoes, he overshadowed Tom Merry and took away much of the sunny side of the stories. As for your remarks about 5p for a local paper, filled with adverts., and 3½p for a Chelsea bun, and decimals and metrication being the biggest swindles perpetrated by cynical governments, I've got to the stage of ranting instead of talking about it. Only time was necessary to stop people from transferring p's to pence to find out the real cost of goods; that done, shopkeepers were well away. And don't people with fixed incomes know it!

TOM JOHNSON (Neston): Frank Richards told me personally that Alonzo was dropped from the Magnet due to his unpopularity with most of the readers. He said Alonzo definitely appealed to some of the more thoughtful boy readers, but not to the average boy.

W. J. RAYNER (Bury St. Edmunds): To keep the magazine going each month to such a high standard is indeed a creditable achievement.

Being a life-long cinema fan, your articles on old cinemas gave me great pleasure and I hope some more may follow some day. I follow the names of films of yesterday in "Danny's Diary."

* * * * *

— ADVERTISE IN THE ANNUAL —

News of the Clubs

CAMBRIDGE

We met at 3 Lay Road on 12th August, Bill Lofts presiding as usual.

The Chairman reported on discussions with the B. B. C. about a possible programme, and on a successful display of comics he had prepared for the Cambridge High School.

After discussing the programme for the visit of the London Club, the President gave an interesting talk on the Howard Baker reprints. An animated discussion followed and members discussed whether there was an opening for these reprints in the children's market as well as in the nostalgia market, and the relative high appeal of the Greyfriars stories over other reprints.

Deryck Harvey talked about the World's unexplained mysteries: Ghosts, the Loch Ness Monster, U. F. O's, Black Magic and Witchcraft, Easter Island, Stonehenge and other prehistoric monuments that seemed to be astronomically orientated; the "Ripper Murders" etc., leading up to the Barlow-Watt T. V. programme and the Sherlock Holmes film.

In discussion mention was made of the "Mary Celeste," the opposition of C. S. Lewis to J. B. Phillips, and other items. Members wondered how Sexton Blake would have tackled the "Jack the Ripper" case. At the end however, Deryck had still not converted the Chairman to a belief in Ghosts'.

London visit on 2nd September.

Next ordinary Club Meeting, 14th October.

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LONDON

There was an excellent attendance at the inaugural Courtfield, Ruislip meeting. A superb treatise by Charlie Wright entitled "Early Recollections" and which was read by Bob Blythe, got the entertainment side of the gathering to a very good start. Tom Wright, moving from

St. Sam's to Greyfriars, gave as his dislike, George Wingate and his like Horace Samuel Quelch. Very strong reasons were given about each of the two characters and a short debate.

Norman Wright's reading of a chapter from the first story of the famous Ezra Quirke N. L. series was very good. He almost brought Kenmore to life in the darkened Triangle of St. Frank's. The Nelson Lee and St. Frank's Grid Quiz conducted by Bob Blythe ended in a tie between Graham Bruton, Norman, and Charlie Wright.

Tea was dispensed in the spacious garden where one souvenir from Friardale was Mible's garden shed. Don Webster was elected a Vice-president on a proposition by Bill Lofts, seconded by Ben Whiter. Bill then gave details re the Cambridge visit. He also supplied a few copies of the recent Sunday Time magazine about the excellent Thomson Firm of Dundee.

Millicent Lyle spoke of the "Magnet" pub in Addlestone, which has a cover complete on the sign board. A good start to what will be the fore-runner of many more gatherings at this venue. Votes of thanks to the Acraman hosts brought the meeting to a close.

Next meeting will be at 35 Woodhouse Road, Leytonstone, Phone 534 1737, on Sunday, 16th September. Hosts Reuben and Phyllis Godsave.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

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NORTHERN

Meeting on Saturday, 11th August

Our first fare of the evening was presented by Ron Hodgson, who gave us readings from two Gems. Ron prefixed his readings with two pen-pictures, the first of Tom Merry by Eric Fayne and the second of Gussy by Tom Hopperton.

Ron's first Gem reading was from Gem 1452 - 'The Mystery of Nobody's Study.' Tom Merry sets out to spend the night in the supposedly haunted study - the gas light dims and goes out - an ice-cold hand touches his face in the silent darkness - and Tom rushes back to his dormitory. A rather unusual role for the dauntless Tom!

Ron's next reading was from Gem 608 - 'The Amateur Advertiser.'

FOR EXCHANGE: S.O.L. Nos. 11, 15, 17, 26, 47, 71, 108, 109, 123, 143, 253, 271, 273, 275, 304, 352, 376, 379, 382, 391, 410, 411. Nearly all in good condition. Some excellent.

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SALE: Greyfriars Holiday Annuals, 1923 to 1941. Bunter Books, Tom Merry Books, G. A. Henty's, "In times of Peril," 80p, "Through the Sikh War" (1st), £1.50, Turner's, Boys Will Be Boys, £1.85; Greyfriars Prospectus, £1.85; Gunby Hadath's "School Boy Grit," 75p; 5 P. G. Wodehouse Books, £1.

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ERIC FAYNE

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THOSE BAFFLING MYSTERIES SOLVEDNo. 1. Will Gibbons

by W. O. G. Lofts

In 1960, I wrote about the mystery of Will Gibbons. He was born at Bradford, Yorks., in 1900, and was the son of William Gibbons, a comedian. Unconfirmed sources from the variety world indicate that later this music hall comedian changed his name to Jack Pleasants - a very famous comedian indeed. Being a keen reader of The Magnet in 1915, Will entered the Greyfriars Story Competition run by H. A. Hinton, and won a prize. On the strength of this, he travelled to London and got a job as office-boy to Willie Back, who controlled the Boys' Friend/Sexton Blake/and Nelson Lee Libraries. Young Will started to contribute short pieces for the Companion Papers and Greyfriars Herald, even writing some of the Herlock Sholmes stories. In 1918, he wrote the Magnet story No. 566 "The Wiles of Wibley" - J. N. Pentelow, the war-time editor, losing no chance to write a sequel in the following issue. Later in the twenties, Will Gibbons went free-lancing and wrote a number of tales in The Champion & Triumph under the name of "Dennis Cross" as well as under his own name. Also, he wrote girls' stories under the name of "Helen Gibbons." He was by all accounts very successful, but in 1938 he simply disappeared, and editors never set eyes on him again. He had just walked out of his lodgings in South London, and that was it. Once seen Will Gibbons would never be forgotten. Extremely short with red chubby cheeks he was good-natured and was always cracking jokes about his landlady. A bachelor, he smoked large cigars. Reports that he had joined a circus as a clown proved baseless, or that he sold Walls Ice Cream from those famous pre-war tricycles. On the strength of my article the Bradford Press took up the story, but despite people who just remembered the family, no fresh information came to light. The mystery remained until recently, when I was able to close the case as being solved, and it fills me with great sadness.

Near Battersea Bridge is a row of old houses converted into flats and run by the W.V.S. for retired people. Living in the top flat of one of these was an elderly man aged about seventy. Very small and with red chubby cheeks he was polite to neighbours, but kept very much to himself - with no friends. Seemingly he had retired as a 'clerk', but still used to leave the house the same time with his briefcase. He went out as usual one morning and never came back. He was killed instantly by a lorry. His name was Will Gibbons. Despite enquiries by the police they never succeeded in tracing any relatives - and the small fortune he left, went to the Crown. In death Will Gibbons left as big a mystery as he had in life since 1938, and what a story he may have told.

Edited by Eric Payne, Excelsior House, 113 Crookham Road, Crookham, Nr. Aldershot, Hants.

Litho-duplicated by York Duplicating Services, 12a The Shambles, York.