STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS DIGEST

VOLUME 31 NUMBER 363 MARCH 1977

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22p

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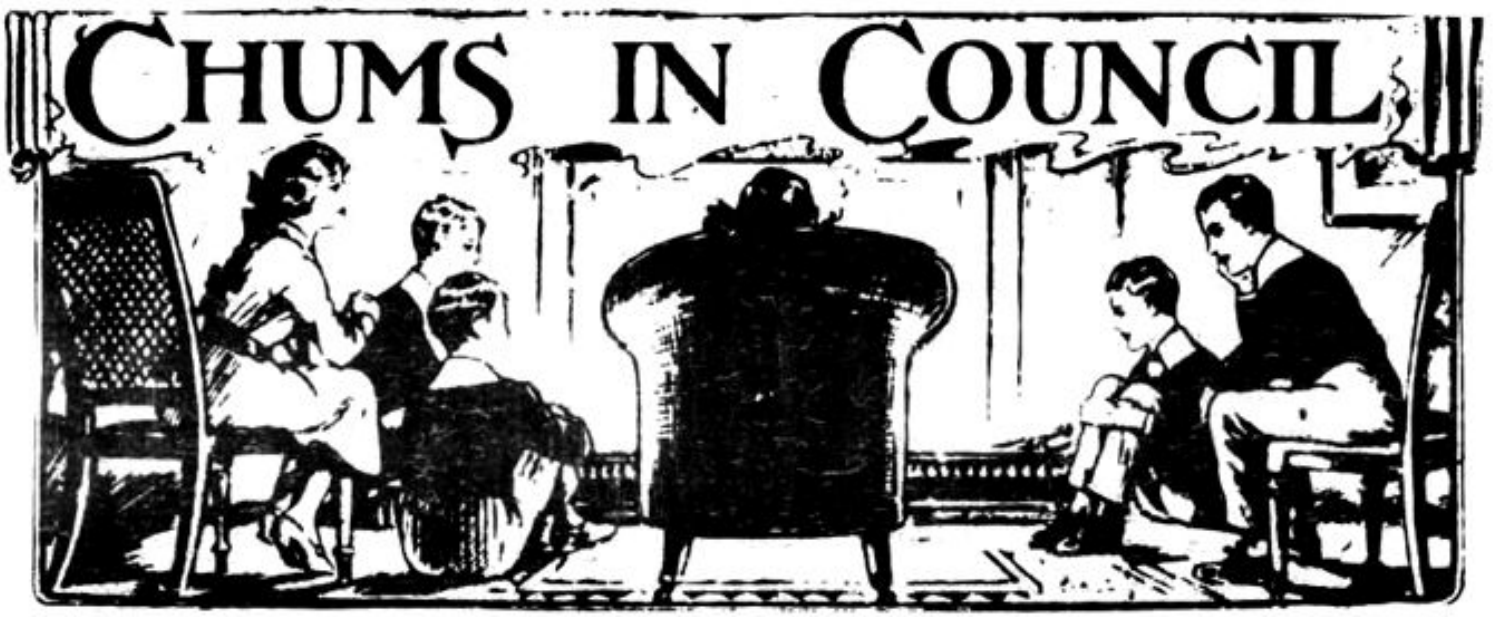

SCORNING THE LADDER

There are writers who believe - or pretend to believe - that their latest work is better than anything they have written before, and that the best is yet to come. Charles Hamilton was certainly one such writer, and I fancy that E. S. Brooks was probably the same.

To some extent, with these two writers, the propensity was due to the treadmill system under which both men worked. The puffing and blowing of editors made it a necessity for readers often to accept that "next week's story is the finest that Frank Richards has ever written".

Generally, of course, it wasn't - but advertising in any form has seldom been noted for its truthfulness.

In a way it is natural for a professional writer to live in the present and the future, and especially one whose yesterday's work is dead wood with no royalties attached to it. Most of us agree that Hamilton's greatest achievements were well before the second world war.

Once they had left the Amalgamated Press, neither Hamilton nor Brooks seemed to have much interest in or time for their old employers. Like the gentleman in Shakespeare, they turned their backs on the ladder, scorning the means by which they did ascend.

I was reminded of something of the sort when, over Christmas, I read the autobiography of James Cagney. An interesting book, from a man who was obviously a kindly, pleasant personality as well as an outstanding actor. He starred in Warner Bros. productions for something like twenty years - films which made his name, gave him fame, and, presumably, brought him riches. Yet all the time he belittles his Warner pictures or damns them with faint praise. The few which he made later, by his own company or, at least, with more personal control, get far more acclaim, though they are surely far less remembered with affection by the public at large.

The answer to it all - and I made the same point long ago concerning Charles Hamilton's criticisms of the A.P. - is that no gifted man works for one firm for a great many years unless it suits him to do so. Looking back - a writer or an actor may get the "what might have been" feeling and wonder whether he could have done better for himself, but that is no reason for scorning that ladder by "which he did ascend".

In passing, the Cagney autobiography clears up one item which puzzled the writer of our "Small Cinema" series. In No. 33 of that series appeared the following: "James Cagney in 'Something to Sing About', from A.B.F.D., was the only Cagney we played which did not come from Warner's, and it would seem that Cagney was loaned to the other firm. I have a feeling that it was below his usual standard, but I really remember nothing about it."

In his autobiography Cagney mentions that in 1938 he had a dispute with Warner's and left them. He went to a small independent studio, Grand National, and made "Something to Sing About". This was

released in Britain by A. B. F. D. Cagney seems to have happy memories of the film and speaks well of it. But I suspect that few people remember it today, and there must be a moral somewhere.

Very soon his trouble with Warner's was put right, and he went back to them to make many more memorable films.

WILLIAM ON TV

One who never scorned her ladder was my gentle and modest old friend, Richmal Crompton. She would be thunderstruck by the furore caused in the press by the arrival on the TV screen of a series devoted to her character, William.

At the moment of writing these lines I have only seen the first two of the series, so it is difficult to make a fair assessment. "A William tale set in its proper period of the nineteen-twenties", wrote the critic of a national newspaper, concerning "William and the Begging Letter", actually published first in 1939.

I must confess that I am not caught up in the excited glow which seems to have enveloped everybody else. The producer is handicapped by the shortness of each episode. Another ten minutes of running time would make a big difference. One can be thankful, at any rate, that there has been none of the up-dating which has ruined so many good stories on screen and television. There is also a merciful absence of the awful audience-laughter which causes me to switch off almost all so-called comedy shows on TV, even if I have been misguided enough to switch them on at all.

The lad who plays William seems a bit colourless so far, though I would rather see him under-act than be too precocious. In any case, as we have often commented before, the real delight of the William stories is not what William says and does but the effect he has on the adults caught up in his activities. I thought William's father excellent, though I am not so sure of his mother. I thought Robert too young for the part, though this sort of thing is obviously hard to cast and it is impossible to please everybody.

Television is to be congratulated on sticking well to the originals of the two stories in the playlets I have seen so far. I thought "The Great Actor" (published in 1928) slightly less successful than the first one.

BBC 2 presented a stodgy appreciation of the William stories reprinted in Armada. I have not yet seen any of the latter. I hope they have not been abridged for a new generation.

To sum up, nothing I have seen so far brings me the pleasure I get in reading, beside the fire, a William story written between 1920 and 1940. But I live in hopes.

TAILPIECE

Recently I enjoyed a book, "The Beauty of Cats", from the public library. The pictures are superb, but I cross swords with the writer of an item in the text. "Don't be bothered if your cat forces open the fridge door and steals food," advises the author, and adds: "All cats are thieves."

I doubt whether many cats would eat food direct from a fridge; they don't like very cold food. But none of our "Misters" has been a thief. Mr. Softee has been with us now for six years, and never once has he taken anything which has not been put down for him.

True, when I was a child we had a tortoiseshell cat we called "Tiny" - she lived to the ripe old age of 15, and had a weakness for helping herself to anything she fancied. But, in those days, though one could afford to buy big joints of meat, and Tiny would often get a piece off the joint, one tended to feed pets on scraps from the plates. Probably Tiny did not really get enough to satisfy.

I don't believe that any well-fed cat will be a thief.

In reply to many kind enquiries, Mr. Softee is in the best of health. All winter he has had an enormous coat of fur which he is now shedding around. A sign of a long, hot summer to come? Good cricket!

When his Mum was in hospital just before Christmas, I often forgot my own meals. I never forgot Softee's.

THE EDITOR

* *

DANNY'S DIARY

MARCH, 1927

We have had a truly marvellous month of wonderful reading in the Magnet. The opening two stories concerned the arrival at Greyfriars of Mr. Quelch's nephew, Roger. Roger, a practical joker, has been at school in Devonshire, but now Mr. Quelch decides to have Roger, experimentally, in his own form at Greyfriars. And Roger makes things hum, with his practical jokes.

However, the time comes when the Head decides that Roger shall not stay at Greyfriars, and Mr. Quelch, thankfully, agrees with him. And Roger goes back to Devonshire.

These two stories - really perfect school stories, with any amount of rib-tickling episodes, all beautifully written, - are entitled "Roger of the Remove" and "Fed-Up With Greyfriars".

One little thought I must enter in my diary. The pictures are gloriously done by Mr. Shields, my favourite artist. Under one picture the caption read: "Bunter!" rasped Mr. Quelch.

Now some of the other writers make people "Rasp", but I am sure the real Frank Richards never - or almost never - does. So I began to wonder who wrote the tale. However, it was only the editing. In the actual story, Quelch doesn't "rasp". He "raps out".

Under another picture it said: "Roger!" fumed Mr. Quelch. I can't remember the real writer using "fume" as a way to describe how people talk. But, once again, this was not in the story, but only under the picture.

Next tale was another glorious one: "Bunter's Brain-Storm". In a newspaper, Bunter reads about a banker having a brain-storm, and being regarded as more to be pitied that blamed. So Bunter has a brain-storm and orders lots of food from Chunkley's stores on Mr. Quelch's telephone - and in Mr. Quelch's name. All so very cleverly written and witty.

Final of the month was "The Interloper", the start of a truly original and exciting series I'm sure we are going to have. Mr. Vernon-

Smith sends to Greyfriars a boy named Paul Dallas. The father of Dallas died some years earlier, and the son had been placed in an institution. But the Bounder's father owed a debt - a moral debt and a financial one as well - to Mr. Dallas. Mr. Vernon-Smith finds the son, and decides to send him to Greyfriars. Mr. Vernon-Smith hopes that the Bounder will welcome Dallas, and treat him like a brother. But the Bounder is terribly jealous and bitter, and he is filled with spite against the newcomer. I'm longing for next week, and some more of this promising series.

In the Schoolboys' Own Library, I have bought "The Greyfriars Hustler", a joyful early Magnet tale telling how Fisher T. Fish came to Greyfriars, and "The Colonial Co." about the arrival of Pons from Canada and Conroy from Australia. They join the South African boy, Van Ryn, to form "The Colonial Co." of Rookwood. I love the old tales.

There has been quite a lot in the papers about two very successful new plays which have just started in London theatres. One is "Good Morning, Bill" by P. G. Wodehouse, and the star is Ernest Truex. I am not sure whether Ernest Truex is British or American, but he has been very famous for a long time in American films. One screamingly funny film I remember him in was called "Oh. You Women".

The other new play is "Mr. Prohack" by Arnold Bennett. A new and very young actor named Charles Laughton has suddenly burst forth as a big star in this one.

In the Nelson Lee Library, St. Frank's is flooded out. It has rained and rained, the river has risen far above normal, and a reservoir bursts. St. Frank's is isolated - cut off from the rest of the world - and not a single master under any roof. The opening story is entitled "The Deluge at St. Frank's". Next week in "The Marooned School", - without masters and without much food - Willie Handforth makes it his business to rescue the school's pet animals. And at night they see a light flashing signals, showing that the Moor View School girls are also in trouble from the floods. So the boys evacuate the West House, and the girls take over.

Then "St. Frank's Adrift" with more adventures of a wet kind in the roaring floods. Last of the month brought a very novel tale "Handforth's Ark" in which the boys, under Handy's direction, construct

an "ark" from a couple of barges and a barn which have been swept to them in the waters. And Nelson Lee arrives in a seaplane. The series continues next month.

Some more old stories of St. Frank's are issued in book form in the Monster Library, this month's title being "Prisoners of the Mountains".

At the cinemas we have seen Ronald Colman in "Beau Geste"; Adolphe Menjou in "The King on Main Street"; Hoot Gibson in "The Buckaroo Kid"; Lon Chaney in "The Road to Mandalay"; Thomas Meighan in "Irish Luck"; and another Ronald Colman film "Stella Dallas". My favourite of the month, though, was Buster Keaton in "The General".

Rather an unusual series has been running all the month in the Gem. Mr. Glyn, the father of Bernard, offers money prizes - 1st prize £50 - for the best inventions among the boys of St. Jim's, and no invention may cost more than £2 to make. So everybody gets inventions crazy. There are 7-league boots, a thought-reading machine, a new type of carburettor, a patent 3-colour fountain-pen, and the like. The tales are "Inventors All", "Skimpole's Thought-Reading Machine", "Rival Inventors", and "The Bogus Inventor". In a shock finish, Racke wins first prize for a kettle which will boil in 30 seconds. And then, all in a rush, it comes out that Racke pinched the kettle from a tinker, named Joe Brass. So Racke gets a flogging, and Kerr gets the prize for a fire-extinguisher. It wasn't too bad, though not by the real Martin Clifford.

Doug came in with a new H.M.V. record, which had "Valencia" on one side and "Sleepy-Time Gal" on the other, both played by Jack Hylton and his band. "Valencia" is such a good tune that it will surely kill itself off in next to no time.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 47, "The Greyfriars Hustler" comprised two red Magnet stories, one from Christmas week 1910 and the other from three weeks later early in 1911. S.O.L. No. 48 comprised three consecutive tales from the Boys' Friend of early 1917 and two more tales from a week or two later. According to Mr. Lofts's list of substitute stories, the series about the many inventions at St. Jim's, covering four weeks, was by E. S. Brooks.)

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

I received the two articles in this month's Blakiana from the same writer so decided that as they concerned two of our most loved characters in the Blake Saga, they should be published together. Our third small item is by John Bridgwater and no doubt readers will be compelled to look up the various items John has referred to, if so, then good hunting.

I had several letters about the old film "Blackmail" shown on B.B.C. 1 last November. In one scene of the newsagent's shop was shown a placard advertising the Union Jack. "Sexton Blake in Yorkshire" was the heading. As a nearby calendar gave the date as 7 April, 1929, I tracked down the particular U.J. it might have been. This was U.J. No. 1325, The Humber Woodyard Mystery, a Zenith tale. On the front cover are the words SEXTON BLAKE IN YORKSHIRE. I well remember Len and myself going to see this film at the Astoria Cinema in Charing Cross Road when it was first shown in late 1929. Memories are wonderful things to have.

STARRING MRS. BARDELL

by Don Harkness with a footnote by Josie Packman as requested

Of all the Sexton Blake stories appearing in the Union Jack only two of them featured the name of Mrs. Bardell in the title. These were "The Mystery of Mrs. Bardell's Xmas Pudding", U.J. No. 1157, and "Mrs. Bardell's Xmas Eve", U.J. No. 1210, both written of course, by Gwyn Evans in 1925 and 1926 respectively.

Although the character was created by William Murray Graydon, Evans undoubtedly gave her the most humorous lines in her mis-pronounciation of words, providing much comedy relief. To quote him "Mrs. Bardell, paragon among housekeepers and admiral cook though she was, her English was weird and wonderful at times. She used words with only the haziest notion of their meaning so long as they sounded right. To give some examples: Blake was a "Criminal incinerator" whom clients came to "insult proficiently" while poor Detective Inspector

Coutts became an "infective suspector", Splash Page was a newspaper importer.

In other Xmas numbers especially written by Gwyn Evans, Mrs. Bardell usually had a big part to play in the proceedings. Even so, he sometimes had difficulty in remembering her Christian name. The S.B. Catalogue lists it as Mrs. Martha Bardell but on more than one occasion he referred to her as Mrs. Maria Bardell, and although in the first story mentioned above No. 1157 in which Mrs. Bardell's sister was first mentioned he called her Mrs. Mary Ann Cluppins, in later tales she became Sarah Ann Cluppins and even Amelia Cluppins. How these errors got past the editor we will never know.

Mrs. Bardell was described as being plump, grey-haired and invariably dressed in black bombazine. (I have never discovered just what material black bombazine was but it appears to have been a popular Victorian material for housekeepers to wear. J.P.) Although her age was never mentioned I don't think it would be uncharitable to estimate it at sixty. She was a very lovable character and the Sexton Blake stories would not have been the same without her.

Footnote. Because Mrs. Bardell was left out of the New Look S.B.L's except for a few appearances, I feel that was one of the reasons they were not so popular as the old ones.

From records published in the C.D. Annual 1957, Mrs. Bardell first appeared in U.J. No. 97, dated 19th August, 1905. The story is called "The House of Mystery" by W. M. Graydon, but although he created Mrs. Bardell he was not very sympathetic towards her. It was the other authors such as Gwyn Evans and Robert Murray who gave her a real character, who were to make her appearances in their stories so much more joyful. I checked the story in U.J. 1157 and the names are definitely Mrs. Martha Bardell and Mrs. Mary Ann Cluppins. If your S.B. Catalogue has not already been amended now is your chance to do so. J.P.)

DETECTIVE INSPECTOR COUTTS AT HOME

by D.H.

It was in U.J. 1519 dated 26 November, 1932, that the most comprehensive insight into Detective Insp. Coutts' home life was revealed. He lived in a villa of early Edwardian architecture named "Meriden" located in Oxley Avenue, Brixton, S.W. The top half of the front door consisted of diamond shaped panes of blue and vermillion glass, fronting a beautifully kept garden with a strip of velvet lawn and trim privet hedges which were the owner's pride and joy. This happy home had been the Detective Inspector's for over twenty years.

Very seldom mentioned until now, was Mrs. Jane Coutts. She was described by the author, Gwyn Evans, as "a buxom pleasant-faced lady, a few years younger than Coutts; her apple cheeks had not lost their country freshness after twenty years of London's smoke and fog. She was a Shropshire lass and was as much in love with her George as on the day when, as a young constable, he had wooed and won her."

It is very pleasant I think, to get this insight into Coutts' home life and a fleeting glimpse of his wife, who only got mentioned very rarely. The worthy Inspector was mostly either in his office in that awe-inspiring edifice known to all and sundry as "Scotland Yard" or else visiting Sexton Blake's consulting room in Baker Street so it is of interest to learn that he found time to spend an hour in the morning before breakfast to give some time to digging and weeding the kitchen garden and afterwards to polish off a breakfast of porridge followed by ham and eggs.

Detective Inspector Coutts could easily have been made into a "dumb cop" comic character for comedy relief but fortunately he was a serious character though lacking in imagination and working strictly to regulations, who benefited greatly from Sexton Blake's help.

The only humour at his expense came from Tinker's good-natured joking disrespect or Blake's gentle sarcasm. All in all Coutts was a good character, a believable person and a great asset to the Sexton Blake stories.

STUMBLING DOWN MEMORY'S CUL-DE-SAC

When you are reminded of a particular story or book do you recall it in detail, in some sort of outline or vividly remember some odd, inconsequential phrase or extract which proves to be quite useless? Struggle as you may, nothing more will come and you can deduce nothing from the brilliant scrap you have so easily brought to mind.

Far too often I find myself in this latter situation. Trigger me off and this is the sort of thing I am more than likely to come up with. The conversation turns to the Champion, for instance, and someone mentions the Foreign Legion tales which appeared in the early 1930's. I read these avidly week after week and what do I remember?

'"Ullo, ullo, o hackbar!" yelled Tich.'

He is Legionaire Thruster Tim's cockney pal and that was his version of the desert tribesmen's battle cry. All else is a blank. Oh, there was a penal settlement called Zephyrs. Not really enough to sustain an interesting conversation.

Mention Ben Traver's play "Plunder". I know I thoroughly enjoyed the film and laughed uproariously. What have I left of that splendid evening's entertainment? A mental picture of Tom Walls and Ralph Lynn triumphantly mimicking the outwitted police inspector saying "Would you like to make a statement?" followed by 'The End'.

These inspired flashes of memory are probably wildly inaccurate in detail but I fervently hope they are true to the spirit and intention of the author.

Talk to me about Sexton Blake, whose adventures I have been reading since the late 1920's, and you stand a very good chance of witnessing an equally dazzling exhibition of forgetfulness. Ask me about "The Next Move". I have read it at least twice. "Oh, yes!" I will say brightly, "That was the title of the last Union Jack four author serial. The one in which the parrot says "Turn off the water, Mr. Brank". I did enjoy it." Somewhere in the inner recesses I have a vague feeling that underground tunnels, a man trapped on a staircase and Roxane in a safe are more important to the story than the parrot, but it is only vague.

Without any prompting at all I can recall holding a Union Jack and reading about Blake getting into an aeroplane and saying to the mechanic something about going in search of the stratosphere. Which story did that incident appear in you ask? Well I just have not managed to place it yet. Perhaps I shall have better luck with another quotation which I remember very clearly. "Surely you are not insinuating this is foul play, Mr. Blake?" on the finding of the whole jury dead in the jury room. By a clever piece of deduction I can actually use this well remembered quote to find the story title. It is "The Silent Jury". The story? Ah, it will very likely take an extraordinarily long time to deduce that.

Here is a really easy one. Blake says "Smart work, old boy" to Nelson Lee when he drives the car off the road to avoid an accident. I know exactly where to find that incident. It is in Turner's book "Boys will be Boys" in the chapter on Sexton Blake. What? You want to know

which Blake story it comes from? Sorry, but that escapes me for the moment. When I remember I will read it over again to find out what it is all about.

* *

Nelson Lee Column

REFORMATIONS

by R. J. Godsave

It is written in the Bible - Jeremiah 13.23, 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil'. From this observation it would appear that the chances of a genuine reformation of a person are indeed slim.

In view of this it is worth studying the reformed St. Frank's characters, which were remarkably few in the long history of the St. Frank's Nelson Lees.

Cecil DeValerie was the first scholar of St. Frank's to reform. Although a new boy his whole attitude to the rest of the Removites was extremely unpleasant, and soon earned the nickname of the 'Rotter'. His terrible ordeal in mistakingly believing that he was responsible for the death of a local boy, a belief which was fostered by an unscrupulous bookmaker, made De Valerie completely alter his attitude to life, and reform. Such a deep shock and the misery it entailed could easily have the effect of an alteration in his ways.

Both Reginald Pitt and Ralph Leslie Fullwood were greatly helped by the influence of others in their reformations. Both had been vindictive in spite against others in the past. The very act of trying to reform requires courage, and no one could call these two juniors cowards, even when their actions were not of the best.

With Pitt, it was the influence of Jack Grey, or Jack Mason as he was then known, who caused Pitt to cast off his old ways. Similarly, Fullwood was also indebted to outside help. Going on a trip with Lord Dorriemore and the St. Frank's juniors and Moorview girls he found he could enjoy life in their company without Gulliver and Bell. His newly found friendship with Clive Russell, who was to join St. Frank's at the beginning of the new term, greatly helped Fullwood in his uphill struggle.

Strangely enough, it was due to Reggie Pitt's sister - Winnie - who had a liking for Fullwood, that he was able to reform so very successfully.

The first New Series saw the possible reformation of Simon Kenmore of the Sixth Form. Falsely accused of forging an alteration in the amount of a cheque given to Kenmore by a leading Bannington bookmaker and passed on in part payment to a doubtful character to whom Kenmore owed a few pounds. Older, as well as young readers of the Nelson Lee will remember Kenmore as a bullying prefect, and the very thought of his being capable of reform being ridiculous. Such a doubt was expressed in the resume of the previous happenings in the opening chapters of the following Christmas Series.

MORE SOLAR PLANETS

ALAN STEWART writes:

In this month's C.D. I was intrigued by Jim Cook's article regarding 'Among the Solar Planets'. Jim, however, was mistaken when he states that his exercise book was very likely part of the parcel lost in transit. According to Bob Blythe, the missing story was in typescript, whereas, according to Jim, his book is in longhand.

By a strange coincidence I also have an exercise book - 'Among the Solar Planets' by E. S. Brooks written in longhand and commences - 'As Gresham made this announcement, etc.' I traced this to Nelson Lee number 223 old series, 'In Trackless Space', second chapter.

The book I have has brown covers and on the front cover - The National Exercise Book 60 pages with Brooks signature in ink, and in pencil - Among the Solar Planets Book Two. I wonder if Jim Cook's book is similar.

BOB BLYTHE writes:

I congratulate N. Gayle for the extremely well-written article 'Brooks & Hamilton". Here we have a writer treating both authors as equals and without making adulatory or derogatory remarks about either. It was a pleasure to read.

Jim Cook's claim to have part of the ms. "Among the Solar Planets" that was lost in Fleet Street was interesting, and I wish I could go along with him in his assumption. I would be the last one to spoil a

good story, but the trouble is that E.S.B. did not submit a ms. - ever (at least, not to my knowledge). If he did, then I am certain it would never have been published, for the simple reason (and I think Jim would agree in this) that his handwriting was so atrocious that nobody could have read it.

No, the practice in those early days was to write the story in long-hand. Having done this, making alteration and corrections where necessary, he would then type the whole thing out and send off the type-script, retaining the manuscript. It was, therefore the ts. that was found in Fleet St., not the ms.

I have reason to believe, though I can't prove it, that some time during this period (1910 - 1914) his brother Leonard did the typing for him, either reading from the ms. or from dictation. Later on, his wife, Frances, took his stories down in shorthand, and typed from that. Later still, E.S.B. dictated and his wife typed as he spoke, thus achieving a wonderful working partnership, as those who have seen the St. Frank's stories in typescript will agree.

A FLY IN THE OINTMENT

Mr. E. KADISH writes:

The Digest continues to be a source of great delight, but, so far as I am concerned, there was one considerable "fly in the ointment" in the February issue. I refer to that rather crude joke about Solomon Levi's making "a hundred-per-cent profit on the sale of his pocket-knife", contributed by Jim Cook in the Nelson Lee Column. I don't know whether this was Mr. Cook's own original masterpiece, or whether he quoted it from an actual item in the Nelson Lee Library. In any case, I found it distinctly unfunny, which, I think, is quite natural considering I am Jewish - and proud of it.

I realise that schoolboy humour is often crude, and sometimes cruel, but there is a distinction between that and the cheap humour displayed by such an item.

Of course, I know that Mr. Cook meant no harm by including this "joke", which makes it even more of a pity that it has to be linked with the name of the great Edwy Searles Brooks who made Solomon Levi such an agreeable and colourful character.

So, please, Mr. Cook, while I'm all in favour of Free Speech and people saying what they wish, a little Christian charity (if I may call it that) and a dash of Jewish tact when selecting future items would surely not be out of place.

* *

DO YOU REMEMBER? by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 141 - Schoolgirls' Own 673 - "Morcove at the Winter Sports"

The Schoolgirls' Own was about the same size as the last Gems, and suffered from the same defect: too many serials. The Morcove story in No. 673 occupied only half the issue, with three serial items at the back. In both cases the foreshortening of the main feature struck a warning note of imminent collapse, and the Schoolgirls' Own had in fact only a year or two left to run when No. 673 was published at the end of 1933. The attractive yellow and blue cover bore a definite resemblance to the Magnet, but the Schoolgirls' Own was a distinctive publication with an air of its own, and it is interesting to note that the half-yearly volumes had pages numbered consecutively: so No. 673 had pages 800-836. One cannot help wondering how many readers did in fact have their copies bound.

This particular number was part of a series concerning a winter holiday spent on the French Riviera. Polly Linton's parents had taken the Chateau Dumont at Cannes, and this issue starts on Boxing Day with a trip to Monte Carlo and ends with the whole party going up to a hotel in the mountains for the winter sports. The plot revolved around two French girls and a wrong that one had done to the other, the Morcove party naturally being on the side of right and justice.

It may be unfair to judge the Morcove characters from a holiday story, but the girls certainly appear colourless, with three exceptions: Polly Linton seems to be rather cheeky and careless about what she wears, a sort of madcap tomboy; Naomer Nakara, a moorish princess, begins nearly every sentence with "Bekas" and talks only about food; and Paula Creel, stated to be the adored duffer, usually commences her remarks with "Bai Jove" and says things like "I never wecollect going to bed more pwostwate." When we are told that she is anxious that all her

trunks should be loaded on the car, it is not difficult to see the resemblance to the famous Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. In fact, the Morcove girls really take no part to further the plot of this story: all the initiative is taken on their behalf by brothers of two of them - Jack Linton and Dave Cardew.

Horace Phillips, who wrote the Morcove stories under the name of Marjorie Stanton, was undoubtedly a man of education who used literary allusions in an appropriate manner, but his style was hardly gripping or amusing, and it is not surprising that most of the girls I knew as a boy preferred to read the Magnet and Gem because there was more 'bite' in the stories. Yet the girls' papers must have enjoyed an extensive circulation, because the monthly Schoolgirls' Own Library at this time published twice as many volumes as the Schoolboys' Own Library (though Morcove stories were not featured each month), and there was a Schoolgirls' Own Annual as well as a School Friend Annual each year. Where all this material has gone to is something of a mystery, but it seems likely that girls were not hoarders like boys, and the vast majority of these girls' papers must have gone into dustbins or vanished in smoke. As a matter of fact, today it is mainly the men in the collecting world who remember with affection the adventures of Betty Barton & Co. of Morcove.

* *

ANOTHER VIEWPOINT by N. Truscott

P. Tierney quotes a passage from the ninth chapter of Magnet 1249, Billy Bunter's Cert, from the Flip series: "that General Chu-Chow had advanced upon Pong-Wong, causing the retreat of General Ping-Pong upon Wang-Bang", and calls it "a silly piece of nonsense", adding that Hamilton might have thought his youngest readers would be amused by it. Now, I have quite an opposite view. Mr. Tierney's reason may be partly right, but, more important, the real meaning of that passage would go over their heads - and, if I am right, over Mr. Tierney's, too. G. K. Chesterton once wrote (in the early thirties) that modern journalism consists largely of shouting "Lord Jones dead" to people who did not even know he was alive. I believe the Hamilton quotation is an instance of his expressing much the same thing in his own way; that is to say,

drawing attention to the sameness of so much of what the newspapers call news, so that someone is always advancing and someone else retreating - it does not matter who, for tomorrow it will be reversed; and that this sameness runs through so much "news". So-and-so's fifth divorce, someone else's sixth "marriage", this burglary, that murder. None of it is new, all of it has happened before, and it matters nothing to any of us. I believe Mr. Tierney's Magnet quotation is one of Hamilton's ways (and he had others) of expressing this; and it would hardly be primarily for his youngest readers.

* *

BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 36. RAINS AS CLOUDS GATHER

The second Great War was drawing near. Somewhere about this time, a number of the renters moved their dispatch departments out of London, though booking and publicity departments remained in the metropolis - most of them in Wardour Street. Whether the move of the dispatch departments was done under government advice, to get huge stocks of inflammable film out of London, it is impossible for me to say. But there was no compulsion, for some renters - and G.F.D. was one - remained in Wardour Street.

M.G.M. moved their dispatch to Rickmansworth, which meant that films by rail transit had quite a long way to come, bumping up the carriage charges, for the exhibitor had to pay the rail charges in both directions. This, probably, was the reason why, for a few years more, we did not book many M.G.M. films, though later on we had a great number of their finest productions on our screen. For us, Warner's was another kettle of fish entirely. Their dispatch was moved to Teddington and remained there for the rest of the time that the Small Cinema was operating. It was an easy thing to get out the car and run over to Teddington from Surbiton to collect or return films - it was far cheaper and much more reliable, even though film transit by rail was always pretty swift and dependable. Some terms, during the war years, our programmes consisted almost entirely of Warner productions - partly owing to the excellence of Warner product and partly due to the convenient proximity of the Warner dispatch department. I believe that the site is now occupied by Thames Television.

Our opening programme this term, not long before the start of war, was a double-feature show from Warner's: George Brent in "The Go-Getter" plus Glenda Farrell in "Smart Blonde".

Next, another double show, both films from G.F.D.: Wallace Ford in "O.H.M.S.", plus John Wayne in "Idol of the Crowds". After that a double show from Warner's: John Garfield, Gail Page, and the Lane Sisters in "Four Daughters"

plus Gene Gerrard in "Glamour Girl". The Universal News was screened in every programme, of course, and often a Porky Cartoon.

Then another double show, both from G.F.D.: Will Hay in "Good Morning, Boys", one of his most popular, plus Wendy Barrie and Mischa Auer in "Prescription for Romance". Next, a double show, both films from Warner's: Bebe Daniels in "The Return of Carol Deane" plus Humphrey Bogart and Kay Francis in "King of the Underworld".

Now, from M.G.M., Robert Donat and Rosalind Russell in "The Citadel", a delightful film from the Cronin novel. At the time, I preferred the film to the book, as, in the book, the wife died under a London bus, so far as I recall. I preferred the happy ending. Years later, M.G.M. reissued "The Citadel", and we played it again.

Then a double show from Warner Bros.: Pat O'Brien, Joan Blondell and Wayne Morris in "The Orphan of the Ring" (shades of the Game Kid and the Chicken) plus Kay Francis in "Women in the Wind".

Next, from G.F.D., a double bill: Margaret Lockwood in "Bank Holiday" plus Donald Woods in a thriller "The Black Doll". After that, another double bill from G.F.D.: Will Fyffe in a re-make of his old silent success "Owd Bob" (we had played the silent film years earlier, and I forget whether the new version was so good) plus Fay Wray in "The Jury's Secret". This was followed by another double from G.F.D.: Jack Hulbert in "Kate Plus Ten" (I remember nothing of it or whether the odd title had any significance) with Noah Beery Jnr. in "Trouble at Midnight".

Now a double from Warner's: Claud Rains in "They Won't Forget" plus Beverley Roberts in "Expensive Husbands", followed by yet another double from the same firm: Claud Rains and Jackie Cooper in "White Banners" plus Ann Sheridan in "Broadway Musketeers".

To wind up a term of many excellent pictures, we had James Cagney and Pat O'Brien in "Angels With Dirty Faces" an exciting though sombre drama, which was reissued years later.

Some time later we played a Hal Roach two-reeler (released by M.G.M. like all Hal Roach features and shorts at that time) with the skittish title "Thugs With Dirty Mugs". The Hal Roach lists contained many titles of this type - "The Chases of Pimple Street" was another.

In conclusion, an interesting item crops up, as they often seem to these days. Recently, the Buster Keaton film "Spite Marriage" has been played for a season in a London cinema. I noted that film critics of several national newspapers stated that this film was never released in this country. The critic of the Daily Telegraph, Mr. Eric Shorter, commented: "This is said to be the first public showing in this country of Keaton's last silent film, though I'm assured that soon after it was made in 1929 a Birmingham cinema put it on."

The critics were in error. As followers of the Small Cinema may recall, I mentioned in No. 11 of this series that we screened "Spite Marriage". It was released by M.G.M. in the normal way early in 1930, and, presumably, was screened throughout the country. A few months after "Spite Marriage" we played

another Keaton feature, "The Cameraman".

I contacted Mr. Shorter, and, in a very pleasant letter he said: "Many thanks for putting me in the picture about the history in this country of "Spite Marriage". These publicists will go on misleading everybody and I fear that I inadvertently propogated the deception. When the film was shown at the last London Film Festival we were told it had never been shown in Britain before. Then came news from Birmingham that it had."

* *

The Postman Called

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

C. LOWDER (West Hampstead): Readers may like to know details of the Arthur Redfern stories by Hamilton (mentioned by Bill Lofts in his piece on Talbot in the January C.D.). There were two serials, both published in the Boys' Realm and then reprinted (largely unpruned, I believe) in the BFL. "Redfern Minor": Boys' Realm Nos. 370-391, 3 Jul 09/27 Nov 09 (BFL 479, published in June, 1919); "Arthur Redfern's Vow": Boys' Realm Nos. 391-404, 27 Nov 09/26, Feb 09 (BFL 494, published in October, 1919). Unfortunately, I don't seem to be able to put my hands on details of the school Hamilton used, but I have a feeling (could well be wrong, though) it wasn't St. Dorothy's.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: The school was St. Dorothy's, which was reminiscent of Rookwood in that it had Classical and Modern sides, the Moderns taking "Commercial Subjects.")

ROGER SANSOM (Ilford): I heartily agree with Jim Cook's dislike of deliberately terrible spelling (C.D., January). Have you noticed that adult authors always make juvenile spelling logical, though wrong - for instance, 'skule' for school? In real life, bad spellers are just as illogical as the language itself.

There's no connection - but can any Hamilton expert tell me anything about "Bunter in Butlinland", published by Cassell's in 1961? I found a copy on the shelf of a friend who'd been working at a Butlin camp. It seemed a weird combination of subjects, though it's readable enough, the plot involving a crook's attempts to rob Billy Butlin himself. I draw the line, all the same, at a Redcoat who calls the cornered villain "my man"!

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Charles Hamilton declared that there was no advertising tie-up in "Billy Bunter at Butlin's", but it was pretty clear that there was. It was a publication "extra"

that year, for one thing; normally two Bunter hardbacks were published but this year there were three. Also, the story was available at the Butlin camps in a special Butlin dust-jacket, as opposed to the normal yellow dust-jackets of those on sale in the town shops.)

Dr. R. WILSON (Castle Douglas): Danny's Diary in this month's Digest brought back a memory from the past, namely, the great storm of January, 1927. I had no car in those days and I can well remember having to pull myself along the streets by clinging to the brickwork of the houses. I never in my life stitched so many wounds caused by flying slates and window glass. The wooden garage at the back of my house, for which I hoped to find a use when I could afford to buy a car, was blown to the winds. As a result when I did have a new garage built, I got one of solid brick and asbestos. Not even the vandals can make any impression on it although they have tried hard enough.

W. THURBON (Cambridge): Isn't Mr. Gayle's claim that Charles Hamilton and E. S. Brooks are the two greatest school story writers of all time rather exaggerated? Hamilton was undoubtedly the most prolific, and he set up a school of writing that produced many imitators and substitute writers, and Brooks in his school stories is surely only one of the imitators. But was even Charles Hamilton a greater writer than Thomas Hughes, Talbot Baines Reid, R.S. Warren Bell and other Captain authors, John Finnemore, the Kipling of "Stalky", Vachell ("The Hill"), Benson ("David Blaize"), Waugh ("Loom of Youth"), Walpole ("Jeremy at Crale") or Wodehouse, or, among recent writers William Mayne. What do we mean by "greatest"? Mohammed Ali is "The Greatest" (even if self claimed) in the boxing world at present. But was he greater than Carpentier, Louis, or Jimmy Wilde each in their own time? In his own sphere Hamilton was the greatest, as shown by his domination of the Amalgamated Press for so long, e.g. his complete take over of the Penny Popular from J.S. & P. Sexton Blake and St. Jim's to an all school story (and Hamilton Schools at that) paper. Is it not wiser to say that Charles Hamilton was the greatest writer for the particular boys he served?

E. KADISH (Hendon): I was very sorry to read in the current "Digest" Mr. Loft's report on the death of Mr. Laidler, two years ago.

He was always one of my favourite illustrators, both in boys'

papers such as the "Champion", and in the "Schoolgirl". It was the Cliff House characters of the 'thirties in the last-named paper, which, in my opinion, he really brought to life (no disrespect intended to Mr. Dodshon, of course!).

Mr. Laidler's drawings complemented John Wheway's Cliff House stories beautifully in the 'thirties. His drawings of Bessie Bunter must have greatly helped to establish Mr. Wheway's new "softer" image of Bessie in the "Schoolgirl". That illustration of Laidler's showing Bessie sitting in an armchair, reproduced in the "C.D. Annual" for 1974, is characteristic of his work and a joy to look at. So, too, are his coloured covers for the "School Friend Annual".

W. O. G. LOFTS (London): Roger was of course only quoting Chapman, but one can get a false picture of Shields. It is true that he was independent, but as a thrifty Northerner he drew, and still expected to get paid, and why not! The A.P. had millions as assets. Shields was so much in demand that his work could be seen in dozens and dozens of A.P. papers - whilst Chapman as far as I know only had his work accepted in the Magnet. Shields thrived on work, whilst Chapman got slapdash when he was pushed.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Chapman's work featured in a lot more papers than the Magnet. You find him all the way through the years of the Popular, in the Gem, the Holiday Annual, the S.O.L., and, I am sure, others. He illustrated serials in the girls' papers before 1914.)

* *

News of the Clubs

CAMBRIDGE

The Club met on 6th February at 20 Wingate Way, Trumpington, the home of Vic Hearn. Bill Lofts and Bill Thurbon reported on researches they were making on G. A. Henty. The Secretary reported on the Aldine Press of Aldus Manutius in 15th Century Venice, from which the Aldine Libraries of the beginning of the century had probably taken their name.

Edward Witten gave an interesting talk on early memories of the Cinema from 1915 onwards. He recalled many one-time famous

and now almost forgotten figures, such as Lilian Gish, Mary Pickford and others. Jack Overhill and Bill Thurbon recalled early Cambridge cinemas, and Michael Rouse recalled his father's memories of the first cinema in Soham, a barn like structure.

Danny Posner gave a masterly survey of the Comics of the "Fifties". He pointed out that before the War the market for comics had been dominated by the I. P. C. and Thomsons. Other firms had started up, but failed. After the War there had been these two giants: Thomsons, traditional, loath to change, loyal to their papers, and still much the same in the Seventies as in the Fifties. I. P. C. extremely commercial, never reluctant to sacrifice anything not commercially viable. But now emerged two successful challengers. First, the Hulton Press with the outstanding "Eagle". The combination of Marcus Morris and Frank Hamson made a success of a paper, with religious and educational tones, two fields that had been unsuccessful before 1939. But the real success of the Eagle was its artwork. Other papers took note of the Eagle format and to some extent copied it. Finally, unable to match it I. P. C. took over Hultons and killed the "Eagle" by modifying it. The fourth competitor, L. Miller, based in Hackney, was not concerned with producing anything of lasting appeal. They produced cheap editions of mainly American origin, adapted for the English market. Danny Posner illustrated his talk with a selection of the Fifties publications, and showed how the "Eagle" stood out far above any other publication. The "Eagle" is now the most sought after of any paper and fetches very high prices. An animated discussion followed.

Vic Hearn ran a record quiz, mainly on singers and bands of the 1930's. Vic's record quizzes are always entertaining and the older members in particular recalled with nostalgia the many fine tunes. Joint winners of the Quiz were Danny Posner and Edward Witten.

The meeting closed with warm thanks to Vic and Mrs. Hearn for their hospitality. Next meeting on 6th March, at 99 Shelford Road, Trumpington, the home of Jack Overhill.

Visitors from other Clubs always welcome.

* * *

MIDLAND

Two meetings to report upon took place during January. Members of the club were invited to a party at the home of Gerald Price to enjoy warm hospitality, the superb readings (on tape) by the host, his son John, and Dr. Locke heavily disguised as Tom Porter. It was a jolly affair, made particularly memorable by the presence of Mrs. Hamilton Wright.

The first offical club meeting of the new year was held on the last Tuesday of January attracting nine members. As anticipated Tom Porter expertly 'palmed' an Anniversary Number and Collectors' Item. The former, 59 years old to the day, was Magnet 520, the famous 'A Very Gallant Gentleman', the latter consisted of the originals of 'Rivals and Chums' and 'Boy Without A Name'.

Two readings were given: Jack Bellfield dipped into Magnet 1169, Ivan Webster went 'Camping with Coker' in Magnet 1647. The evening concluded with a general discussion on the delights of the Greyfriars countryside and other facets of the hobby, topped off with one round of Greyfriars bingo.

NORTHERN

Saturday, 12th February, 1977

Highlight of the evening was a talk by Geoffrey Wilde entitled 'Hitting the Master for Six'. As Geoffrey was an avid reader of Hamiltonia and a staunch disciple of Hamilton he felt he might be excused for presenting what was a critical survey of one section of the master's writing. For, so far as cricket was concerned, Hamilton had a weakness. He seems to have had only a very sketchy idea of the principles of cricket and an impatience with the finer points.

It could be said that Hamilton was mainly interested in the human drama of the situation, but, said Geoffrey, he could have brought out the psychological elements and the drama better if he had brushed up his knowledge of the finer points of the game.

Hamilton, said Geoffrey, never seemed to mention the captain, yet the ways in which the captain sets his field and handles his players is of paramount importance.

Geoffrey went on to quote three outstanding series, Da Costa,

Lancaster and Ralph Stacey. In each of these stories there was a player of exceptional ability. To emphasize the drama there are occasions when the star player fails.

Geoffrey professed surprise at the attitude of the other players to failure, for luck came into all games, and often came in spells.

But Pentelow wrote well about cricket. Was this, perhaps, the reason why Hamilton did not? Did he, for this reason, disdain to write realistically about it?

There followed a team crossword conducted by Jack Allison.

And, for Jubilee year, Mollie Allison read sections of the minutes of the January meeting of twenty-five years ago. It was interesting to note that the Library then had over 1,000 books and was valued at £50!!

LONDON

There was a record attendance at the 29th A.G.M., which was held at the Kingsbury home of Bob and Louise Blythe and being the commencement of the Diamond Jubilee year of Saint Frank's College, Bob was duly elected chairman. Furthermore, three items were rendered by him. The first was excerpts from 1960 newsletter re the A.G.M. of that year, A Trackett Grimm story, "The Missing Beachcomber" and a fine general knowledge quiz which was won by Roger Jenkins.

Josie Packman read her C.D. Annual article, "The Third Murray". Four excerpts were played over from the Leslie Rowley Greyfriars tape and the third William t.v. adventure was screened. Millicent Lyle mentioned that East Malling in Kent was probably the village Richmal Crompton had in mind when writing the William stories. An excellent repast was available served by many willing hands.

Next meeting at the home of Bill and Thelma Bradford, 5 Queen Anne's Grove, Ealing, London, W.5. Phone 579 4670, Sunday, 20th March, kindly inform if attending. Votes of thanks to the hosts concluded a very happy meeting.

BENJAMIN WHITER

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WANTED: NUGGET WEEKLY COMPLETE Nos. 1 to 34, July 1920 to February 1921 app.

R. LANGSTON, GOODWILL, THE CREEK
SUNBURY-ON-THAMES, MIDDX.

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MORE STORM

by Christopher Lowder

A few amendations and additions to Cyril Rowe's interesting CD Annual piece on the mysterious Michael Storm.

GEM. The Alan Wayward series was written entirely by Storm, and all payments were made to Storm or Mrs. Storm. The pseudonym used for this series was 'Innis Hael' (note the spelling). Clark Hook had absolutely no hand in the series, and this error originated in the Lofts/Adley Men Behind Boys' Fiction, where 'Innis Hael' is given as a Hook pseudonym. The series began in Gem No. 11 (2nd Series) and ran for seven weeks, with a one-week gap between the penultimate and final instalments.

11. The First Adventure -- 25 Apr 08
12. The Long Arm of the Pasha -- 2 May 08
13. The Swoop of the Hawk -- 9 May 08
14. The Black Vulture of Foliat -- 16 May 08
15. The Taming of the Turk -- 23 May 08
16. The Vengeance of the Bey -- 30 May 08
18. Alan's Foe -- 13 Jun 08

PLUCK. The Alan Wayward series then continued in Pluck as two very short (in wordage, that is) serials. Both were by Storm, but both were published anonymously.

241-246. Sons of the Mountains -- 12 Jun 09/17 Jul 09
248-254. Game to the last -- 31 Jul 09/11 Sep 09

These two simply carried on where the final Gem story left off, and are clearly part of the same series.

BFL 4d LIBRARY. "The Death Drums" was not an anonymous story, but was bylined 'Innis Hale' (the 'l' and the 'e' transposed). The Blackie hardback issue, The Grey Messengers, was in fact first published in 1940. The interesting thing about this BFL/Blackie story is of course that this Michael Storm is not the Michael Storm of the

1907-09 period -- but that there's a link between the two men is beyond question (for instance, the use of the same pseudonym 'Innis Hael/Hale'. The original Storm clearly had some kind of private joke going on: Michael Storm; Innis Hael (Hale); Alan Gale).

Michael Storm Mark 2 was a fairly prolific writer of the 1930's/ 1940's (I have a number of issues of Tit-Bits from the 1930's with short stories by him). If we could only get hold of him, the whole Storm/ Sempill mystery would probably be solved ... at a stroke!

BOYS' REALM. The Dick Mascot serial was bylined 'Alan Gale', and ran as follows:

404-419. Dick Mascot's Schooldays -- 26 Feb 10/11 Jun 10

The BFL version (No. 183) seems to be uncut, as far as I can tell -- though I must confess that when I went through it, I didn't run a line-by-line analysis.

UNION JACK. It's worth pointing out, I think, that UJ 277, "The Road Hog", is attributed to Norman Goddard in the Sexton Blake Catalogue. This is a mistake. The style is quite unlike Goddard's, and in any case, as I discovered some years ago, payment for the story (£21.21.0) was made to Storm.

PENNY PICTORIAL. An addition to Cyril's list -- No. 495, "The Case of Squire Falconer". Definitely a Storm story. Apart from the fact that he got paid for it, the style of the story (originally titled "The Squire's Affair") is undoubtedly his.

Two slips of the writer's pen should perhaps be pointed out: Nigel 'Dom' should be Nigel Dorn; while Alan 'Cale' is of course Alan Gale.

One incidental: I get the impression that the lady known as 'Mrs. Storm' has previously only been referred to over the years in the CD in connection with G. H. Teed and his arrival on the AP scene in 1912. That she (whoever she was) was alive and well and living with Michael Storm years before this can be proved by the fact that many of the payments for Storm stories were made directly to her. The first Alan Wayward story, for instance (£11.11.0), and, oddly, the final two Abbotscrag stories in Marvel (Nos. 237 and 238).

Why this was so is as much of a mystery as anything and everything to do with the man who called himself Michael Storm. However,

Cyril Rowe's timely piece has at least tickled the somewhat jaded research instincts of Bill Lofts, Derek Adley and myself. A concerted effort on our part may well at last solve what is surely one of the most baffling mysteries in the history of the Amalgamated Press papers.

* *

HAMILTON CLEEK by Brian Doyle

In the January issue of C.D., S. Gordon Swan writes about Hamilton Cleek, 'the Man of the Forty Faces' (some of whose adventures appeared in CHUMS in 1919-20) and requests further information on the tales and about their authors, Thomas W. and Mary E. Hanshew.

There were 13 Hamilton Cleek books, details as follows: "The Man of the Forty Faces" (1910) (American title "Cleek, the Master Detective"); "Cleek, the Man of the Forty Faces" (1913) (revised edition of the first book); "Cleek of Scotland Yard" (1914); "The Riddle of the Night" (1915); "Cleek's Greatest Riddles" (1916) (American title "Cleek's Government Cases"); "The Riddle of the Purple Emperor" (1918); "The Frozen Flame" (1920); "The Riddle of the Mysterious Light" (1921); "The House of Discord" (1922) (American title "The Riddle of the Spinning Wheel"); "The Amber Junk" (1924); "The House of the Seven Keys" (1925); "Murder in the Hotel" (1931); and "The Riddle of the Winged Death" (1932).

Many of the later books were not written by Thomas W. Hanshew (1857-1914), but by his wife, Mary E. Hanshew, and Hazel Phillips Hanshew, who drew upon his notes and ideas.

Cleek had a remarkable near-plastic face which enabled him to contort it in many disguises without needing make-up or masks. In his earlier days he was a bold and clever criminal, but hated the newspapers calling him 'the Vanishing Cracksman'. He requested them to call him instead 'the man who calls himself Hamilton Cleek' and, in return, supplied the Press with information about the time and place of his next robbery. His adventures were shared by a London street urchin named Dollops. Cleek eventually gave up crime to turn detective when he married a girl named Ailsa.

Hanshew, who wrote for both sides of the Atlantic, wrote several 'non-Cleek' mystery novels, including "Beautiful But Dangerous"

(1891), "The Mallison Mystery" (1903) and "The Great Ruby" (1905). He was also one of the large band of pseudonymous authors who wrote about 'Nick Carter'.

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SECOND BESTS by Ernest Holman

The question of judgement by comparison came into my mind as a result of certain items appearing in the August Digest. R. J. Godsave mentions his difficulty in bringing subsequent New Series of Nelson Lee into line with earlier issues. Jim Cook briefly dismisses a section of later St. Frank's arrivals, stating that their short stay has been entirely forgotten. Further on in the issue, 'Controversial' remarks that "Billy Bunter's Christmas Party" never 'rang the bell'.

In other words, later stories were not up to the standard of previous ones. Fair enough comment - and one with which most of us would undoubtedly agree; but - and there IS a but in such judgements - is FAIR justice being given to these 'lesser' stories?

In his "History of the Magnet" Roger Jenkins reckons that, after 1934, good stories were still to come but that the sustained level of the previous four years was never regained. That, I feel, is the basis on which post-war Hamiltonia and post-1929 St. Frank's should be judged; they did not attain past levels - yet, good stories were still to come.

If stories of Greyfriars, St. Jim's and St. Frank's had never appeared - or, at any rate, had never been read - how, then, would these later ones rank? Of course, it is not easy for past readers to avoid comparisons but if, by some means, past stories could be forgotten, would the later yarns 'stand up'? Personally, in the main, I think that they would indeed do so.

However, if comparisons are to be made, how about looking at the post-war Hamilton books alongside his NEW stories written for various editions of the Holiday Annual? For instance, wouldn't "The Bunter Cup" (H.A. 1925) or "Battling Bunter" (H.A. 1928) be pretty well on a par with many of the post-war Bunters? Wouldn't "The Wandering Schoolboy" St. Jim's yarn (H.A. 1920) level off remarkably well with "D'Arcy's Disappearance" (Goldhawk 1952)?

Surely the true standard of post-war Hamiltonia is revealed by

the final 4½ Bunter books. Hamilton's last completed book - "Big Chief Bunter" was the last GOOD Greyfriars yarn to be published.

In the St. Frank's field, I am often surprised at Nelson Lee Columnists when they seem to suggest that this school ceased existence after 1929. (Over the years post-war Hamiltonia has been well discussed - but how seldom does Nelson Lee from 1930 onwards ever seem worthy of comment? Why?)

The later stories of Hamilton and Brooks were, at the least, 'not at all bad'. In many cases, they were quite good 'second bests'.

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SIXTY YEARS AGO

by Jack Overhill

In September 1916, a policeman saw me throw a stone up an apple-tree overhanging the wall of a back garden of the street I lived in. I was summoned and in open court was bound over in the sum of £5 for six months - more than my father, a highly-skilled journeyman boot-maker for a Cambridge bespoke shop, earned in a month and equivalent now to £250. On the way home from the Guildhall, he said: 'I can't afford to pay £5 if you get in trouble again, so mind what you're up to or you'll have three years in a reformatory.' Thirteen years old, I didn't relish the prospect. From what I'd heard of a reformatory you were birched every day and had salt rubbed in to make it smart!

My father and I lived alone. He often kept me away from school

(seventy times one term) to run errands and to do housework; I also helped him with his work. After a long absence from school in the autumn term, he told me in December to go again. I left the house; the morning was cold and frosty; instead of going to school, I went on Coe Fen and tried the frozen ditches to see if they'd bear me. They didn't.

My father was angry when I went home. Why hadn't I gone to school?

I didn't want to come bottom in the end-of-term examination. I would after being away so long.

He let the matter drop.

I was always apprehensive after even a day away from school and I dreaded going back on Monday, the 8th of January. But on Friday, the 5th of January, the Penny Popular was beginning a reprint of Greyfriars stories with The Making Of Harry Wharton, which I was longing to read. To wish the time away for the Penny Popular to come out was to wish myself back to school. I was in a quandary until I read of Harry Wharton's arrival at Greyfriars - an enjoyable story, for although it was abridged, I knew nothing of that then.

School was the start of a harrassing time for me.

A fall of snow led to a fright. It was snowing when I came out of school. A woman was walking along with an umbrella up. Several boys threw snowballs at it and missed. Mine was a longshot, carelessly thrown. The snowball landed on the umbrella and split it from top to bottom. There was a chorus of, 'Now you've done it.' The woman stopped and started to walk towards me. I was still bound over and the reformatory drew near.

Suddenly, she halted, turned and continued on her way. I was relieved but worried for days. The school crest was on my cap; she could complain to the Headmaster. Luckily, she didn't. I was already in hot water through going 'up the court'.

When I didn't work out of school hours, my father put me to his trade in the evenings. I hadn't time for homework and was caned for not doing it - once so severely, I showed him the weals on my backside. He was so shocked and angry he talked of taking me to the police-station - unheard of in those days. 'Don't take the cane,' he said. I didn't - and stuck it out.

I was put down a standard. He boiled over. I'd done the lessons the previous year and was wasting time. He refused to send me to school. The school attendance officer came to the house. My father's threatening manner so frightened him, he ran off. Waiting to be prosecuted, to his surprise, he was requested to go before the Borough Education Committee. I was a scholarship boy and he'd signed an agreement to keep me at the school till the end of term when I was fifteen. He said I was fourteen in three weeks' time - old enough to earn my living. The Borough Education Committee gave way. The agreement was cancelled and I was permitted to leave school.

I've still got the Penny Popular with The Making Of Harry Wharton in it. A reminder of Charles Hamilton helping me through hard times sixty years ago.

Edited by Eric Fayne, Excelsior House, 113 Crookham Rd., Crookham, Nr. Aldershot, Hants.
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