

STORY PAPER COLLECTORS DIGEST

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AUGUST 1977

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JUST COINCIDENCE?

Last month our reviewer, looking at the reprinting of the two Wodehouse school stories, "Gold Bat" and "Head of Kay's", drew attention to the mention of "a mystic game of Tommy Dodd" in "Gold Bat" and to one of the main characters in "Head of Kay's" being a Jimmy Silver.

Could it be just a coincidence that Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd were introduced as leading characters in the Rookwood series? I am

inclined to think that it could not. I think there is not much doubt that Hamilton read and digested the work of all the most successful school story writers of the period. It is possible that the name, Jimmy Silver, appealed to him, and he could see no harm - as indeed there was not - in using a name from another writer's 1905 story to be the name of the leading character in his new series ten years later. It could be, of course, that the name just lingered pleasantly in his memory, as names will, and so he used it for Rookwood without realising where he had come across it before.

As for "the mystic game of Tommy Dodd", I find that the Oxford Dictionary gives "Tommy Dodd" as the name for an odd man out. From this one can gather that a game of "Tommy Dodd" would be such pastimes as Musical Chairs. The term "Tommy Dodd" in this connection is quite new to me, but obviously it would have been familiar to those of the generation of Wodehouse and Hamilton. Here again, Tommy Dodd of Rookwood may have been just an unconscious "lifting" of a name which had lingered in the memory.

Hamilton, of course, was not too good at name creation. He tended to rely on old ones. The most curious case, as we discussed many years ago, was that when Billy Bunter was created for the Magnet of 1908, the name was then being used for a schoolboy creation from another writer, and, for a time, one found Billy Bunter of the Magnet running side by side with a Billy Bunter in Vanguard. As Hamilton also wrote for the Vanguard it looks suspicious, but one feels that it must have been just a case of a name lingering in an author's memory.

ANIMALS IN FICTION

Generally speaking, I feel that to give children presents of animals is not a good practice. Youngsters' steam-pipes tend to grow cold quickly, and the new toy soon becomes a bore to be cast aside. There is always a risk that animals given to children may, in some cases, get neglected in the long run.

Countless stories for children have, quite rightly, associated pet animals with youthful heroes and heroines. It is most important that a love for, and a kindness to, animals should be instilled into children from an early age.

I am not sure that boarding schools would be likely to favour resident pupils keeping pets, owing to the risk of their neglect. I cannot recall any pets at Greyfriars, but at St. Jim's Herries had a bulldog and Wally had a mongrel dog, each being devoted to his pet. Van Ryn had a parrot in earlier days at Rookwood and Bessie Bunter also arrived at Cliff House with a parrot. One of the Cliff House girls, I seem to recall - was it Barbara Redfern! - had a marmoset.

An occasional defect in the William stories was that Miss Crompton's hero, though devoted to dogs, was cruel, at times, to cats.

Unexpectedly enough, I find a similar defect in one of Talbot Baines Reed's novels. In "Tom, Dick and Harry", the tale opens with the Headmaster's dog, greatly disliked by the schoolboys, being shot in the night. The author provides ample evidence that the boy guilty of the deed was one of the story's heroes - the senior, Harry. The argument seems to be, on the author's side, that, because the dog was not a much-loved animal, it was an act of public good for some boy with a firearm to shoot it.

It is true that, at the end of the yarn, the older Harry assures the younger Tom and Dick that he was not guilty of the deed, but it is not too convincing.

Whether any youngster might get the idea of shooting with bow and arrow or a catapult at a cat, like William, or shooting at a dog with a gun like Harry Tempest seemed to have done, I can't say. But the very idea leaves a bad taste, which is a pity.

ANNUAL TIME AGAIN

Our own Annual holds a high place in the affection of our readers. December without the Annual would be like Christmas without a pud. It is for that reason that we carry on with the good work in these days when inflation had gone wild and the cost of everything makes for all sorts of worries. While readers are so loyal and enthusiastic, my motto is that the Annual must go on.

This year's Annual will be our 31st edition - a quite remarkable achievement, though we see it ourselves as shouldn't.

All your favourite writers will be well to the fore. Roger Jenkins takes Hamilton's "School for Slackers" and appraises it in his own

inimitable manner, and he is, as always, a writer whose articles can be read and read again. Mrs. Josie Packman turns the spotlight on Waldo, the Wonder Man, and assesses his value in connection with the Sexton Blake saga. W. T. Thurbon looks back with joy at Sporting Stories of long ago, and tells us about his favourite. Brian Doyle gives us a nostalgic treat by recalling many of the radio programmes which delighted us long ago. His article will conjure up many pleasant memories. And that's just for a start.

All being well your order form for this year's Annual will, as usual, come to you with September C.D.

THE EDITOR

DANNY'S DIARY

AUGUST 1927

On August Bank Holiday it poured with rain all day.

Out of the goodness of my heart I have spent several evenings at Doug's cricket club, fagging after balls while my brother and the rest were hitting out at the nets. Doug was evidently touched for he took me up to London on an afternoon early in August and we went to a matinee at the London Coliseum. It is a huge and lovely theatre where they present Variety at its best, and there are performances twice daily at 2.30 and 7.30.

We saw Nazimova, the film-star, in person. She got a lot of applause, and was beautifully dressed, and sang a bit and talked a bit, though I wasn't much impressed with her, so Doug called me a Philistine. Also on the bill were the Houston Sisters, who were just wonderful. I fell deeply in love with Renee, the one dressed as a little girl. The two sisters did a lovely act, and finished up with the song "Oh, Honey Bunch, you know how much I love you." I was humming it all the way home, and Doug kept singing "Bye, bye blackbird" which Nazimova sang.

For a change, the Gem has been exceptionally good this month with the series running concerning Tom Merry & Co. on the Bootleg Ranch as the guests of Kit Wildrake. The first tale of the month was

"Tom Merry & Co. in Canada" in which Arthur Augustus had cause to bless the day that he saved the life of Black Louis, the half-breed, for when the chums are prisoners in the hands of a gunman, it is the half-breed who rescues them.

In "The Dude of the Bootleg Ranch", Rancher Wildrake can't make out how it is that so many of his prize cattle keep disappearing without trace. And it is Arthur Augustus who solves the mystery. The next tale was "The Secret of Pine Tree Patch" in which Gussy is the unfortunate paleface who has incurred the enmity of Hawk Nose, the Indian - and Hawk Nose vows to win Gussy's scalp to even matters up. In the last tale of the month "The Dollar Trail", the boys go on the trail of a bank robber, and run into many perils and hardships.

I hope this series goes on for a long time. It's good.

Rookwood is back, this time in something new, in a Gem serial entitled "The Rookwood Dictator". It's not all that hot, but it is illustrated by Wakefield who also illustrates Rookwood in the Popular.

This month I had "Barred by His People", a Greyfriars tale in the Schoolboys' Own Library. In the second half of the tale Bulstrode Minor arrives at Greyfriars, and dies beautifully at the finish. Very theatrical story, I thought, though interesting enough in its way. I didn't buy the second S.O.L. this month, as it is a Michael Poole tale, and I don't like his writing.

There was a terrible railway accident towards the end of the month when the Deal express was derailed and crashed into a spanning bridge near Sevenoaks. 13 people were killed and 30 injured.

In the Nelson Lee Library the series has continued with the St. Frank's boys on the Congo. In "The Gorilla God's Magic" they are doomed to die by fire, sacrificed to the natives' god - a stuffed gorilla. But Johnny Onions, the acrobat, climbs up the pole, hidden by the smoke, and puts on the gorilla's skin. So the gorilla comes to life, the natives flee in terror, and the boys escape. The series ended with "The Schoolboy Exiles", when, after many more exciting adventures, the boys are rescued. A far-fetched series, of course, but full of quick-change adventures to keep the reader palpitating.

Next week brought a new series. Back at St. Frank's there is a tremendous rift between the Remove and the Fourth Form, with a

mysterious figure - the Unknown - causing all the trouble and chuckling fiendishly as he does it. This tale was "The Feud of the Fourth". This was followed by "The Foes of St. Frank's" in which there is open warfare between the two forms, so much so that the Head promises severe punishment if it goes on. But the Mysterious Unknown continues to ferment trouble. All very original and exciting.

The Boys' Friend Library this month has "St. Frank's on the Rocks" as one of its book-length stories.

At the cinemas this month we have seen Hoot Gibson in "Hey! Hey! Cowboy!", Richard Barthelmess in "Ranson's Folly"; Gloria Swanson in "Fine Manners"; Blanche Sweet in "Diplomacy"; and Ken Maynard in "Senor Daredevil". Ken Maynard is a new cowboy star, and this was a fine picture.

The Magnet has been just great all the month, starting with "Bravo, Bunter!" in which Bunter saves a child from the path of an express train - and nobody believes he has done it. Great stuff. With the next week came the start of a new travel series, and free gifts of metal models of famous railway engines.

First tale of the series is "The Man from the South Seas". Ben Dance has come half way round the world to bring Tom Redwing a chart showing the hiding place of a treasure, but Silvio Xero has followed him. The next story "The Treasure Chart" finds Redwing and Smithy good pals again, in face of the peril from Silvio Xero. Last of the month brought "Tom Redwing's Quest". The summer holidays are on, and the chums are to sail for the South Seas on Mr. Vernon-Smith's yacht "The Golden Arrow", with Mr. Vernon-Smith and his valet who is named Soames. Bunter is not in the party, but anyone near the baggage-room in the middle of the night would have heard a fat snore which was very familiar to anyone who had slept in the Remove dormitory. This terrific series continues next month.

August has been a terribly wet month. It never seems to stop raining. In fact it is turning out to be the wettest summer ever known in this country.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Schoolboys' Own Library No. 57, "Barred by his People" comprised two consecutive Magnets of early summer 1911. Bulstrode was the main character in each - at that time he was Junior Captain - though the second story was not really a sequel to the first.

S. O. L. No. 58, "The Butt of the School" comprised a number of St. Katie's tales from a series by Michael Poole which had appeared in the Gem some years earlier. The Gem serial "The Rookwood Dictator" was the first of a good many serials and single stories of Rookwood which appeared in the Gem between 1927 and 1937. Almost all (and possibly all) were by substitute writers. The tales contained many stock "Hamiltonisms", but there are a great many places where, in the words of the late Gerald Allison, the grit crunched between the teeth of the reader.)

* * * * *

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

I received a letter from my good friend Gordon Swan the other day in which he wishes me to make a correction regarding his article in the May C.D. so here it is in his own words:

"I received my May C.D. recently and found that an article I wrote was included. In this article I named the escaped convict as Robert Harling and you added a note to the effect that when this story was reprinted in the Sexton Blake Library the convict's name was altered to Carling. Why, only the A. P. knew. I have looked up the relevant instalments in the Dreadnought and find that the name was shown as Carling, so I am afraid I am the culprit not the A. P. I must apologise for this inexplicable error".

I trust you will all enjoy the other article this month by Jim Cook. It's rather a long one so will take up all the available space.

WHY BAKER STREET?

by J. W. Cook

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle may well have been influenced to settle Sherlock Holmes in Baker Street at the time because of its association with the famous. Such well known residents as Mrs. Siddons, the actress; Lord Lytton, the novelist, who was born there; Cardinal Wiseman, who died there, and William Pitt, who lived there. The Cardinal lived at No. 15, and Pitt died at No. 120.

Holmes and Sexton Blake have conflicting theoretical residential 'sites', although it is recognised with that entente cordiale peculiar to lovers of Holmes that 221b was originally on the site of what is now

Marks & Spencer and the Metal Box Company.

But why Sexton Blake in Baker Street? Was Harry Blythe, creator of Blake, fond of alliteration? Or was he setting up a rival neighbour to Holmes?

It would be stretching coincidence too far to suggest Blythe chose Baker Street out of the blue while there were so many other famous street names were there in London for the picking.

One year later after the 'birth' of Sexton Blake Maxwell Scott presented the world with another famous detective, Nelson Lee. Scott, whose real name was Dr. Staniforth, eschewed Baker Street and found chambers for Lee in Grays Inn Road, east of Baker Street, which meant Nelson Lee had to start from scratch outside the aura that had already become to be attached to Baker Street.

Still, had Nelson Lee been 'posted' to conduct his investigations in the same street as Holmes and Blake the triptych effect may have produced a spiritual combination and assisted the S. O. E. and O. S. S. who occupied the top section of Baker Street Underground Station in World War II - a spot both Blake and Tinker were to so often look down from their flat while in pensive mood.

But I will ask again: why Baker Street? Sir Arthur had a reasonable explanation. He had his consulting room at No. 2 Devonshire Place and he used to walk here from his lodging in Montague Place, just behind Baker Street. It was there while waiting for patients who rarely came that he began writing Sherlock Holmes' stories. Cambridge Circus, as readers of British spy stories know, is the H.Q. of the British Secret Service but give me Baker Street every time.

It has often tantalised me not knowing who was responsible for naming a secret rendezvous area in France TINKER. Could the fact that SOE at Baker Street Underground Station had a 'Colonel' who remembered Blake and Tinker 'lived' opposite? The secrets of World War II are gradually being exposed - I hope "Special Operations Executive" and the "Office of Strategic Services" may tell us who gave birth to the TINKER project.

I suppose it was unfortunate that Blake resided in Baker Street. He had to share his fame with that of Holmes. Nelson Lee had no such ties, but yet another private investigator suffered from a Baker Street

address; he was Ferrers Locke, a relative of the headmaster of Greyfriars.

It is surprising the number of doctors who took to writing detective novels. To Dr. Stanforth and Conan Doyle must be added A. E. W. Mason; R. Austen Freeman. Austen Freeman's Dr. Thorndyke must have been the first fictional detective to carry his own travelling bag - long before Scotland Yard devised such a thing as a 'Crime Bag'.

And mention of Scotland Yard reminds me of the slight confusion tourists get when wishing to see "The Yard" at Dacre Street. So many get it mixed with Baker Street! The new 20-story glass filing cabinet to house the headquarters of the Metropolitan Police in Victoria is yet another sign of the break with the past.

Incidentally do you know the cable address of the Yard? It is "Handcuffs, London". But I never found out Blake's cable address or Nelson Lee's. Suggestions are welcome.

Although both Blake and Holmes are in the same street I don't think Sexton Blake would hold such views about household staffs as did Sherlock Holmes in "Wisteria Lodge". The man from 221b expresses himself thus: "... Holmes referred scathingly to the 'butlers, maid-servants, footmen and the usual overfed, underworked staff of a large English country-house.'"

But I am not getting nearer to my query why Blake at Baker Street. Long before Conan Doyle London was so well known that he could have put Sherlock Holmes and Watson into any of a hundred famous streets - any one wouldn't have detracted the fame or dethroned the name of Sherlock Holmes, but Baker Street it had to be.

Each time I come to London I have to visit Baker Street. It hasn't the arboreal attraction Grays Inn Road has for me but it has the two-fold spiritual affection that arose from the ghosts formed in the printer's ink of Holmes and Sexton Blake.

But that same printer's ink today is unworthy of its past. The Fourth Estate ignores Sexton Blake but highlights Sherlock Holmes. Whenever Baker Street is mentioned in the press Fleet Street automatically brings in Holmes and his friend Dr. Watson of 221b.

Yet more has been written about the exploits of Sexton Blake and

Tinker - more words printed than were ever read by lovers of Sherlock Holmes that the anomaly must be responsible by that other section of society who barred the "Penny Bloods" from their households.

I would have liked to have known more about those many writers of Sexton Blake stories. I feel certain their little fads and idiosyncrasies while compiling their tales would equal if not surpass the foibles that is attributed to famous writers.

It is well known that Joseph Conrad found his thoughts flowing most freely in the bath. Mark Twain often wrote in bed. And Fennimore Cooper chewed pastilles as he wrote "The Last of the Mohicans".

Perhaps the late Eric R. Parker chewed his pencils depicting a scene from a Sexton Blake story? Or Gwyn Evans may have puzzled over a situation that demanded extracting Blake from a tight corner and finding the solution at the break of day?

Then again, it may well be that some of our Blake authors were useful in military intelligence. The services of Compton Mackenzie, Ian Fleming, Graham Greene, and Somerset Maugham all worked for M. I. 6, the wartime version of the British Secret Service.

I have the impression that Blake writer Donald Stuart as Gerald Verner assisted M. I. during World War II.

It has been asserted that the original Sexton Blake did not work in Baker Street. His address then was New Inn Chambers followed by an office accommodation in Wych Street. Is it to be assumed Blake moved to Baker Street as a rival investigator to Sherlock Holmes?

Was it Hal Meredith who really created Sexton Blake and who afterwards took him from previous addresses to land him forever at Baker Street? Not that it matters. Sexton Blake and Tinker are with us today and will live as long as we live.

But again; why Baker Street?

While the career of Sexton Blake began in lesser known London streets Holmes at least blossomed out from Baker Street and, unlike Blake, remained there till the end.

It may well prove to be Blake's undoing when he moved his office to Berkely Square away from Baker Street. The alliterative impulse remained but the mystique that had grown from "Baker Street" had departed.

It was a great pity that the conditions under which authors wrote Sexton Blake stories - to use the same central characters of Blake and Tinker - did not include positive assurance that the Baker Street residence and office would be retained even though progress might demand it.

But what's done is done. I can imagine the old Blake writers stirring in their long sleep shaking a misty fist at those who changed the Baker Street status quo. I am sure Blake's enemies wouldn't have agreed to any other dwelling. And I am positive that Blake's femmes fatales preferred Baker Street; except perhaps Miss Death, who had but six months to live. Perhaps she too is shaking a misty fist.

Baker Street today is somewhat longer than it was when Sexton Blake and Tinker first pitted their wits against the world of crooks. It has altered considerably since Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson lived at 221b but Hitler's bombers failed to flatten it or erase the 'sites' on which housed Holmes and Blake. For memories cannot be destroyed by bombs. While there is a Baker Street in London there will surely be Sherlock Holmes and Blake and Tinker.

They are the 'Baker Street Regulars'.

I shall give up asking 'Why Baker Street'? Only those who have gone could possibly tell me - and it doesn't really matter.

* * * * *

Nelson Lee Column

THE START OF ST. FRANK'S

by W. O. G. Lofts

In the excellent Golden Jubilee of St. Frank's issue of the C.D. our editor in his column raises some very interesting questions. Why for instance, Nelson Lee and Nipper were turned over to E. S. Brooks and written in the first person. Why also did the N. L. L. fade out in the early thirties? Some of these points I feel sure have been mentioned in the Lee column through the years, but certainly not at any length, and so one or two further details may be of interest to the reader.

W. H. Back Director of the Amalgamated Press Ltd., was the man who put Sexton Blake on the map by publishing weekly episodes of

his adventures in the Union Jack each week. He was also responsible for starting the highly successful Boys' Friend Library in 1906. Apart from school and adventure tales, they also featured detective stories with Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee in the monthly issues. These proved so popular with readers, that always ready to bring out new publications, around late 1914 he decided to bring out two Libraries featuring these two great detectives. There would be of course a basic difference between the two new projects to stop them completing against one and other. The Nelson Lee Library that did not have a paper of its own, would be small size, with a long-short story and priced a penny. The Sexton Blake Library would be book length costing 3d and similar in format to the B. F. L.

The opening story then that appeared in the N. L. L. in July 1915 was entitled 'The Mystery of Lime-House Reach' which although anonymous has been proved to have been written by Archibald C. Murray - a professional soldier and living in Suffolk. Further stories were written by many other authors such as Mark Darran, W. J. Bayfield, R. M. Graydon, Maxwell Scott, J. G. Jones, A. S. Hardy, E. S. Brooks and G. H. Teed. With the First World War then in progress, and many authors called away to active service (Mark Darran fated never to return) towards the end of 1915 saw the Library written exclusively by two writers, E. S. Brooks and G. H. Teed.

About the middle of 1917, and with pages cut due to the paper shortage, it became obvious that the N. L. L. was not supported as well as it should have been. With many other less popular papers being axed, unless some drastic change occurred it would quickly fold. There was no real reason why the sales were low, as in the writers opinion there was no difference in the two Libraries at that early stage, except the length of the tales, and the name of the detective. Sexton Blake then was obviously a bigger drawing card than Nelson Lee.

Someone then in the editorial chair came up with the novel idea of having a new format type of paper. A sort of detective/school story Library, and to make it even more novel the stories were to be related in the first person - by Nipper the assistant to the Grays Inn Road detective. Actually and for the record, the first idea was not new at all, as boy detectives had featured galore in previous school stories.

Probably the best example being in the 1910 Aldine Diamond Library when Tom Drage went to St. Edgar's School, after a long series of pure detective yarns featuring his relative Caleb Drage the famous detective.

Of the two writers then penning Nelson Lee stories, Teed was not only the much senior writer, but at that period was considered to be a far superior one. The snag was that he did not write school stories, E. S. Brooks certain did already having established himself for his substitute tales of Greyfriars and St. Jim's for The Magnet and Gem. In any case Teed had sufficient work for the U. J. and S. B. L. to keep him happy as he was their star author.

So it was E. S. B. who wrote the transformation of detective stories to those of school tales of St. Frank's, and the rest is history. The account of the downfall of St. Frank's is far too lengthy to relate here, and must be in a future article.

HANDFORTH RULES O. K.

by William Lister

"Collectors' Digest" of July featured a cover which must have delighted, nay warmed and nourished the heart of many a St. Frank's enthusiast. The artist is to be congratulated. On a shield-shaped background we see to the right-hand side a glimpse of the old school, which underneath is an enthusiastic cricketer. To the left Fatty Little has just seen a ghoul in the larder and is preparing for a four-mile-a-minute sprint to safety, while the picture below depicts a phantom monk on the prowl reminding us that Edwy Searles Brooks was at his best with his supernatural mystery tales. Right in the centre the artist has placed the picture of the one St. Frank's character that should be at the centre of the thoughts of every St. Frank's fan. Think of Handforth - think of Ezra Quirke and you think of E. S. Brooks or vice-versa.

In my view Edward Oswald Handforth only had one serious rival for long lasting fame. I refer to Ezra Quirke. I realise there are one or two who might disagree with me and I respect their views. Allow me to say - find any man (or woman) who has not seen a copy of the "Nelson Lee" since its demise and are now late in life and you will hear them say "Oh, yes, Handforth and that queer fellow Ezra Quirke."

All the other characters are looked on as background or supporting cast. Nelson Lee, Nipper, Fatty Little or Lord Dorrimore

and the others are seen or remembered in that light. A good supporting cast, no one will deny, but no serious threat to Handforth or Ezra Quirke.

How was this position achieved? I would think much the same as a film star comes to the top. At some point the general public take a fancy to a rising star and from then on he is made. The producer cashes in on this and then picture after picture comes out featuring the same star. In times past it was Lillian Gish, Tom Mix, John Gilbert, Valentino and Lon Chaney, people came more for the star than for the film so producers stuck to them for as long as they could.

The same thing happens with authors. They get "stuck" with their characters. Sir Arthur Conan-Doyle got "stuck" with Sherlock Holmes (he even had to bring him back after he had dumped him), E. W. Hornung with "Raffles", Ian Fleming with "James Bond" and the Union Jack with "Sexton Blake". Once a character has caught on he is made, and who is to say that Handforth and Quirke didn't catch on? I seem to recall a writer by the name of Charles Hamilton who got stuck with one by the name of Billy Bunter. So I make no apology for quoting Handforth and Ezra Quirke as deserving centre place on our "Collectors' Digest" cover.

At this point I think someone may ask "How come you give this honour to Handforth as many would place Ezra Quirke right there in the centre?" Let me explain.

There is a sense in which I find Quirke a very near contestant to Handforth as a character likely to live in a person's memory for a long time and I gave due consideration to this.

In a very short series Ezra Quirke captured the imagination of readers and is now immortalized in Howard Baker's production "The Haunted School". However a later sequel series though good, did not catch on. E. S. Brooks must have realised this and from then on quietly dropped our Ezra, but there is much to be said for a character that achieves success in almost one book. I believe the original "Raffles" was all in one volume, (I am aware that another writer has cashed in on a Raffles T. V. series) and they were very good too.

But in considering Edward Oswald Handforth who, having quietly crept up to Nelson Lee stardom, held that position come wind, come

weather for many years. Almost, one might say until the very last copy of the old paper dropped from the press, and this is no mean feat.

I have, of course, born in mind that the pages of past copies of the "Collectors' Digest" have hummed with discussions about the popularity - some for and some against. The very fact that he has been so discussed proved that he was at the top.

Nobody bothers discussing small fry. Take the big names, Margaret Thatcher - Harold Wilson - Edward Heath or even Billy Graham - all come in for lively "for and against" debates, but who bothers about discussing the faults and failures of we smaller fry?

After all, we don't hear the merits and de-merits of most of the minor characters at St. Frank's in "C.D.",

Handforth has been praised and also lampooned but this only shows he is at the top or nobody would bother.

So may I copy a phrase (or slightly revise it) seen on a garden wall hereabouts, "Liverpool Rules O. K." and close my article with "HANDFORTH RULES O. K".

cont'd on Page 19 ...

* * * * *

WHY PICK ON ME?

asks H. Vernon-Smith

It was fascinating, to say the least, to find one's character analysed to the extent that mine was in the "Let's Be Controversial" column of your magazine. Not that I don't admit to being something of a controversial fellow myself and, since they say that 'the looker-on sees most of the game', I suppose you may have a point or two. So have I;

I'm not proud of my earlier days at Greyfriars and would question what bizney it is of yours or anyone else to recall them. Some johnnie once said 'let the dead past bury its dead' and I'll lay you ten to one in doughnuts that he had something to hide himself. As for reforming, well I had a sample of that from Alonzo Todd. It proved a very painful process - for Alonzo!

Wharton and his crowd have sometimes had a restraining influence on yours truly, but the lapse has only proved temporary. If I have any regard in that quarter I reserve it for Bob Cherry - a chap who must have more friends in and out of the Remove than anyone else.

You say that I was once too bad to be true, well, substitute 'good' for 'bad' and you have a fair appreciation of Wharton but, talk about Pride going before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall, and the name of the Great Panjandrum of my form leaps to the eye!

School life, even at Greyfriars, could be very dull if we all said "yes sir and no sir" to our kind masters. In my book, the Beaks are fair game and for the most time they simply sit up and beg for the wool to be pulled over their eyes. Not that Quelch hasn't had his successes in spite of what you say about the Captain Spencer affair. Our beloved form master can make a chap feel a little uncertain of himself on occasions. I was up before him once and he looked me in the eye and said "Vernon-Smith, if you give me your word that you were not responsible for this outrage, I shall accept it!" It was quite a novelty to hear him say that for Quelch doesn't always display such faith in my word and the fib I was about to utter died on my lips. Like good little Georgie Washington, I could not - at least under those circumstances - tell a lie! I remember Quelch looking at me for what seemed ages and, just when I expected the axe to fall, he said quietly "You may go, Vernon-Smith!"

Reddy is a pal in a million, as good an influence on a chap that any parent or master could wish for. How he manages to put up with me I cannot begin to guess, but manage it he does. Even Reddy won't stop me from going my own way especially when that way lies in the direction of the "Cross Keys" or "Three Fishers" at dead of night. I don't suppose you, dear Editor, have ever arrived back at School, after the witching hour, to find that some interfering fool has closed and fastened the box room window. You haven't? I thought so! Your education has been neglected! A stone to the dorm window and Reddy lets down a rope for me to climb. There's something exhilarating in climbing sixty or seventy feet up a wall in the moonlight knowing that a master or pre on the prowl could catch you out.

It is not so much the chance of winning on the wicked pasteboards, the little green table or even a gee-gee at Wapshot or Lantham. It's the risk involved that mean life's blood to me. That and pitting myself against other odds that may confront me. Not all you learn of value is taught in form or on the sports field, you know. One doesn't exactly

expect to find Quelch giving instruction on 'form' or Lascelles laying odds on the Game Chicken winning by a k. o. in the ninth round. So, if the prophet won't come to the mountain the mountain must go to the prophet - although Joey Banks wouldn't thank me for likening him to either.

Only when I find that my enterprise is being emulated by a fat fool like Bunter or a namby pamby like Hazel do I feel any doubt about my extramural activities. I'm not exactly proud at being found in company like that of Skinner, Snoop, and Stott or those insufferable snobs Pon & Co. After all, there's nothing like being with one's team and raking in the runs or scoring the goals on Little Side. I rather fancy that I've got a bit of a reputation for being a sportsman there as well as in the billiard room or on the racecourse.

As the jolly old poet remarked "Life is Real and Life is Earnest" and that's what I mean mine to be. He also said "Let us then, be up and doing," and, though I don't believe that he meant after lights out, I'm with him all the way. There will always be action when I'm around, and plenty of it.

When I started writing this I thought I'd be showing where you were wrong in your article. Now, I'm not so sure. What you have to say and what I have written seem to add up very much to the same thing. Perhaps, as our elders and betters would put it, I've matured since those long off wicked days. Perhaps, too, maturing is a better word than 'reforming'. Let your readers give their verdict and if, as I expect, they go for 'maturing' I hope that they will allow that it has been an interesting process.

* * * * *

NELSON LEE COLUMN continued

OUR NEW ART SERIES

Mr. ROBERT BLYTHE writes:

As one who was privileged to see Alf Hanson's excellent drawings in advance (July C.D.), I feel I ought to point out that you have omitted to explain the whole point of this series of drawings.

As you know, the Monster Library finished publication with No. 19, and Alf conceived the idea, as part of the St. Frank's Jubilee, of imagining what later covers of the Monster

Library would have looked like had that paper continued publication. Consequently those imaginary covers shown last month represent No. 20, Pitt's efforts to save the family fortunes (o.s. 328 - 335); No. 21, The Coming of Archie Glenthorne (o.s. 349 - 357) and No. 22, "The 1st Northestia series" (1st n.s. 36 - 43).

Alf Hanson is to be congratulated on a wonderful idea, brilliantly executed.

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 218. THE CEDAR CREEK STORIES

Exactly 60 years ago this month, Charles Hamilton started his Cedar Creek series which purported to relate the schooldays in Canada of Frank Richards, the author. Just whose idea it was we do not know. What we do know is that the series commenced in August 1917. Four years later it ended. Just whose idea it was that the series should end when it did we do not know. What we do know is that it ended in July 1921. The stories - 205 in all - ran in the Boys' Friend. All, with one solitary exception, were by Charles Hamilton himself, and it was the late Gerry Allison who pointed out that one exception.

The stories were much reprinted, giving evidence of their immense popularity. All but four were reprinted in the Popular; a large number were reprinted in the latter-day Gem; a number featured in the Holiday Annual; and certain series also appeared in the Boys' Friend Library and the Schoolboys' Own Library.

As we mentioned recently, Cedar Creek was the only one of Hamilton's major sagas to which he never added in post-war years. This might have been because he had written nothing of Cedar Creek since far-off 1921 and they were nothing but a dim, if pleasant memory in the back of his mind. More likely, the reason was that the series had purported to be biographical.

Plenty of professional scribblers have written fatuously that "Charles Hamilton was educated in Canada", and the error, of course, stemmed from that long ago series about Cedar Creek.

Gerry Allison once wrote that the Cedar Creek series contained numerous autobiographical details for those who were enterprising enough to find them. I doubt it. I have read the entire series many times down the years, but find nothing genuinely autobiographical in it.

It is true, of course, that, in "The Schoolboy Author" mid-way through the series, Frank Richards, who wrote for Mr. Penrose's newspaper, had a cold, and was unable to do his weekly story. He was intensely annoyed to find that someone else had written a story which was published under the Richards name. The main ire came from the fact that the story contained a split infinitive, of which the youthful Frank would never have been guilty. Frank threatened to haul Mr. Penrose before the sheriff if it ever happened again.

It is, of course, possible that Hamilton was having a dig at his own editor, but it is more likely that anything was grist for the mill. In the story Hamilton himself observed that "Frank was not yet accustomed to transatlantic methods used in the publishing world over there."

The Cedar Creek series as a whole was delightful, the better stories being those not connected with the school. The quality dropped to some extent after the introduction of Mr. Peckover's private school, plus Dicky Bird & Co. The rivalry became too much akin to that between St. Jim's and the Grammar School. In fact, many of the Greyfriars and St. Jim's plots were transferred not too credibly to the Canadian backwoods.

In characterisation there was nothing particularly outstanding or original. We all loved Miss Meadows intensely, but, looking at her now, we can see that she was probably a little too refined and demure to be the Headmistress of a backwoods school. I liked Yen Chin very much. As the son of the Thompson laundryman immigrant, with his coolie English, he was really far more credible than Wun Lung, had we bothered about such details.

In fact, Frank Richards's Schooldays, with their settings, were nothing like so convincing as the Rio Kid stories, where, for several years, the author did not put a foot wrong. Whereas Cedar Creek came entirely from Hamilton's own head, it has always seemed clear that there was some authentic source for the Kid stories.

I think it likely that Hamilton himself decided to wind up Cedar Creek in mid-summer 1921. In fact, the discerning reader sensed that the end was coming long before it actually came.

Frank Richards, accused of theft, ran away from his uncle's

home, and was adrift in the Canadian West, playing the lead solo in the stories for no less than 17 weeks. And, incidentally, these 17 stories were among the very best of the entire series.

Cleared at last of the theft charge - Yen Chin was the culprit - Frank returned to Cedar Creek and his uncle's ranch. Lord St. Austell, who had been helped by Frank and was impressed with the lad, wanted to send him back to England and make himself responsible for Frank's university education.

It might have saddened most readers, who wanted more Cedar Creek, but it would have made an ideal ending for the series.

But Frank turned down his benefactor's offer - he felt the call of the prairies - and stayed on at school in Canada.

And so the door was left open for an extension of the series later on. An extension which never came.

* * * * *

BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 41. TARGET FOR TO-NIGHT

We opened the new term with a double programme from G.F.D. Deanna Durbin in "It's a Date" plus Richard Cromwell in "Secret Enemy". Next week, also from G.F.D., came Sir Cedric Hardwicke in "The Invisible Man Returns", which was probably popular, though I have a feeling that it was inferior to the first Invisible Man film which we had played a year or two earlier; plus Mary Lawson in "The Man at the Gate" which I seem to recall as a modest little British feature based on a poem which King George the Sixth had quoted in a Christmas broadcast. But my memory may be playing tricks.

Next came James Cagney in "Torrid Zone" which was evidently a long film as it was supported only by a cartoon and the News. This one came from Warner Bros.

Then, from G.F.D., W. C. Fields in "The Bank Detective" (called "The Bank Dick" in America), plus Richard Arlen in "Black Diamonds". Next, also from G.F.D., came Franchot Tone in "The Trail of the Vigilantes" plus Charlie Ruggles in "His Exciting Night".

After that, from G.F.D., came Bud Abbott and Lou Costello in "Rookies" plus Baby Sandy in "Sandy Gets Her Man". This was followed by a double from Warner's: Wayne Morris and Virginia Bruce in "Flight Angels" plus Roger Pryor in "A Fugitive from Justice".

Now came another double from G.F.D.: The Dead End Kids in "Give Us Wings" plus Richard Arlen in a boxing film "The Leather-pushers". This programme was followed by another from the same firm: Arthur Askey in "The

Ghost Train" plus Johnny Mack Brown in "Ragtime Cowboy Joe".

The next programme, from Warner's, comprised Edward G. Robinson in "Confessions of a Nazi Spy" which I fancy was rather dull. I seem to recall that it went down fairly well on a West End run early in the war, but I think it was a dramatised documentary mainly for American consumption, and, though the great Edward G. was billed as the star, his was not a very large appearance. With "Nazi Spy" we played a British documentary "Target for To-Night" which was very famous indeed in its time. "Target" was a full-length film made by the Ministry of Information concerning air operations. It received enormous acclaim from the critics; so much so that the Ministry allowed one of the renters to

release it commercially, and it was shown with considerable success up and down the country. We, however, had it direct from the M. O. I., and so got it free of charge, and, probably, some weeks before it went out on general release.

Our closing feature for the term came from Warner Bros. and was an excellent drama, Bette Davis and Miriam Hopkins in "The Old Maid". Without question one of the best Davis films. Supporting feature was another full-length film from the Ministry of Information, "From the Four Corners" with Leslie Howard as the star. It must have been one of his last appearances on the screen. I forget everything about it, but it never won the acclaim of the more famous "Target for To-Night".

* * * * *

The Postman Called

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

L. WORMULL (Romford): Regarding your interesting remarks on the Bioscope: the cinema in Wilton Rd., Victoria is the Biograph, claimed to be Britain's oldest cinema, opening in 1905. My diary for 1955 shows a visit there for its 50th Anniversary. Half the programme was devoted to silent films, with Arthur Dulay at the piano, the other half to the featured talkie. It is, or was until recently, run by Henry Cooper's brother, George.

R. H. CUSHING (Hitchin): Every edition of 'Collectors' Digest' is of absorbing interest to me. In particular I was and remain, an ardent reader of the works of Charles Hamilton, particularly those written under the pseudonym 'Frank Richards'.

In my view coverage in the 'C.D.' of most of the boys papers of roughly the same era, is first class, and probably unique. However, there is, I believe, a notable omission.

I refer to 'The Football & Sports Favourite' which gave me personally, and probably countless thousands of my contemporaries, endless pleasure, if not as deeply satisfying as that of the immortal 'Magnet', 'Gem', etc.

Unfortunately I cannot recall any of the contributors to this paper although a regular cartoon feature of considerable merit was called 'Percy & Steve'.

I wonder if any of my fellow readers have a better recollection of that excellent paper of its type, than I have.

P. TIERNEY (Grimsby): M. Hall refers with regret to the fact that there was little or no mention of the Jubilee in children's comics.

I well remember, as he does, the prominence given to the 1935 Jubilee and the 1937 Coronation in the Magnet and Gem and share his regret that there was nothing of the kind for children in the recent Jubilee week.

But, he overlooks one important point. The boys' papers to which he refers were story papers, not comics, and there are no story papers for boys now.

Today's comics are of such a frivolous nature that if they suddenly gave prominence to anything of a serious nature it would seem incongruous.

I am not of course arguing that this is a good thing. It is an extremely bad thing. But it does provide a partial explanation for the apparent neglect of the Jubilee which Mr. Hall deplures.

F. HERTZBERG (Bebington): Mr. Hall is saddened that 'almost nothing' of the Silver Jubilee was mentioned in modern children's comics. This was not in fact the case - amongst others, the Beano (now up to 1825, but little more than Lord Snooty and a half page of Biffo the Bear remaining from former days) for many weeks has filled the final 'O' of its title with a Union flag, and among IPC's comics, the brashly new Buster gave its whole front page in the issue of 11th June to a monstrous street party scene, with red, white and blue candy striped logo, 'Jubilee Issue' banner, and photographic inset of the Queen at her coronation - and almost ever interior strip has a SJ theme.

JACK OVERHILL (Cambridge): I am reported as saying, at the Cambridge June meeting, that Frank Richards wrote "Sportsmen All". A little slip-up but not mine. I simply said it was a mistake letting Bob Cherry beat Tom Merry in the boxing event. I didn't mention the author's name. I knew it was G. R. Samways, and said so in my article "Back Street Boy" in last year's C. D. Annual.

BEN WHITER (London): My mother used to take me to the various Music Halls - Islington, Wood Green, Hackney, Finsbury Park, the Shoreditch Olympia, Collins' Music Hall, Popular Hippodrome, etc., and the last item on the programme was the showing, as you put it, of a news item on the Bioscope. Happy days indeed!

W. J. RAYNER (Bury St. Edmunds): Regarding your remarks on Bioscope, the early film shows in travelling fairs and as part of music-hall bills were known by this name. A film-trade paper "The Bioscope" ran until 1930.

News of the Clubs

LONDON

July 1977 being the actual month of the Diamond Jubilee of Saint Frank's College, it was appropriate that the meeting should be held at Bob Blythe's abode. The latter had a busy time combining the chairmanship with his Nelson Lee Library curator's stint and furthermore reading out his very fine treatise on the Edwy Searles Brooks feature in the N. L. L. "Between Ourselves". Young Jim Robinson conducted a cryptic quiz on Saint Frank's which Eric Lawrence won.

Winifred Morss read a couple of chapters from Ezra Quirke series, "The Schoolboys Magician" and then tested the memories of members with a quiz on what she had read. Norman Wright was the winner.

Josie Packman supplied a record for playing over entitled "Murder on the Portsmouth Road," a tale of Sexton Blake.

Two Arthur Marshall records were played over and these were

"Showing the School" and "The Games Mistress".

An unanimous decision by not only those present, plus the postal members expressed grateful thanks to the new duplicator of the monthly newsletter, Jane Hammond, whose workmanship was greatly admired.

Votes of thanks to Louise and Bob for a happy meeting.

Owing to industrial dispute, those members who intend to be present at Bill and Marjory Norris' Cricklewood home kindly use phone, 452 8148. 21st August is the date.

BENJAMIN WHITER

NORTHERN

Saturday, 9th July, 1977

After Club business, news and views, Harry Barlow presented us with a quiz on the Smedley Series. As Harry had warned us last month of the subject of his quiz it was only to be expected that we would excel ourselves. Alas, expectations are not always fulfilled!

Top came Geoffrey Wilde with 18 correct answers out of twenty, second Harold Truscott with 14 and third Ron Hodgson with 13. Perhaps our congratulations should go to the member who confessed she had never read the series and yet managed to score 2!

And after refreshments the continuation of our own special Magnet, 'Bunter's Television Service', read for us this month by the two writers, Mollie Allison and Geoffrey Wilde. Beginning with Dr. Sparkinson's missing plans and leading up to Wibley's missing manuscript, and Bunter himself has mysteriously disappeared! A further thrilling instalment is promised.

* * * * *
WANTED: H.B. volumes; also books by Victor Gunn, Berkeley Gray, G. E. Rochester, Moray Dalton.

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2. Film Fun Annual, 1960, £1.50. Nelson Lee's n.s. Nos. 14, 16, 33, 35, £1 each. Gem,
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JAMES GALL, 49 ANDERSON AVENUE, ABERDEEN. Tel. 491716

WANTED: S.B.L. No. 577, Raffles Versus Sexton Blake and other S.B.L's, and Union Jacks before No. 736. Also wanted Magnets, between Nos. 774 and 1015, particularly Nos. 795 to 798. S.a.e. Magnets, Gems, Bullseyes, S. B.L's, Champions, etc. "Many thanks too, conveyed to all who made my recent trip so enjoyable. It was great meeting you all and enjoying your wonderful hospitality."

BERT VERNON, 5 GILLMAN STREET, CHELTENHAM

VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA 3192.

HARRY HEMSLEY - COMIC ARTIST by Brian Doyle

If you remember the famous BBC radio phrase "What did Horace say, Winnie?", you'll also remember its originator, the late Harry Hemsley, who was an extremely popular radio and variety theatre artiste from the 1920's to the 1940's. Hemsley's act consisted of his chatting humorously with a family of imaginary small children (all impersonated vocally by himself) including Elsie, Johnny, Winnie and the tiny, unintelligible Horace, whose gems of juvenile wisdom were translated by Winnie.

All this leads into the fact, unknown to me until a few days ago when I happened to be happily browsing through an old volume of "Radio Times", that Harry Hemsley began his working life, at 16, by contributing humorous drawings and strips to such comic-papers as "Comic Cuts", "Chips" and "Ally Sloper", later graduating to adult

'glossies' such as "The Bystander" and "The Sketch". Later still, he specialised in child portraiture. He subsequently became a stage entertainer (beginning in concert parties) and eventually rose to the ranks of Britain's most successful and best-loved comedy stars. He also wrote and illustrated several amusing books.

Since I have never before seen any mention of Hemsley's early work for the comic-papers (even in Denis Gifford's comprehensive "British Comic Catalogue"), I thought the information might well be of interest to readers.

* * * * *

THERE WERE OTHER SCHOOLS

by Cyril Rowe

Charles Hamilton and the A. P. are renowned for in the one case writing, and in the other publishing the long standing sagas of Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood. Hamilton in his various guises wrote of a myriad of other schools.

The other major long runner was St. Frank's, which had detective interest in addition, coupled also with great adventure, inventive news recounted in the famous holiday sequences.

But the Companion papers had other fairly long running, if more spasmodic school series over the years, and to call to mind these perhaps somewhat lapsed enthusiasts may I enumerate these that come to mind.

J. N. Pentelow as Jack North ran a prolific series in Pluck before the first war about Wycliffe, Haygarth and Franklingham, which were later reprinted in the Boys' Friend Library well into the nineteen twenties.

David Goodwin, apart from several other schools produced a consistent series about St. Simeons also before the first war in the Boys' Friend and Boys' Realm which were also rapidly reprinted in the same noted medium.

E. J. Joyce as Sidney Drew wrote about Calcroft in the main - he did feature others - from the ½d initial Boys' Friend into the later 1d issues together with the Boys' Realm, then later on towards the end of the war, sharing the Marvel with Tom Sayers on Jack, Sam and Pete, with an occasional complete issue. The earlier episodes were also

entrants to Boys' Friend Library.

Michael Storm produced less in this line but Abbotsrag and Ravenscar in the Marvel and Pluck were great performances in this genera.

Duncan Storm with the Bombay Castle scholarship used a facile precept to ensure his characters having adventures all round the world.

And last of all, who probably should have been first, Henry St. John Cooper as Henry St. John wrote so many tales of St. Basil's in the green 'un long before Greyfriars or St. Jim's, let alone Rookwood had started. I think that these must have been the favourites in the field - certainly backed by the editors - before Hamilton made his great run and breakthrough. So much so, despite his other schools, and his other historical tales, etc., St. John re-entered with his own "Schooldays at St. Basil's" when the Boys' Realm recommenced after the first war. Like all the others these St. Basil's epics, together with other of his efforts were reprinted in the Boys' Friend Library, first and second series.

The doyen of all school story writers as far as I'm concerned was and is John Finnemore, who wrote the Teddy Lester serials in the Boys' Realm, and achieved great hard cover success published by Messrs. W. R. Chambers, up to 1916, which were later reprinted by Latimer House in the 1940's. But I have written of that earlier so enough said.

* * * * *

"A LOAD OF RUBBISH?"

by James Hodge

"Was Dr. Watson Jack the Ripper? What part did the aged Sherlock Holmes play in the General Strike? For years Conan Doyle's reputation has been buried beneath masses of similar literary detritus, much of it inspired by the Sherlock Holmes Society."

Thus Julian Symons in a recent 'Sunday Times' review of a new Conan Doyle biography. It would seem he was largely referring to the writings on the Holmes canon in the Journal of the Sherlock Holmes Society.

Most dictionaries define detritus as "worn-down matter, a result of rubbing away"; it can, by inference, also mean "rubbish".

Except that we are usually concerned with entire range of our authors' works, it is fair to say that CD and its Annual are to Hamilton, Brooks, Gwyn Evans et al what the Journal of the Sherlock Holmes Society is to Conan Doyle.

In this context, how much of Mr. Symons criticism is applicable to CD?

Certainly not to the contributions of those researchers whose facts and figures add knowledge to pleasure, nor to those whose close studies of the old papers qualify them to pronounce judgement on plot and style; assuredly not to those purely personal reminiscencies which so delightfully jog our memories of long-ago days when, despite hard times, we viewed our world with a less jaundiced eye than now.

What, then, is in possible doubt? I wonder about those articles wherein the author, usually as a result of dozing off over an old Magnet (or Gem, Lee, U.J.), finds himself walking, talking, dining or wining with our favourite characters, with the inevitable realisation that ... "It had all been a dream! Or had it ...?" Or fourteen pages of a CD Annual devoted to a cricket fantasia wherein St. Frank's not only take on Sussex County and the West Indian Test team but also carry off the trophy - and poor old E.S.B. then only one year in his grave!

Ourselves apart, what of Butcher's 'Greyfriars Prospectus'? Detritus? Yet I cherish my copy! Or 'Personal Recollections' by Editor Hinton in the Gems for Summer 1919 - surely detritus ad nauseum and almost ad infinitum! You may ask, where's the harm? I would ask, what's the point? If point there is, I've a feeling Mr. Symons may have it. For how will it serve our hobby if, in a future CD, the Editor was foolish enough to let me enlarge upon the fact that the illustration on page 19 of Magnet 1374 shows W.G.B. sitting on his trunk which bears the initials 'G.W.B.' or that in Magnet 1375, page 12, chapter 10, MR. Locke takes eight lines of print to regain his Doctorate?

You may also consider that, on the whole, this contribution fully justifies its title - and no '?' about it!:

WATCH FOR THE 1977 COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL

