STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS DIGEST

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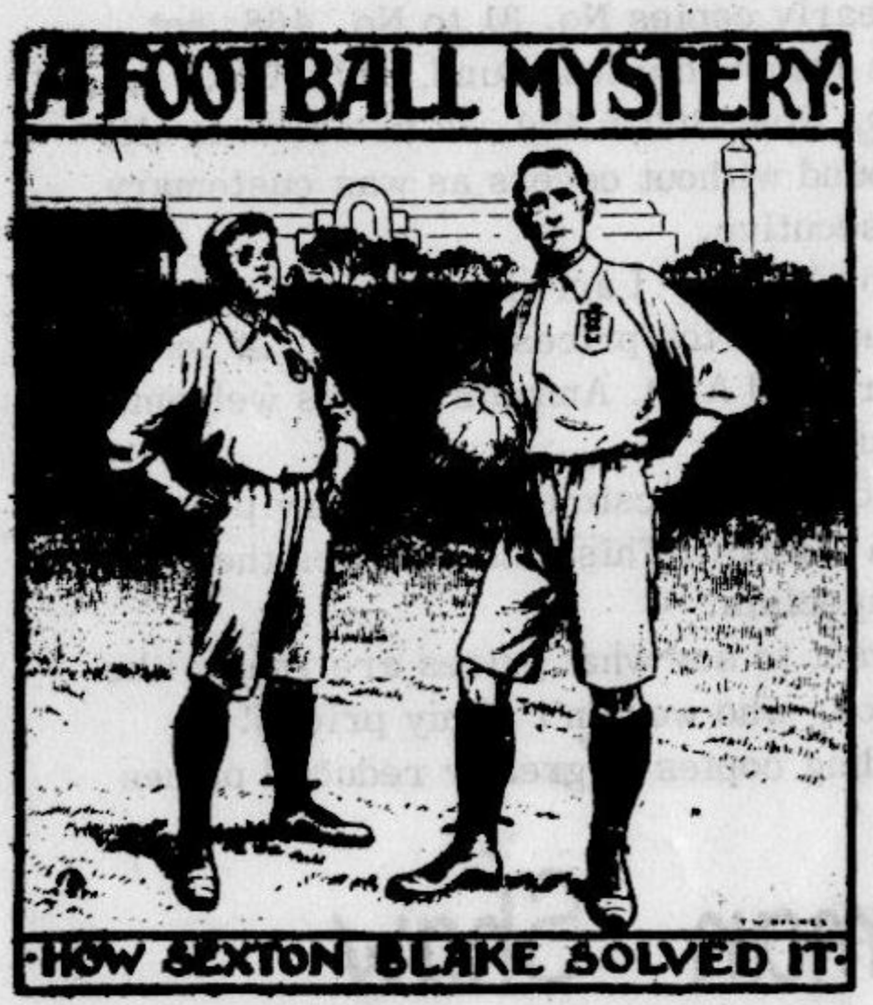

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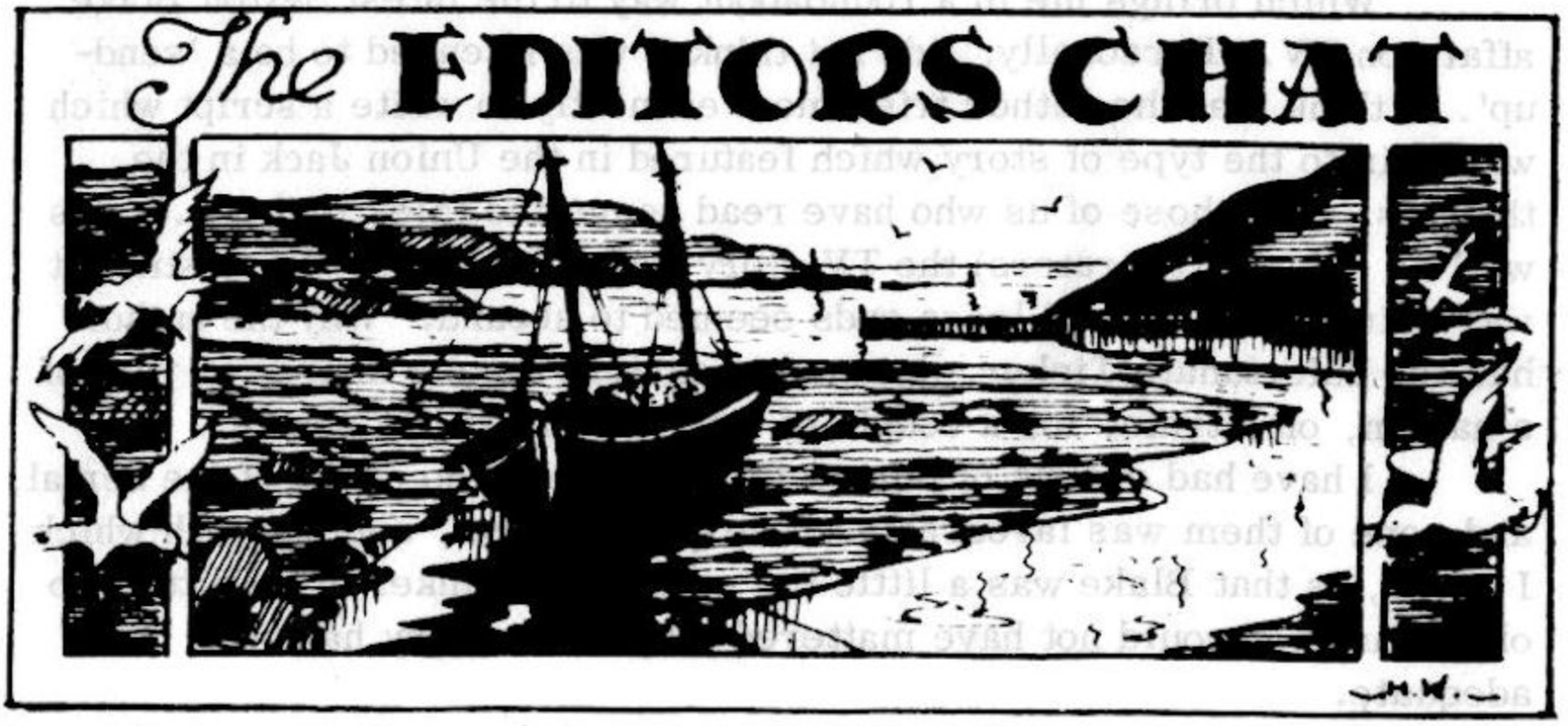

SEXTON BLAKE ON TV

"The appeal of 'send-up' has always eluded me." So commented one of our contributors in last month's issue of this magazine. He was referring to the latest Sexton Blake serial on TV.

I, too, dislike 'send-up' on stage or TV. I have yet to see one which is successful or amusing. One ends up feeling sympathy for people who are trying desperately hard to be funny but only succeed in making fools of themselves.

In literature, the two most remarkable, and, indeed, successful,

were in our own papers - the Herlock Sholmes stories and the St. Sam's stories. It was curious that the A.P. got away with the Herlock Sholmes tales, for one would have thought that some form of copyright would have protected the Conan Doyle creation. In addition, anyone trying to be funny at the expense of some much-loved character or book is likely to bring about his ears the arrows of those who remain loyal.

In the matter of St. Sam's, it was the Magnet's own characters and schools which were the object of ridicule, and the Magnet was really an odd place to find such guying. It seems likely that with St. Sam's, readers accepted them as what they purported to be - the work of a second-form schoolboy trying to write a dramatic story.

Which brings me in a roundabout way to the latest Sexton Blake affair on TV. Personally, I do not think it was intended to be a 'send-up'. I think that the author tried most earnestly to write a script which was akin to the type of story which featured in the Union Jack in the thirties. For those of us who have read some fine tales in the U.J. (as well as some third-raters) the TV story was ludicrous. Worse still, it was painfully slow, and loose ends seemed to abound. Why the author had the unfortunate Tinker, dressed in eastern female attire, as part of a harem, on a train, for a couple of episodes, is still a puzzle.

I have had dozens of letters from readers who spoke of the serial, and none of them was favourable. The general view, and one with which I agree, is that Blake was a little too young, and Tinker was a little too old. But that would not have mattered a lot if the story had been adequate.

It is another proof, in a way, that much-loved characters of fiction just can't be transferred to the screen successfully, as we have seen with Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry, Miss Marple, Hercule Poirot, William, and plenty more. We have our own visions of the characters we love, and it is far better to leave them where they are - in our minds.

I have a confession to make. I saw all but the first episode of Sexton Blake. I kept thinking what rubbish it was - yet I was never moved to switch it off. In some ways, I enjoyed it.

A modern writer would sum up my mood with that much over-worked modern word - ambivalent.

NOT SO COMIC!

At frequent intervals we get a splurge of correspondence in one newspaper or another concerning Charles Hamilton, the Gem, the Magnet, or something closely connected with them. When short of ideas, say something about Frank Richards!

The latest (at the time of writing) was in the Daily Telegraph. I missed the start of it, but I saw it over the next few days, when Hamilton fans or opponents were permitted to spread themselves in the correspondence columns. Most of it was sincere enough, but all of it gave one the feeling of "Oh, lord, here we go again!"

The only letter which lingers in the memory is one from Mr. Maurice Hall, who entered the fray to assure Telegraph readers that "the generic word 'comic' was, and still is, a suitable word to describe the Magnet and Gem", and gave the additional information that "we collectors have up-dated the word 'comic'".

If Mr. Hall likes to regard his Magnets as "comics", that is his own business. He may mean that everything we used to love is devalued these days. If so, we are the losers.

There are probably two main groups of collectors - those who collect, in deep affection, the old papers with which they grew up, and another group who are too young to have loving memories of papers which ended nearly 40 years ago but who collect because it is a pleasant hobby. The first group, and, I suspect, much the larger, would be unlikely ever to accept that the Gem and the Magnet and the Union Jack were comics.

They were never called "comics" in their lifetime, for the simple reason that they were not comics. The term "comic", as applied to the story-papers, is simply the result of trendy sloppiness in the writing and thinking of the past twenty years.

Mr. Hall wound up by saying "We shouldn't become snobs because a word sounds more grand than its predecessor." I tried to work that one out. I ended up by thinking of the adorable Fred Basset and the expression on his face when some visitor patted his head and said "What a lovely spaniel!"

THE ANNUAL 1978

The final preparations are now going into this year's C.D. Annual - the 32nd year of publication for this much-loved book. All being well, it will be coming with the postman towards the middle of December. I have already mentioned some of the big attractions in store for my readers. Jack Overhill will be there, chatting on his memories of the old Robin Hood stories; William Thurbon writes on "The Sharpshooters"; Bill Lofts talks about men who wrote for girls.

Lots more, of course, including some fascinating pictures.

A final peep next month, in readiness for a Merry Christmas.

THE EDITOR

* *

SALE: C.D. Annuals, 1970, 1971, 1973, 1975, 1976, 1977, £4.50 each. 4 C.D's, 1974, £1.50. 6 C.D's, 1975, £2.25. H. Baker Magnets, Gems, H. Baker Holiday Annuals, original Magnets, Gems, Bunter Books, Captain Vols.

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WANTED: P. G. Wodehouse books. "P. G. Wodehouse" by R. B. D. French; "William Tell Told Again"; "Not George Washington"; The Globe by the Way Book. Also "The Lucky Stone" by Basil Windham (pseudonym of Wodehouse) serialised in Chums 1906 - 1908.

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DANNY'S DIARY

NOVEMBER 1928

During the month the news has been gloomy, for the King is ill. So far the reports on his progress have not been good.

The weather, too, has been very bad, off and on, during the month. The gales have been terrific and a great deal of damage has been done, and there has been loss of life. The Rye lifeboat, Mary Stanford, capsized in one of the gales, and all 17 of her crew were drowned.

In Modern Boy, Ken King has been going strong through the month. In "The Guns of Guvunuka", a wily old sea-salt, Captain Peek, tricks Ken into carrying arms illegally to a tribe of savages of the Pacific. In "Rough Justice", Ken takes the law into his own hands and administers a hard lesson to Peek for his illicit dealings with the cannibals of Guvunuka.

In "Salving the Sunabaya", Ken helps skipper Griffin, the unluckiest captain of the islands. In the final tale of the month, "The Great Pearl of Gola", Ken King and Kit Hudson find themselves in possession of the largest pearl that anyone has ever seen.

This month has seen the 150th anniversary of the opening of Wesley's Chapel in City Rd., London. Mum and I went to a service which was held there to celebrate the occasion. I had a bag of Rowntree's blackcurrant gums, and ate them during the service, and found it all very enjoyable.

In the "Nelson Lee" the opening tale of the month was "Willy's Dog", the last of the series about Willy Handforth's dog, Lightning.

Then a new series started with "Corcoran of the Blue Crusaders". Lionel Corcoran is a new, full-of-pep, junior at St. Frank's. And the Blue Crusaders are a football team, owned by Corcoran's uncle, in the second division of the English League. Next came "The Remove Crusader". He is Tich Harborough, but the Fourth prefer their own Crusader, Corcoran.

The final yarn of the month is unusual. Simon Kenmore of the Sixth disappears. But when the juniors hear that Kenmore has been

drowned and that Fatty Fowkes of the Blue Crusaders is responsible, they decide to hide Fatty from the police. An intriguing new series. Stories of the Blue Crusaders and of Fatty Fowkes, by Edwy Searles Brooks, are also running in the Boy's Realm, but, so far, I have not had that paper.

In the Nelson Lee, there is a serial entitled "What's Wrong with the Rovers?" about Nelson Lee and Nipper as detectives.

At the pictures, we have seen Tom Mix in "Arizona Wildcat"; Buck Jones in "Black Jack"; Wallace Beery and Esther Ralston in "Sons of the Sea"; Laura La Plante in "Thanks for the Buggy Ride", and Charlie Chaplin in "Shoulder Arms".

There is a court case going on over a film entitled "Dawn", in which Sybil Thorndike plays Nurse Cavell. The film has been refused a censor's certificate.

Mount Etna has erupted, and it lasted for several days, while thousands of people were made homeless. Nearly as bad as all our gales. It's still blowing as I write.

Dr. Davidson, the Archbishop of Canterbury, has retired, on the occasion of his golden wedding. Mr. Baldwin, our Prime Minister, has made him a baronet.

Two good tales in the Schoolboys' Own Library this month. "The Schoolboy Cup-Fighters" is about the Coker Cup provided for a football competition, and "The Cockney Schoolboy" about 'Arry 'Ammond's arrival at St. Jim's. I also had a Boys' Friend Library this month, a story about the Navy's Lower Deck. It is called "Raggies O' The Rambler", and it is by Stanton Hope. Doug has had a Sexton Blake Library entitled "The Adventures of the Eighth Millionaire." It introduces George Marsden Plummer and Vali Mata-Vali.

The Gem has been pretty feeble this month. Tom Merry was "Bound by his Promise" in the first tale. He promised Miss Fawcett to be kind to the new boy, George Bloom, who turns out to be a young villain. Next week "The Sports Crank" was Professor Phineas Piffell - and his same really summed it all up well. Next "The Conscript Fags" in which the juniors were made to fag for the seniors. Lastly, "My Lord Trimble". A new boy, Lord Entworth, comes to the school. He is Trimble's double in appearance and manners, and Trimble takes his

place for a few chapters. A weary affair. One has only to compare this with a series where Bunter had a double to see what a difference a writer makes.

A new market at Spitalfields has been opened by Queen Mary.

Great stories of the Rio Kid in the Popular again this month. In "Trailing Back", the Kid feels the urge to go back to Frio country, and once again he crosses swords with Sheriff Watson of Frio. In the next story "The Thousand-Dollar Kid", Mesquite Judd, the gunman, rides into Frio determined to pick up the reward for the capture of the Kid. But Judd loses. After that one came "Bandits of the Border" in which a Mexican gang held up the stage, and committed a big robbery. And finally, in "The Trail of Ten Thousand Dollars", the Kid defeated the Mexican gang - and returned the stolen money to Herman Fray, the banker who had been robbed. Great stuff.

Also in the Popular is the series about Rookwood in a feud with Oakshott School, the Levison brothers are at Greyfriars, and the Schoolboy Pug is going strong at St. Jim's.

New pound notes and new ten bob notes have been put into circulation this month, and they are very impressive, especially if you've got plenty of them.

The gorgeous Carboy series has come to an end in the Magnet. In "Rallying Round Carboy", the practical joker is sent to Coventry by the form, but, by making his form think he is the son of a multi-millionaire, he makes everybody look silly. Final tale, "All Through Bunter", shows Wharton and Carboy at loggerheads because Bunter lets Carboy's old pal know that he had read Carboy's letter, but makes that old pal think that his, Bunter's, name is Wharton. But it all comes right in the end, and Carboy wasn't expelled from his old school after all. This must be one of the best series ever in the Magnet. At the end, Carboy left Greyfriars, and it is better that these new characters should drop out when their particular series is over - but I am sorry to see him go.

The next story "Shunned by the Form" is not by the real Frank Richards, though it is really a pinch of one of his old plots. An anti-climax after the Carboy tales. Wharton and his pals are at loggerheads, and Wharton writes a weird letter to his uncle, but doesn't post it.

Skinner gets it and adds some insulting bits about Wharton's old pals. Real melodrammer. I said earlier about what a difference a writer makes to a plot. This is another example of the same thing. A very potted story with lots of happenings.

Last of the month is a Coker tale "The Rebel of the Fifth". Bunter punches Prout on the nose - and Prout thinks Coker did it. Great fun!

The gales are still blowing. The wind is still rising. Golly, it's been a windy month.

EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 87, "The Schoolboy Cup-Fighters" comprised two Magnet tales separated by two years. The first half, from a tale entitled "The Downfall of the Fifth", told of the Greyfriars Fifth Form's effort to put on a stage play. It appeared towards the end of 1911, and did not fit in well with the overall title of the S.O.L. The second part of the S.O.L. was "The Coker Cup" which appeared in the red Magnet of late 1913. Both stories lost a few chapters.

S.O.L. No. 88, "The Cockney Schoolboy" comprised two consecutive tales of the blue Gem of late 1913 and entitled then "The Cockney Schoolboy" and "Parted Chums". A bit reminiscent of the Schoolboy Pug series. Hammond, the Cockney, drops his aitches, and drinks from his saucer. The tenderhearted Gussy makes Hammond his pal, but Levison breaks up the friendship. (The two stories were reprinted in the Gem early in 1939 as "A Cockney at St. Jim's", and "The Cockney Turns up Trumps", a clumsy and inferior title.) Hammond remained on the scene for a long time, but I cannot recall that he ever again starred.

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Nelson Lee Column

A QUESTION OF STYLE by Nic Gayle

The English which Charles Hamilton used to forge a highly individual and personalised style was, beyond doubt, impeccable. It helped to propel the reader through the inevitable inconsistencies, irregularities and indeed, impossibilities that will arise from time to time in a boys' paper running for 32 years, and in many cases (notably the 'golden age' of the Magnet) triumph over them to the extent of producing fine literature in the richest (if not the most beautiful) language in the world. E. S. Brooks, is the other great school story writer on par with Hamilton, but the question is, can the same be said of him? ... Does he share with Hamilton the finesse in the use of his basic tool, language, and does the resultant style carry the necessary conviction, as outlined above? The answer to this latter question is, I think obvious; Brooks' style, whatever it's merits or demerits, works, otherwise he would be a forgotten boys' author and the Nelson Lee a forgotten paper. A boy will forgive a badly written story, but not a boring one. It is inconceivable that the saga of St. Frank's could run for 18 years and still be read and loved today if the stories themselves do not carry conviction. Much depends upon the question of style, and what we are considering here is whether the style of writing in the St. Frank's saga succeeds because of E.S.B's use of English, or despite it. The answer I believe, is both uncomfortable yet satisfying for St. Frank's fans. Let us probe deeper.

Pick up any St. Frank's tale and you will notice that the descriptive and narrative passages are split up into relatively small, tightly hewn paragraphs; a definitive feature of the author's style. How smooth the transition is from paragraph to paragraph depends entirely upon the quality of the writing. In E.S.B's great descriptive passages such as the 'underground well' or the 'snake' scenes from the Jerry Dodd series, or the 'scorpion' scene from the Yung Ching series, or many of the supernatural manifestations in the Karnak or Quirke series, in such scenes the transition from paragraph to paragraph is effortless, this producing a culminating effect which adds to the tension and dramatic

unity of the tale. In E.S.B's less well written stories however, the effect is the reverse. We notice a kind of irritating 'hiccup' between one paragraph and another, unfortunately not improved by making the paragraphs even shorter as the author tends to do in this situation, sometimes reducing them to one short line. However, his most irritating habit in this 'hiccuping' is his main way out, frequently starting sentences and paragraphs with the words 'and' or 'but'. This irritating literary mannerism is not only lame in the extreme but also downright bad English, something which I, as a qualified teacher of the language, would not accept from a 1st former. Fortunately, it is something which tends to be used less and less in direct relation to how well the story has been written, and some of the great series in the Lee are almost wholly or completely free of the indiscriminate use of these conjunctions.

A classic example is the exciting but badly written New Anglian series of 1922, a series that bears the too frequent Brooks hallmark of being written in a hurry. In just the first chapter alone of the fourth story, there are 45 paragraphs of which one third consist of a single sentence, and 11 of these begin with the words 'and' or 'but'. This is taking no account of those many sentences within the paragraphs that also begin with these conjunctions; the final tally is very high indeed. This rather speaks for itself, I think: sadly, the above example is by no means a rarity.

The explanation of this fault is not lack of knowledge; as I have already remarked, it is minimal or even non existent in the best series. It is rather, I feel, to be found in the way that E.S.B. went to work. To quote his son, Lionel Brooks; " ... at first, with many of the school stories, he would dictate on to a recording machine, and then she (his wife) would transcribe. But later on he would dictate directly to my mother sitting at the typewriter. The result was the final draft, complete with carbon copies. Virtually all revisions were done in his head before dictation ..." The defects in this system are all too obvious. However brilliant the mind, it cannot hope to eradicate all the faults inherent in any piece of writing as thoroughly as the more tedious but effective method of crossing out and doing it again. The inevitable result is slap-dash work when not at the top of one's form. It is only because Brooks was a genius (I believe) that this lends even his most hurried work that

indefineable something which makes all his stories eminently readable, if nothing else.

His fascinating and impossible characters together with the general crispness and sparkle of their dialogue are very positive plusses in an evaluation of E.S.B's style, with, I'm afraid, the exception of Nelson Lee, whose mild pomposity is the gift that the Victorian age gave to many of her fictional detectives. I find the subtleties of Reggie Pitt, the humour of Handy and Archie Glenthorne, the irresistable appeal of young Willy and the realistic attractions of those young flappers Irene and Co., plus many many more, quite on par with the characters created by Charles Hamilton, if not more so. If they never plum the depths as Harry Wharton does, they are at least colourful with distinct personalities and varied but individual dialogue. Only Nelson Lee out of all the major characters sometimes fails to ring the bell, as his rather Victorian and pompous mode of speech works against him. He is at his best when making an acute observation that we have failed to notice before, or when engaged in positive physical action. Dorrie, as his best friend, acts as a good foil, and helps to make Lee a little more human like the rest of us. Otherwise, he remains the schoolmaster/detective who, in the middle of one of the most destructive cyclones ever known in the South Seas, turns to his charges and says, "Don't dare to venture forth" instead of telling them not to go out.

If the above criticisms of E.S.B's style seem a little harsh, then that is only to the good. In the final analysis, that is why St. Frank's remains one of the best loved schools in fiction; because it can take it.

THREE OF A KIND

by R. J. Godsave

It is unfortunate that E. S. Brooks is regarded by some as mainly an author of far-fetched and horrific adventure stories which appeared in the Nelson Lee Library as the summer school holiday series.

It is, therefore, rather surprising to find in the St. Frank's old series there were only three summer holiday series which could be classified as far-fetched during the years 1917 - 1926.

The first of this type was the famous El Dorado series. This story by Brooks was probably prompted by the disappearance at that

time of a Colonel Fawcett who was exploring the great forests of the Amazon regions.

A city populated by white giants with prehistoric animals roaming the countryside beyond the forests and swamps was the basis of this story. The St. Frank's party, who were guests of Lord Dorriemore on his yacht the 'Wanderer' were in the Amazon region in search of Colonel Kerrigan, father of Stanley Kerrigan of the Third Form of St. Frank's who had also not been heard of for two or three years. In this instance the St. Frank's were able to overcome the forests and swamps by using an airship brought by Lord Dorriemore in the holds of the 'Wanderer' with the necessary supplies of gas.

The second story was the New Anglia series which brought the St. Frank's party in contact with the descendants of some seventeenth century pilgrims who intended starting a colony in the Argentine. The ship was caught in fearful storms, and was driven by strong currents into the Antarctic zone. Owing to some volcanic disturbance the vessel found herself within a hot flow from a strange river which in turn led into a fertile basin. The Pilgrims found that there were forests, streams and a soil which was wonderfully rich and was, in fact, an ideal spot to found a colony, although cut off from the rest of the world by masses of ice.

This story was the sequel to the South Seas island adventure in which Phipps, Archie Glenthorne's valet came into his own.

The third and final series was the story of descendants of the Roman Legions who were stationed in the African outposts of the Empire. This story was based on the historical fact that to this day one can visit the ruins and excavations of the Roman built city of Timgad, or as the Romans called it Thamugas, on the edge of the Sahara desert in Algeria.

It must be remembered that when Brooks wrote these stories the aeroplane was very much in its infancy, and many places were still unexplored and were a closed book to the outside world.

* *

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

By the time you read these words the B.B.C. Sexton Blake serial will be a thing of the past. As usual, the wrong information was given when they said it would be shown on Sunday evenings in October. Nothing of the sort happened. It was put on in September whilst some folks were still away on holiday and at a time which is usually reserved for the children's serial - tea-time, not evening. I have only seen one episode, which I did not care for - obviously the whole thing was done as a "send-up". Sexton Blake has never had any good serious films, etc., made about him yet more millions of words were written about him than the snobbish Sherlock Holmes. A most curious attitude about the biggest money-spinner detective of all time.

I would like to have some more articles from your pens starting from January next year. We must keep up the good reputation of our Blakiana.

IT'S STILL MISSING, FOLKS!

by William Lister

It wasn't that I felt like reading, I did not! But when you have copies of a paper on loan you don't like to keep them too long. Anyway the title was appealing. "The Case of the Missing Link" and as it was featured in the Union Jack it could not be all that bad (No. 1167, 20th Feb. 1926) and I advise U.J. readers to look out for it or borrow it.

The story is ablaze with characters. From old, well-meaning (if mistaken) scientists to bogus clergymen, from evil looking nephews to an honest looking, hard-done-by son, to whom an attractive young lady pledges her love and support, to say nothing of Sexton Blake and Co.

What a story - what a plot - what characters! I've heard of the missing link (who hasn't, it's turned up all over the world in my life-time). The only thing I know about it that, in spite of all this it is still missing. But this story is new, its the missing "Missing Link", some-one swipes it. Having got your interest, I hope, lets have a look at the thing. Quote: "Isn't it gruesome Mr. Page?" To think we are all descended from that. Professor North blinked excitedly as the box was opened and the grisly relic lifted out. (He's the one who found the thing that's supposed to rock us in our shoes.) There was a trace of pardon-able pride in the scientist's voice as he said: "There gentlemen, The Flintrock Skull - the missing link between man and the anthorpoids.

Observe the jaw, distinctly simian and yet the cranium is larger than that of any ordinary ape, and the red colour" end of quote.

Now I don't want my readers to get too excited about their ancestors, after all, this was 1926 and now being 1978 there have been many such queer items discovered with equally big claims in the intervening years, all of which have faded into oblivion, the hopes of their discoverers lay mouldering in the dust and the Missing Link is still missing.

However, this Missing Link goes missing again - double quick, and that's something new. No doubt you have guessed it - it's been nicked! and by now the author has lined up for you three suspects. Number 1. The Bogus Clergyman, to be seen doing a jig on our skull on the cover page, drawn by E.R.P. Number 2. The shifty-looking nephew of our Professor and Number 3 The blue-eyed boy loved by our pretty little heroine, son of the Professor.

Seeing the Professor is murdered during the robbery it could not possibly be this charming blue-eyed son of the aforesaid Professor, or could it?

At this point Sexton Blake is called in. What he makes of this ape skull is anybody's guess. It is quite on the cards that Sexton Blake had seen the books that I have seen, full of illustrations of hideous Jekyl and Hyde drawings of what we were supposed to look like, enough to scare the pants off one. Claimed by some scientists to be just the job and by an increasing number of other scientists to be a load of rubbish.

Sexton Blake could not care less about this old skull but he is interested in the skull-duggery that led to the Professor's murder. We are led through exciting events, through a number of suspects until Blake reveals the real murderer, and take my word for it, it is a surprise. It is now time for me to drop the curtain on this excellent cast. Would that they could take a bow. I quote the final words of our story:-

"Sexton Blake stepped over to the cupboard in the corner and withdrew the red Flintorock Skull. The relic grinned sardonically. "Alas poor Yorick" murmured Splash Page the irrepresible. Sexton Blake smiled. "Yes, Hamlet was right - how does it go? 'That skull had a tongue in it and could sing once ... as if it were Cain's jawbone, that did the first murder'."

"Bless us, Blake's quoting Shakespeare" murmured Splash to Inspector Coutts, whereon the C.I.D. man chuckled and made his one and only jest: "There are more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamt of in the "Daily Radio"" he said.

"Guv'nor, we must make a note of the date" yelled the delighted Tinker. "Inspector Coutts has made a joke."

The End

P.S. The last remark leads me to ask our statistic experts if there is any other place where Coutts jokes or is this really the one and only?

FACT AND FICTION

by S. Gordon Swan

During the course of a lifetime I have seen remarkable happenings, so much so that I have learned, among other things, that the fiction of today is the fact of tomorrow.

Years ago, someone whose name I forget saw me reading a novel and said: "Oh, I couldn't read that, it's only a made-up story."

What a narrow-minded outlook! Where should we be without the story-tellers? But this attitude exists today. There are still those who say: "It can't happen here." But it does happen here.

Many of the adventures of Sexton Blake recorded in the past have been duplicated in real life in recent years. When Robert Murray conceived the sensational exploits of the Criminals' Confederation and Paul Cynos you can be sure there were some Doubting Thomases who condemned the stories as far-fetched. Yet modern organisations and gangs have perpetrated crimes on as grand a scale as those fictitious master-crooks ever achieved. The Great Train Robbery is an episode one could quote and there are others the reader may call to mind, too numerous to mention.

Gwyn Evans created the character of King Karl of Serbovia, the King-Crook. We have no instance of a royal criminal of that type to put forward (though some Roman Emperors and a few dubious royalties might qualify for the description of criminal), but isn't the case of a crooked President close enough to draw a parallel?

Air-piracy was a feature of many of the old yarns and there are examples of such to be found in the Sexton Blake Saga. This has become

an all-too-familiar factor in today's chaotic world.

The Sexton Blake authors and other fiction-writers were simply anticipating that which was to come. Their imaginations provided the inspiration for stories which were to attain reality in a future era. Or were some of them gifted with prevision?

I have no doubt that many people scoffed at Jules Verne's conception of a submarine under the guidance of the redoubtable Captain Nemo travelling beneath the Polar ice -- and this in the nineteenth century. But we have known this feat to be accomplished in our own time. Some may have laughed at H. G. Wells's early visions of the future: space-travel, aerial warfare, talking machines and suchlike. Yet many of his ideas have come to pass and others may yet eventuate.

To come closer home -- home being now, in my case, Australia -- about sixty years ago, Maurice Everard (Cecil Bullivant) wrote a story called "The Quest of the Crimson Star" which appeared in The Boys' Friend Library (First Series). In this tale he visualised hundreds of small boats descending upon the northern coast of Australia, the boats being manned by yellow men in a planned invasion of the island continent. I don't know what impact current Australian news has upon Great Britain, but for months past small boats containing alleged Vietnamese refugees have been arriving at Darwin, in Northern Australia -- hundreds and hundreds of illegal immigrants who will soon become more than a vocal minority if the flow goes on. Is this a more subtle kind of invasion than Maurice Everard envisaged?

Fiction writers, authors of Sexton Blake and other boys' stories among them, have their place in the scheme of things and no-one can gainsay it. Without their imaginative efforts the world would be a stagnant and sterile place.

* *

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

ROGER JENKINS writes: I was interested in what you say about the popularity of Tom Merry and the Gem. You make a good case, but I have never been really sure why it was the Greyfriars Herald and not the St. Jim's Gazette that appeared as a separate publication. Again, I should have thought that Rookwood was far more popular than Cedar

Creek, but there was only one Rookwood story in the monthly Boys' Friends - "The Feud at Rookwood" - whilst there were many Cedar Creek reprints.

LES ROWLEY writes: This month's "Let's Be Controversial" certainly caused me much thought. I have always been glad that the 'Gem' proved so successful that the 'Magnet' became possible, but I do not feel indebted to Tom Merry for Harry Wharton! Tom Merry may have been the best character at St. Jim's, but Wharton was not the best character at Greyfriars. That honoured spot goes surely to Henry Samuel Quelch and for him we owe nothing to the earlier school. Parallels can certainly be made regarding other characters as you ably demonstrate; but where, may one gently enquire, is the comparison to Quelch? Is he (and may Mr. Prout forgive me) Unprecedented and Unparalleled?

There were happy days in my youth when I knew the luxury having (and enjoying) both the 'Gem' and the 'Magnet' to read, but then someone wielded a kind of domestic Geddes axe and I had to decide where my loyalties lay. It was a difficult choice but I opted for Greyfriars because of Quelch and that gentleman has amply repaid that loyalty to him. This is but an opinion; it would be nice to know, however, if it is shared.

(Eric Fayne comments: The Greyfriars Herald did not start, as a separate entity, until the very end of 1915. It is therefore outside the range of the Controversial article in question, where it was admitted that the popularity of the Gem had slipped by 1914. I would not be surprised if Cedar Creek, so novel at the time, was more popular in its day than Rookwood. The early reprinting of the Cedar Creek stories would seem to indicate as much, unless the publishers did not know their own business.

I fully agree with Mr. Rowley. In my view, Mr. Quelch is the finest schoolmaster in school fiction. The masters at Greyfriars, and, indeed, some of them at Rookwood, were far superior to those at St. Jim's. But, oh, sir, even Mr. Quelch surely owed something to the Gem. Mr. Quelch was Tom Merry's first form-master in the Gem, as Wingate and North were his first prefects. You may not recall Tom Merry saying to Mr. Quelch: "Henry, now Clavering is closing, I'm going to St. Jim's. You take my advice and go to Greyfriars when it comes along.")

GEOFFREY WILDE writes: The decline in the Gem's popularity can, as you say, hardly have been due to subtle differences in the characterisation of Merry as against Wharton. Even the schoolboy

reader, though, may have come to be influenced by more general considerations: the cast at Greyfriars was more compact and more stable than that of St. Jim's, and the general level of characterisation among its members was very high.

Apart from Wharton - and the unique Bunter - the rest of the Five, Mauleverer, Vernon-Smith, Coker, Fisher T. Fish, Messrs. Quelch, Prout and Charpentier, Price, Hilton, Skinner, Hazeldene and Dicky Nugent were all distinctively drawn, and all of them presented a convincing mixture of strengths and weaknesses. At St. Jim's there were too many rather colourless characters like Digby and Herries, and too many strong ones, like Lumley and Talbot, who after a relatively brief prominence lapsed into obscurity.

If Wharton was straight as a die 90 percent of the time, his creator, by countless clever touches, still hinted tellingly at the touchy and arrogant side of his nature.

* *

AN ODD "MAGNET" by Maurice Hall

There were 1683 of them - sounds rather like Mr. Chips on his death-bed as he remembered his many pupils that he had taught and, perhaps to us, collectors of Charles Hamilton's work in the shape of the "Magnet", there maybe something in common.

The 1683 copies have been recorded, analysed, discussed and substitute stories identified from Hamilton's work, though I feel that one or two credited as the 'Masters', might, in the long run prove to be a sub story or part sub story even at this late date.

However, this article is about fact and a queer state of affairs it is. On the 22nd May, 1926, "Magnet" No. 954 appeared on the newsagents counter and everything seemed well with the world, though the week's offering of "For Another's Sake" was a substitute story by S. E. Austin - one of a pair of tales featuring James Walker and his Aunt in the key role. The date of this copy was, as I have said, 22nd May, but where is next week's copy for the 29th May I ask, named in the editor's chat as being called "Bunter's Treasure Trove"? It did not appear until the 5th June when copy No. 955 came out, carrying not one, but two dates on the front cover - "Weeks Ending May 29th and June 5th,

1926".

Curiously, there was no "To and From Your Editor" chat and only the smallest of notices about the next week's "Magnet" on page 22 which told of the forthcoming Bumper Number "The Persecution Of Billy Bunter!" A last oddity in No. 955 is that on page 26 at the foot, where the information is listed, i.e. printed and published and the overseas agents are mentioned, the issue date appears again and it is May 29th, 1926. No mention is made of June 5th, so I feel that the copy of the "Magnet" that was lost for one reason or another, was due to come out on the 5th June and was replaced by the late publishing of the May 29th issue. Who or what caused the loss of that copy I don't know, perhaps someone else could supply the answer!

If you stop and think about it, there could have been 1684 copies of the "Magnet", for as far as I know this was the only copy lost - unless; YOU KNOW ANY BETTER!!

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: The points mentioned by our contributor are interesting but not mysterious. The only General Strike in British history occurred over nine days in early May 1926. As a result, all the weekly periodicals lost an issue. As the papers went to press several weeks in advance, it was not till three weeks after the strike was over that they were absent from the shops. The gap occurred in the last week in May. Danny recounts the matter fully in Danny's Diary for 1926. See C.D. May 1976.)

* *

REVIEWS

RUCTIONS AT GREYFRIARS — Frank Richards

(Howard Baker: £4.50)

The success of the early years of the Magnet was built upon one-week plots, many of which were outstanding. By the thirties, the one-week plot - or "single" stories - were very rare. The long series - some of them, admittedly, a little too long - avoided the plot wastage of earlier years, and they also allowed the author scope for character development plus a natural sequence of events, over a number of weeks, which the average reader found most satisfying.

Though the single story was a rarity in the later Magnet, there were still a few of them. Eight have been collected together in this attractive volume under the overall title "Ructions at Greyfriars".

Even so, the volume contains a twosome, in which a new boy named Carlow is recognized by Coker as a former bootboy of a seaside hotel. Carlow gets into a feud with Frank Nugent, an affair which naturally has Frank's young brother as a kingpin in the plot.

Possibly the best story is the one that opens the volume, "Widgers on the Warpath", the plot being dug out from a 1914 Gem "The Fighting Prefect." Mr. Buddle once discussed the latter story, and wondered whether any adult would go back to school to get his own back on a master who had offended him. At any rate, Widgers is just such a character, the offending master being Mr. Prout. There is a simply delightful sequence in which Mr. Capper "sympathises" with Mr. Prout. Can men really be so "bitchy"? I guess they can. And with the intention of dealing with Prout, the chums inadvertently deal with Widgers - and earn Prout's gratitude. A gem of a tale in more ways than one.

There is a November-the-Fifth story, and another, "Coker's Football Fever" is an amusing if run-of-the-mill Coker tale, the title of which tells most of it.

"The Bounder's Blunder" is to jump to the conclusion that the French master has stolen a banknote, and "A Brother's Sacrifice" has the Nugent brothers to the fore again. All the stories so far mentioned come from late 1931.

To wind up the collection, we go back two years to 1929 for "Coward's Courage", a forgettable story which was not helped by starring Snoop. Years earlier, readers had met Snoop's Canadian uncle, Mr. Huggins. Mr. Huggins now decides to remove Snoop from Greyfriars, but the weedy youth redeems himself with a little bit of unexpected bravery. Even though this story may not appeal to everybody, it adds to the variety of a pleasant and charming volume.

THE FACTS ABOUT A FEATURE FILM — Marjorie Bilbow
(Whizzard/Deutsch: £2.50)

Most of us have a soft spot for films - particularly for old films, probably. This book, written by our own Marjorie of our London Club, tells us just how one particular film was made. So happily and clearly is it written, that a subject which could have been technical and boring to us on the outside, is full of interest, fascinating, and warm. The writer has selected one of the Hammer films to tell us about. She describes all the details which had to be allowed for, all the problems which arose, and the various people who took part and what they did before the finished film reached the public screens.

The lavish pictures in the book are terrific. Obviously, a work which cannot be anything but a "must" for members of the film industry. But you can take my word for it that we ordinary members of the public are going to be enthralled with its revelations. As you read, you actually find yourself taking part in what is going on. Get hold of this one if you have ever enjoyed a good film.

THE GREYFRIARS HOLIDAY ANNUAL 1979 — (Howard Baker: £4.50)

The joy of these latter-day Annuals is the infinite variety of their contents, and this one is well up to the standard of the predecessors. The most outstanding item is probably the reprint of the School Friend No. 1. The story was "The Girls of Cliff House", and it was the first of the five stories which Hamilton wrote to launch the new paper and the new series. It is interesting to see how he departed from the Cliff House which we had known in the early

years of the Magnet. Miss Primrose had many years knocked off her age, Miss Locke the second-in-command, disappeared completely, there was an entirely new staff, Marjorie Hazeldene was demoted to being a minor character, and Barbara Redfern (no relation to any of the Redferns who littered the earlier Hamiltonia) became the chief character with her "Co" of Mabel Lynn and Bessie Bunter. Whether Hamilton was wise to create a female version of Billy Bunter is a question I can't answer.

An excellent pair of Magnets from the summer of 1931 relates how Ponsonby found a secret passage running from the Friars Oak to a box-room within Greyfriars, and how, for a time, the Highcliffe scamp took advantage of his discovery. (The theme was repeated in the closing months of the Gem.)

"Who Hacked Hacker?" is a delightful single tale from the Magnet of early 1930. The Magnets just mentioned are noteworthy for some powerful artwork from Shields. He must have helped to put the Magnet at the top in that golden age.

Another Magnet comes from way back in 1921, entitled "The Mystery of the Christmas Candles". This issue had a coloured cover, which reminded one of earlier Christmas Numbers, though the story could not hold a Christmas candle to most Magnet Christmas tales. This one introduced Jack Drake as a detective.

A Nelson Lee from 1929 is "blown up" with great success, as has been done with the Lee on previous occasion. The yarn is "Mutiny", an amusing affair in which it is the girls who rebel, and their Headmistress blames the St. Frank's boys for the mutiny in her ranks.

A Gem from 1933 contains "The Mystery Footballer" which is a reprint of an early-1909 Gem named "A Lad of the League". The new version lost a chapter or so, but the pruning was minor and not harmful. A tale of "pro" football, with Blake in the lead, a place he seldom occupied after Tom Merry came on the scene. His brother, Frank, is introduced. I cannot recall that we heard any more of Frank. A competent story if not a memorable one.

The drawback of reprinting any issue of the Popular is that one is bound to get certain smallish chunks of long series. The big pearl in this particulars oyster is "The Rio Kid's Christmas Gift", a truly lovely little complete western.

An interesting item is a fairly long Ferrers Locke tale, written soon after Hamilton sent Jack Drake to be Locke's assistant. Even though the plot is not complete - the story went on the following week - this one will pass a pleasant hour.

A perfect book for you to give your favourite nephew - or for your wife to slip in your own stocking on Christmas morning.

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BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 56. OUR VINES HAVE TENDER GRAPES

Our opening big picture came from Warner Bros., and was Ann Sheridan in "The Doughgirls". From its title it was, presumably, something about a woman's army service, but I have long forgotten it. In the same bill was a Pete Smith novelty "Treasure from Trash", from M.G.M. Very good one-reeler, running about 12 minutes; this may have been our first Pete Smith, but we were to play plenty of them.

Next week, in Technicolor, from M.G.M. came Van Johnson and Esther Williams in "Thrill of a Romance". Normally one associated the delectable Miss Williams with swimming pictures, but I have an idea this one was a thriller, and a good one. In the same show, "Puttin' on the Dog" was a Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon, and "Wagon Wheels West" was one of the excellent westerns from Warner's.

The following week brought Barbara Stanwyck in "The Gay Sisters", from Warner's. A coloured cartoon was "What's Cooking, Doc?" and "Monumental Utah" was a coloured Fitzpatrick Travel Talk.

Next came a double feature programme, both features from Warner's: James Craig (whoever he was) in "I Was Framed" and Faye Emerson (whoever she was) in "Find the Blackmailer". It sounds a nice little crime show. In addition there was a Bugs Bunny coloured cartoon, "Bugs Nips the Nip".

Then, from M.G.M., a splendid, if heavy, drama of the war years: Robert Montgomery and John Wayne in "They Were Expendable". A coloured cartoon was "The Shooting of Dan McGoo" (a great favourite, this one, so he gave it several return dates); a Pete Smith entitled "Equestrian Quiz", and a Warner western "Law of the Badlands".

Next week, from Warner's, brought Peter Lorre in "The Mask of Dimitrios". In the same bill was one of Warner's delightful collections of the funniest of Mack Sennett, this one entitled "Good Old Corn"; plus three coloured cartoons, "Swing Shift Cinderella", "Wild and Wolfy", and "Nutty News".

Then one of those lovely family stories of the American mid-west which M.G.M. always did so well, "Our Vines Have Tender Grapes". Though Edward G. Robinson headed the cast, it was Margaret O'Brien and Butch Jenkins, the children, who made the film so memorable. The type of thing one could see over and over again and always love it. A coloured cartoon was "Big Heel Watha".

Next week, from Warner's, Peter Lorre in "Hotel Berlin", which sounds like a spy drama. A coloured cartoon in this bill was "Double Chaser".

The following week brought, from M.G.M., Clark Gable and Greer Garson in "Adventure", the theme of which, despite its outstanding stars, eludes me now. A Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon in the same programme was "Quiet, Please", and a 2-reel comedy, Henry Armetta in

"Home, Cheap Home" came from Columbia.

The final programme of that term brought, from M.G.M., Judy Garland with John Hodiak and Angela Lansbury in "The Harvey Girls". I don't recall this one, but it was not, so far as I can remember, one of the best of Garland. I fancy that the Harvey shops of America were on the same lines as our splendid and much-missed Lyons' Tea Shops, the waitresses of which were called Nippies in their golden age. In fact there was a British Musical Comedy entitled "Nippy" which was perhaps the opening show of the Prince Edward Theatre in the early thirties. I have a feeling that "The Harvey Girls" was after the style of "Nippy".

In the same bill there was a coloured musical entitled "Minstrel Days" and a coloured cartoon "Lonesome Lenny".

(ANOTHER ARTICLE IN THIS SERIES NEXT MONTH)

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The Postman Called

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

W. J. RAYNER (Bury St. Edmunds): "Biography of a Small Cinema" is a charming series. Some cinemas now use the "cakestand spools" which have the entire show of about three hours, some 18,000 ft., on one reel. "Danny's Diary" is another great favourite. The Carlton Theatre, Haymarket, London, was until recently operated as a cinema by the Fox Film Co. It was bought by Classic Cinemas for tripling, and re-opens on 23rd November as three cinemas, with one section of 500 seats and two sections with 250 seats each.

JOHN TOMLINSON (Burton-on-Trent): I am not a wholesale condemner of substitute stories, but Mr. Railton's selection, for trial weeks as junior captain, is just beyond me. Fatty Wynn had some good points, and D'Arcy would have done his best - but Grundy, Tompkins, and, of all people, Mellish ---! After the myriad of times our Percy had been in disgrace if Mr. Railton did not know his character he was either too simple for words or suffered from severe loss of memory. I don't know if the author of these tales was Fred Gordon Cook, but it is the kind of situation he, either under his own name or that of "Burleigh Carew", would have put in "Chums", several of his stories being in the volumes of that magazine that I possess.

What a contrast after the Victor Cleeve series. Talk about chalk

and cheese - !

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: According to Mr. Lofts's article in the 1964 Annual, the series was written by S. E. Austin.)

TOM PORTER (Cradley Heath): I have just finished reading the "Who shall be Captain?" series. Some small parts of the series were well worked out, with sound character sketches of Tom Merry and Lowther, but the series as a whole was spoilt by what Danny rightly calls "a tripey idea", or, as Tom Merry summed up at the beginning of chapter 4, Gem 1079, "Railton must have been off his nut to have started these temporary captains on the go!"

R. H. CUSHING (Hitchin): Long may the Digest continue to evoke cherished memories to "old boys" - and veteran "girls" who, despite the ravages of time, remain young at heart.

W. O. G. LOFTS (London): In answer to Denis Gifford's queries on Bouncer & Jingles likewise I found no trace of these in any Museum files or Press Guides. However, the revelation that the former publication at least was issued by Ed Herdman leaves no doubt that they were actually amateur papers and produced by members of The Amateur Journalists Association. They even produced Chums, Magnet, Gem, Union Jack, and Boys' Friend before the A.P. issued these papers, and Arthur Harris (who died in 1968) once claimed that the professional firms pinched their titles. These mags were almost professionally produced (e.g. The S.P.C.) and usually a charge was made only for postage and packing. Many members were top men in the publishing world, e.g. E. L. McKeag editor of School Friend, and possibly this is how such odd announcements got in The National Newsage from time to time. John Jukes certainly knew Arthur Harris, but never confided to me his interest in his early amateur efforts. Mr. Harris (the old comic King) claimed to have over 100,000 different items in his collection, and I would suggest that Denis try and locate where these went to, he would no doubt find the elusive Jingles and Bouncer amongst them. The original title of Hobby World (where J. N. Pentelow wrote an article on Old Boys' Books) was The Black Cat, not lucky for Ed Herdman, as in 1934 he was killed by a burglar, and his blood so it was said spilt over his collection of old Penny Bloods.

W. T. THURBON (Cambridge): Your September editorial aroused many nostalgic memories. Those watering carts, with their tanks and sprinklers, drawn so sedately by a plodding horse along the dusty streets; do you recall how dusty they were, especially before 1914; the hot sun, and the delicious smell of the water on the hot roads? And how small boys would run shoeless to follow the sprinklers?

Danny's Diary reminds me too of the old days of silent films; I find it difficult to recall them now very clearly; the flickering pictures and the sub-titles, and the inevitable pianist.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: I am not sure that our correspondent is not perpetuating a legend in referring to flickering pictures and the inevitable pianist. I would think that the heyday of silent pictures, which we remember, was a period when photography was good and projection generally excellent. True, when we see old Chaplins on TV we tend to be critical, but we have to remember that the prints are taken from negatives which are over 60 years old and have suffered obvious deterioration from the passing of time. I recall seeing on TV a Douglas Fairbanks silent film and also "The Phantom of the Opera" from the twenties, accompanied by a tinkling piano to give a sense of period. But that sense of period is inaccurate. Very small cinemas, certainly, got by with just a piano accompaniment, but the majority of cinemas of the silent days which I remember, had excellent orchestras with first-rate musicians. In the Kentish town where I lived as a small boy, there were three cinemas, and each had a fine orchestra of at least six performers or more. "Way Down East" and "Over the Hill" from the early twenties went out accompanied by splendid musical scores which were played by fine teams of musicians in the orchestra pits.)

JOE CONROY (Liverpool): My C.D. for October is, as usual, a joy to read. Browsing through this and earlier C.D's and also the Annuals it struck me that the regular subscribers to your paper are just names to the majority of us. We take names like W. O. G. Lofts, R. Blythe, Eric Fayne, Roger Jenkins, Josie Packman, Les Rowley and quite a few others for granted and yet they are always cropping up. Without them I think our hobby would die. So - how about a MONTHLY PEN PICTURE OF ONE OF THEM? - I'm sure it could be done! And I am sure it would give pleasure to many of us.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Generally speaking, our contributors are not after publicity, and would not welcome Mr. Conroy's plan, I fancy. The main factor is a contributor's knowledge of the subject on which he or she writes.)

F. V. GILES (Barking) Recent references to the availability of Howard Baker reprints from Waltham Forest Public Library prompt me to mention that some thirty of these volumes are on the shelves of Barking Central Library. Not, however, as one might innocently suppose, in the fiction department, but in the non-fiction section under the label "English Novelists"!

F. S. KNIGHT (Gloucester): Danny's mention of the "Charfield" disaster revives memories for me, as at the time I was in our local General Hospital, and I remember the hustle and bustle as nurses prepared for the arrival of some of the injured. I was turfed out of my bed and put on a kind of couch to help make room as the ward was full. I think we had three of the injured and one died the same night.

* *

News of the Clubs

LONDON

A double vote of thanks was accorded to Bob and Louise Blythe who very kindly accommodated the club on the occasion of the October meeting at very short notice. Furthermore, Bob almost took over the gathering as he occupied the chair, officiated in his Nelson Lee librarian stint, read out most of the recent controversial correspondence about the definition of the word comic that appeared in the Daily Telegraph, read James Hodges piece on the Bullseye and the whereabouts of Cursiter Fields, conducted the ever popular Eliminator quiz and finished up by reading extracts from the newsletter of October 1961 and the Trackett Grim story "The Case of the Bullet Proof Man". In the hall was a display of paper and book covers and contestants later had to name these. Norman Wright was the winner of this competition, another of Bob Blythe's efforts.

Winifred Morss's Transportation quiz was won by Anne Clarke and the Eliminator was won by Reuben Godsave. Prizes were kindly supplied by Bob Blythe.

Bob Acraman read out an account of his visit to the Fleetway

house. Bill Lofts's piece on the Sexton Blake TV series was also read out.

Thus a well attended meeting and a full programme.

Next meeting at Hume House, Lordship Lane, Dulwich, S.E. 22, on Sunday, 12th November. Kindly inform Josie Packman at her home address if intending to be present.

CAMBRIDGE

The Club held the first meeting of the new season on Sunday, 1st October, meeting at the Cambridge Scout Headquarters.

Mike Rouse welcomed Mr. and Mrs. Terry Wakefield and invited Bill Lofts to introduce them. Bill spoke of his long acquaintance with Mr. and Mrs. Wakefield, and his knowledge of Mr. Wakefield's father.

Mr. Wakefield spoke of the Artists who had illustrated so many Fleetway House publications, enlivened by many amusing anecdotes. He talked about his father, G. W. Wakefield, and confirmed that his father had been a noted amateur boxer in his youth. He also talked about his own career. As a boy he had read the Rookwood stories in manuscript as his father brought these home to illustrate, thus reading the stories several weeks before publication. He said that to him Jimmy Silver always appeared a more real character than either Wharton or Tom Merry. He recalled many artists he had known, including Bert Wyner, in his spare time an ardent archaeologist, and Harry Mayne, who had illustrated many of the covers of the Sexton Blake Library, including the one shown in the Radio Times article on the present Sexton Blake serial. In its early days Fleetway House was one of the most boisterous offices in London with the easiest hours, but much of the artist's work was done at home, often working late at night. He recalled that "Puck" was first edited by a rather prim spinster; when she retired she was replaced by Quittenden, of whom Terry told several amusing stories. When Foxwell migrated to the Daily Mail, a man named Janes became Editor of "Bubbles". Janes allowed Terry to take over the front page of "Bubbles", which was a great boost for him. In reply to questions Terry said that when a new artist took over a series he was required to follow the style of his predecessor. Asked about "scripts" he said this was a post-war word; before then they spoke of "ideas" or "wheezes". He said the

attitude in the office was that the papers must come out on the appointed days, with all the regular characters. "Ideas" might come from many sources. He instanced how the only time he backed a Derby winner he found the Bookie had "welshed". On telling his Editor about this the Editor said "Use it as an idea for a Lupino Lane strip, with Lupino jumping on the Welsher as he runs from the crowd who mistake Lupino for the welshing bookie". When ideas were short the Editors would often take down a "red book", a series of bound volumes of the previous six months' issues of the papers, and say "re-work that idea". He later found that while in the army the same Editor had asked his father to work the same idea for an "Abbott and Costello' strip; father and son both using the same idea unknowingly. During tea an animated conversation took place, and books and drawings were circulated. The meeting thanked Mr. and Mrs. Wakefield for an outstandingly entertaining afternoon. Next meeting at Jack Overhill's on 5th November.

NORTHERN

Meeting held 14th October, 1978

A wide range of topics ensured a lively discussion time. The TV Sexton Blake series provoked almost wholly unfavourable reactions. The kindest that could be said for it was that the story had its possibilities, but the sense of watching a "send-up" was always too much with us. Nigel Shepley mentioned a new book inspired by that other doyen of Baker Street, "Dining with Sherlock Holmes". We also noted that the Holmes stories from Strand Magazine are now available in facsimile of the originals. A sale of "comics" at Sotheby's had led to some entertaining correspondence in the Daily Telegraph; members had brought along cuttings which the Chairman read out to the meeting. We were pleased to note that several correspondents were well up in their Greyfriars lore, and that the notion of the Gem and Magnet as "comics" was well and truly quashed.

Harry Barlow put us on the rack with a quiz about the Ravenspur Grange series. Not, apparently, a widely popular series, said Harry, and went on to prove his point. The winner, Geoffrey Wilde, could only muster 8 marks out of 16.

Next month we propose to read extracts from early Magnets featuring Courtney, Valence and Wingate. As a prelude to this, we wound up the meeting with a general discussion of that controversial decision to kill off the first of these, why it was ever considered necessary, and just how much the Sixth Form at Greyfriars lost when this central trio was broken up. The last of these questions we can perhaps come closer to answering after next month's readings.

JOHNNY BULL

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WANTED: Any issues of The Public School Magazine with P. G. Wodehouse stories. Please write to:-

D. MORGAN, 22 HAYES ROAD, BROMLEY, KENT, BR2 9AA.

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O.A.P. wishes to dispose of his small collection of Hamiltonia. List available.

FRANK ELLIS, 13 ALBERT COLLEGE DRIVE

GLASNEVIN, DUBLIN 9, IRELAND.

* *

WANTED: Early Collectors' Digest Nos. 1 to 24. Write:

NICHOLAS THROCKMORTON, THE FORSTAL, BIDDENDEN, KENT.

* *

FOR SALE: 16 Greyfriars SOL's; 18 Magnets. S.A.E.

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THE DEMISE OF WIZARD II

by Gordon Hudson

I turned over the pages of the Wizard, and there once again was a familiar looking announcement:

"Great News for all readers!

Next week these two famous papers combine to make one super boys' picture-story paper -- Victor and Wizard"

Five years ago a similar announcement marked the end of the Rover, the last in a long line of boys' story papers. On that occasion, however, a rather curious merger took place.

In 1969 Wizard I, a story paper, ceased publication and was incorporated in the Rover. For a while the title was "Rover and Wizard" and then it reverted back to simply "Rover". Sometime afterwards D. C. Thomson Ltd. commenced a new picture-story paper which they called "Wizard", reviving the old name. Then in 1973 the Rover came to the end of its long run and was incorporated in the Wizard, that is the new paper. Rather topsy-turvy!

At first two of the stories, which were unfinished, were continued in the Wizard. This did not last long and soon the new Wizard became "-picture paper. In 1977 a word-story was re-introduced. At the end of the series it was replaced by another, and this process continued until the last issue. I hoped that this might be the revival of stories generally instead of pictures, but, unfortunately, this has not proved to be the case.

It would appear that, as on previous occasions, falling circulation has ended the life of Wizard II. It seems curious though that a story should have been introduced so near the end of the run. Perhaps this was in an effort to revive the paper.

The last issue of the Wizard was dated 24th June, 1978, and two new serials commenced, to be continued in the new combined paper, which, curiously, has the same number of pages as each of the separate papers - no more. The Victor for the same week also contained the opening episodes of the same stories. In the ordinary way I would have expected one paper at least to have contained two "singles" in the available space, but this may have been a deliberate policy decision to encourage readers to buy the new paper.

As one who did most of his early reading from the Thomson Big Four and the Champion, I have never had much enthusiasm for the new Wizard. I only continued to purchase the paper because of its links with the past, both in the name and in the re-issue of a number of old stories in picture form. Nevertheless, I am sorry to see the end of Wizard II, feelings which I believe will be shared by many other readers.

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