

STORY PAPER COLLECTORS DIGEST

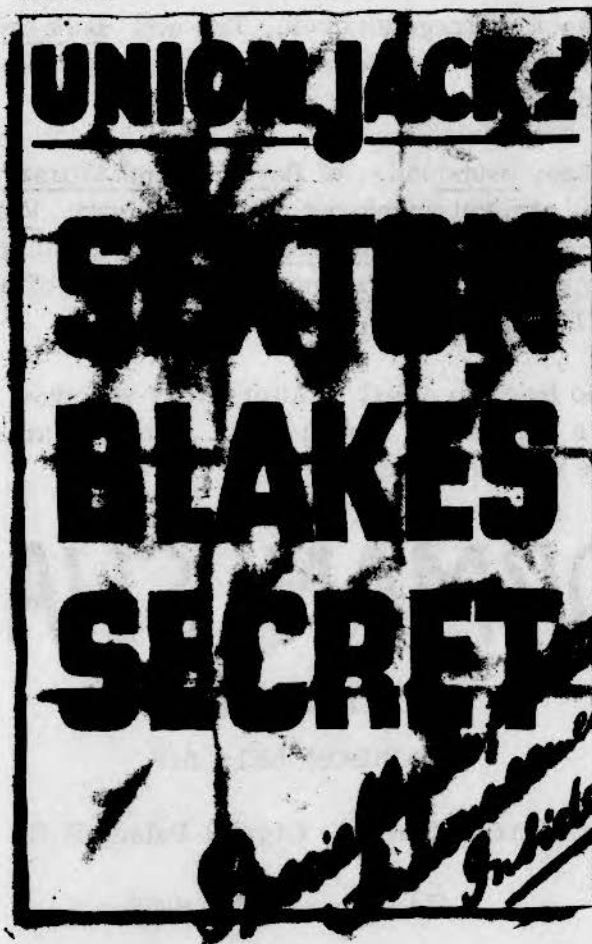
VOL. 37

No. 434

FEBRUARY 1983

**IN THIS
ISSUE—**

**COMPLETE STORY of LOBANGU and
SEXTON BLAKE—Detective Adventure
in England and Africa.**



Howard Baker Facsimiles. Several collections recently purchased, also new, unused, shop-soiled - very slightly damaged copies. All £5.50 each. Out of print as available, from £10 each. Sorry no lists, but please send your firm order in order of preference and I'll send! All new available, including the Book Club Specials at £16. All second-hand ones of these sold.

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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by
W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

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Translation increases the fault of a
work and spoils its beauties

THE UNION JACK

In the extracts from Danny's Diary which we publish this month we learn that it is exactly fifty years since the final issue appeared of the grand old paper "Union Jack". The final issue was dated 18th February, 1933.

Actually, as we all know, the title of the paper was changed to "Detective Weekly". The format was changed to larger sheets; the cover was changed from a multi-colour one to black print on what the editor termed "yellow" tinted paper.

In the U.J.'s final issue the Editor headed his chat with the word "PROGRESS". Whether readers took the word at its face value it is hard to say. In modern times we have learned to accept it with very great reserve. We know, to our cost, that in recent years PROGRESS has almost invariably meant the replacement of much-loved traditions with something far inferior, far more costly to our personal pockets, and, usually, a total throwing away of former high standards. And it is hard to believe that Detective Weekly was in any way an improvement on the old Union Jack.

I must confess that I was never a regular reader of the U.J. I bought it on only very rare occasions, and the only time I had it for a fair number of consecutive weeks was in the twenties when they enlarged it and introduced the multi-coloured cover. I had the first tale of that new phase - I recall it was a Kestrel story entitled "The Case of the Bogus Judge" and it was so good a tale that I was persuaded to carry on buying it for, perhaps, a couple of months. Some of the tales of that time were "The Marble Arch Mystery", which was by Brooks, I believe, and starred Waldo, the Wonder Man, and "The Case of the Toxic Tulips" which, I seem to think, starred Zenith, the Albino. But the quality of Union Jack stories seemed to vary so much, and so I ceased to buy it.

Just why did they change the Union Jack into Detective Weekly. The obvious reason, though, naturally, it was never admitted, is that the paper was failing. It had run for just on forty years, from April 1894, and in very early days it offered mainly tales of adventure, of which the young Charles Hamilton contributed quite a few.

It could be said that the name Union Jack gave no indication of the contents, whereas Detective Weekly did. But then how many titles of popular and successful papers gave any indication of what you were buying. "Gem", "Magnet", "The Boys' Friend" told you nothing in their titles. Clearly, a good paper advertised itself. Its name did not really matter a lot.

Changes in format were always a danger signal. If the old style

was successful, then the publishers would be mad to change it. So we can accept that the Union Jack was failing, and the editor made changes feeling that he had nothing to lose and might gain something.

I have not seen many Detective Weeklies, and never bought even one new in the shops. But I doubt whether it was any improvement on the Union Jack.

The larger sheets, one would think, would be less convenient for reading. The plain tinted paper (not really the yellow they had announced) was clearly an economy. The same thing happened years later when the multi-coloured Magnet changed to salmon, and the red, white, and blue Gem, in its new buff shroud, was a pale and anaemic shadow of its former self. They never recaptured the glow of the Blue Gem and the Red Magnet of long before.

The Detective Weekly was to have larger and clearer print. Maybe it did. I wouldn't know. But I recall that in the closing period of the Magnet they suddenly announced that a new, clearer print was to be used - and it proved to be less pleasing to the eye.

No doubt BLAKIANA will assess for us the Detective Weekly, its advantages and its drawbacks, if any, and how long it lasted. Come forward, Blakians!

YOU NAME IT!

No doubt plenty of you watched the B.B.C's excellent production of "East Lynne" over Christmas on television. I was wondering how they would pronounce the name of that arch cad, Levison.

Nearly a quarter of a century ago I wrote, in the "Let's Be Controversial!" series, a facetious bit entitled "Chumley for Short". We reprinted it in the 1980 edition of the Annual. I mused over the pronunciation of certain surnames in the Hamilton stories, commenting that the correct way to say Levison would be "Loosen", but that most of us, probably, call it Levvysun.

I have seen "East Lynne" many times down the years on the stage - mainly by repertory companies, and the pronunciation of Levison was always Levvysun. To the best of my knowledge, it has never been made as a talking film for the cinema, but I recall, as a youngster, going with my mother to see it as a silent film. I remember it was a Fox

film, but I can't for the life of me recall who played the ill-fated Lady Isobel.

Back to the new TV version. The B.B.C. pronounced the name of the old rotter as "Loosen", which, I guess was quite correct. I wonder what pronunciation Charles Hamilton intended for that young fellow at St. Jim's who reformed just a little too completely. I wish I had thought to ask him.

GOOD-BYE, BOB!

A flood of letters, expressing shock and sorrow at the death of Bob Blythe have been ample evidence of the high regard in which Mr. and Mrs. Bob Blythe are held in hobby circles. It is impossible to quote from the letters, but I thank all who wrote - and we will let Mr. Leslie Rowley speak for us all in this farewell:

"One is always saddened by the loss of a friend, but never more so than at Christmas, the season of love, hope, and remembrance. It is the remembrance of the resolution of Bob Blythe and Len Packman that comes flooding in now. A resolution that ensured that people like you and me should share the joy of reminiscing together about the books we loved in youth and old age. A resolution shared by their ladies who deserve so much of our thanks and sympathy today."

My calendar today, at the start of January, bears this message: "He who leaves the fame of good works after him does not die." A fitting epitaph for our Bob.

THE EDITOR

The Princess Snowee sends her purring love to so many who have written to ask what has become of her "corner". She will be back one of these days, all being well.

WANTED: Magnet Volumes Numbers 22, 23. Also Club Volumes, Numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9. Also Greyfriars Holiday Annuals, 1922, 1926, 1929, 1930, 1932, 1933, 1937, 1938, 1939. Please state price required.

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WE AGREE, MR. BRANDRETH!

"It seems unlikely that Frank Richards would have objected to the re-written Bunter books," observed the lady who wrote a review on them in the Times newspaper.

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (who once attended a London Club luncheon) did not agree with her, and said so in a spirited letter to the Times.

"What rot!" said Mr. Brandreth emphatically. "Frank Richards would have objected most strenuously. He loathed people tinkering with his work."

And Mr. Brandreth went on: "Clean, wholesome literature was the Magnet's motto, but there was more to Frank Richards' writing than that. His style may have been uneconomical, repetitious and quaint, but it was also consistent, unambiguous, strangely hypnotic, and unique. Like it or not, a Greyfriars where there's more tolerance and less tuck, where they don't laugh at foreigners any more, where they hardly teach Latin and where they certainly don't give you a walloping without an explanation first, isn't the Greyfriars Frank Richards created.

"An emasculated Bunter is a national scandal. They'll be telling us not to believe in Father Christmas next."

Hurrah for Mr. Brandreth. He has written what most of us think. And Hurrah for the Times for publishing his letter.

* * * * *

OBITUARIES

DEATH OF SURREY READER

We deeply regret to record the death of Mr. N. J. Neville of Caterham, Surrey.

Mr. Neville died in hospital, following a long illness. He had been a loyal and enthusiastic reader of C.D. for a great many years, and was an avid student of the Magnet and Gem and all Hamiltonia.

We express our sincere sympathy to Mrs. Neville, and to Jonathan, in their very great loss.

ANOTHER OLD STALWART GONE

Here at Collectors' Digest we are deeply saddened to learn of the death of Mr. C. L. Farrow of Boston, Lincolnshire. He had been a loyal reader of C.D. for over twenty years, and he often told me that the luckiest day of his life was the one when he first came on our magazine.

Mr. Farrow kept a small Off Licence shop in his little town, and was a highly-respected citizen. But he used to write frequently: "I have no relative left. I am absolutely alone." I wish now that I had written to him more often than I did - we get these regrets when it is too late - but I wrote him from time to time during the year, and he understood that the old editor has so much to do all the time. He used to assure me that he regarded the "Skipper's" letter in C.D. as written personally to him - as it is to all C.D. readers.

Mr. Farrow was 73 when he died in January. We shall miss him and his heartwarming letters.

* * * * *

Danny's Diary

FEBRUARY 1933

Quite a startling thing has happened. The fine old paper, the "Union Jack" has ended. Or, at any rate, it has changed its name, and it seems it will never be the same again. I think the publishers are up the pole now instead of the flag.

The first Union Jack this month has been "Sexton Blake Wins" by Robert Murray. An excellent story about Mr. Reece and his Criminals' Confederation. Next came "Village Vengeance" by E. S. Brooks which is also very good.

Then - the final Union Jack. The last Union Jack tale is "The Land of Lost Men" by Rex Hardinge, which introduces Lobangu. But on the cover, in large type, is the announcement "Sexton Blake's Secret", and that secret, I suppose, is that the Union Jack is finished, to be replaced by Detective Weekly. I feel rather sorrowful about it. There has always been a Union Jack in my lifetime. The first story in the Detective Weekly is by Lewis Jackson. The lovely old coloured cover has gone, and is replaced by what the editor calls a yellow cover, but looks grimy buff to me. The sheets are bigger, which means less convenient for the reader. Who on earth thinks out these changes?

It has been a cold and snowy month. On the 24th, in many parts

of Britain, there were the worst snow blizzards for very many years. But, to warm things up in Germany, the Reichstag in Berlin has been burned down. Politics, or whatever they call them, seem to be taking a weird turning in Germany.

The Nelson Lee Library has continued with the rather far-fetched series about the Fellowship of Fear. A notorious gang of criminals has given an ultimatum to the Head of St. Frank's. He must die himself - or turn over the school to the criminals. The month's first story is "The Fighting Six". Next week brought "The Siege of St. Frank's", with St. Frank's over-run by hooded raiders with machine guns and searchlights. Then "The Castle of Doom", with Lee and some of the boys kidnapped and carried off to a sinister castle.

With the final week of the month the series ended, and I really didn't like it a lot. Rather a silly affair. And next month the Nelson Lee is going to start at No. 1 again with yet another New Series. It doesn't look too promising.

Sir Malcolm Campbell has set up a new world speed record at Daytona Beach, Florida. In his new car, "Bluebird", he clocked up a speed of 273 miles an hour.

The first story in the Gem this month is "The Mystery Footballer". He is Jack Blake's elder brother, Frank, who had quarrelled with his father, left home, and become a winger for Northfield Athletic Football Club. Tom Merry & Co. go to see Northfield play Newcastle United in the League game. And Blake recognises his brother on the wing.

The next story is a complete disappointment, for it is not written by the real Martin Clifford. I thought they had done with that sort of thing when they started reprinting the old stories. This one is called "Hero and Cad", and it is about a new friend in the Third Form for Wally D'Arcy, a boy named Dudley.

Then "The Call of the Sea" in which a new boy named Jim Raleigh comes to St. Jim's, but he really wants to go to sea.

Final of the month is "The Swot of St. Jim's". The swot is Skimpole, who decides to sit for the Codicote Scholarship with its £50 prize. Not a good month in the Gem, all told. Better luck next month, mayhap!

Two tip-top tales in the Schoolboys' Own Library. "The

"Schoolboy Hypnotist" is a terrific tale, telling of Crum, a boy hypnotist, who comes to Greyfriars from a travelling show at fairgrounds. I loved it. The other tale is "The Boy from the Bootleg Ranch", which tells of the arrival of Kit Wildrake, a youthful cowboy from the Canadian Wild West. Nice little tale.

An average month in the local cinemas. We have seen Dolores del Rio and Joel McCrea in "Bird of Paradise"; John Barrymore in "Cardigan's Last Case"; Richard Barthelmess in "The Cabin in the Cotton"; George Arliss in "A Successful Calamity", which is not so good as some Arliss pictures; Edmund Lowe and Evelyn Brent in "Attorney for the Defence"; "Rome Express", a good tale which stars Esther Ralston, Conrad Veidt, and Gordon Harker, and it is a tip-top British film; "Devil of the Deep" starring Charles Laughton, Tallulah Bankhead, and Gary Cooper (nice thriller); and finally Edward G. Robinson in "Two Seconds". I liked this one, which is about a criminal's lifetime passing through his mind in the two seconds in which he sits in the electric chair before the switch is pulled.

A man named Maundy Gregory has been sent to gaol for taking money for the promise that he could get somebody a "title". If he had got away with it, I might have bought my Dad one for next Christmas. He would make a good "Sir James", and I might have been "Sir Daniel".

Throughout the month in the Magnet, the series about Jim Valentine, the boy forger, has continued. Luckily it is all very entertaining, otherwise it might have overstayed its welcome just a little. First tale of the month is "Bunter the Footballer", with Bunter thinking he is a Dixie Dean, Hugh Gallacher, or Alex James, while in the background of it all Nosey Clark is trying all sorts of tricks to get Valentine back into his gang. Next week "The Mad Musician of Greyfriars", with Claude Hoskins, the school musician, starring - and Nosey Clark doing his stuff in the wings. Then "Black Masic" with strange things happening to Jim Valentine - so strange, in fact, that it is almost supernatural. Final of the month is "Billy Bunter's Bargains", with Bunter setting up in the Remove as a kind of pedlar of trifles - with Nosey Clark still around - and even the famous Popper Diamond turning up in a most unexpected place. All grand reading, with immense variety in sequences which support the main series.

And the Jim Valentine series goes on next month. And they're still giving away sticky-backed coloured stamps with the Magnet.

NOTES ON THIS MONTH'S "DANNY'S DIARY"

S.O.L. No. 189, "The Schoolboy Hypnotist", which Danny bought in February 1933, was the 3-story Crum series from the Magnet of early in 1928. It fitted snugly into the S.O.L. and made one of the best of them. S.O.L. No. 190, "The Boy from the Bootleg Ranch" comprised the 4-story series which brought Wildrake as a new boy in the Gem of early 1921, plus a couple or so of other Wildrake singles from shortly afterwards. Wildrake was not an inspired character, but the tales shone beyond their merits in 1921 owing to the surrounding glut of sub tales.

Of Danny's Gems in February, "The Mystery Footballer" had been "A Lad of the League" in early 1909; "Hero and Cad" had been "D'Arcy Minor's Chum" in 1909, the Gem's second substitute tale. The earlier one "The Schoolboy Jockey" had got by, because the writer, Down, was never a show-off with his writing, and just tried to copy the master; "Hero and Cad" by H. Clarke Hook, stuck out like a sore thumb, and nobody could have credited it to "the real Martin Clifford". "The Call of the Sea" had been entitled "The Son of a Sailor" in 1909. Oddly enough, and for no obvious reason, the new boy, Jim Ballantyne, was changed to Jim Raleigh in 1933. (Or did the editor think that Jim Ballantyne might sound too much like Jim Valentine, then starring in the new Magnet series.) "The Swot of St. Jim's" had been "Skimpole's Scholarship" in 1909.

The film "Rome Express", which Danny saw in early 1933 was the forerunner of scores of copies, in which people of various types met on a train. Probably the most recent of them has been "Murder on the Orient Express". But "Rome Express" started it all.

* * * * *

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

By the time you read these words Christmas will have long been over and the January issue of the C.D. will have been published, but I would like to say thank you to everyone who sent me greetings and Christmas cards and to wish you all a Happy New Year.

PIERRE QUIROULE, The Master Story-teller by Terry Beenham

An initial impact to gain his readers interest and attention is a skill that all writers need to employ and particularly so in writing a detective story thriller.

In the Union Jack stories recording the many adventures of Sexton Blake there were few writers of greater ability than Pierre Quiroule - real name W. W. Sayer - in achieving this. He further had the ability to consistently hold the readers interest throughout the story. One of his most exciting stories is "The Mystery of the Living Shadow" S.B.L. 1st series, No. 141.

The following are excerpts from Sexton Blake's encounter in the "Red House" situated on the edge of Blackheath, with the chilling, sinister living Shadow. It is in the early evening and twilight is dropping fast outside as Blake looks out of the window - "Then he started suddenly, for quite distinctly he heard it that time. It was a knock at the front door! . . . he drew back the catch of the door and, opening it a few inches peered out. No-one was there. Were his ears playing him false, his imagination running away with him? Then at the door came a loud rattle. Blake could not restrain an involuntary start -- he was too iron-nerved to get jumpy over trifles -- someone was at the door. He calmly blew out the match he had lit and returning to the street door opened it. But still there was no-one visible!

Blake determined to be ready for him this time. He gently closed the door again and stood there waiting expectantly with his hand ready on the catch. For some minutes nothing happened. He was just beginning to think that his mysterious practical joker had gone for good. Then the knock came again and this time it was repeated thrice. Thud! thud! thud! In an instant Blake had flung the door open and leapt outside. A breath of wind fanned his face, a faint acrid odour assailed his nostrils - and that was all. No-one was there - the porch was empty, there was not a soul in sight.

The encounter further develops when Blake strikes a match and holding it above his head finds to his astonishment a sudden puff of wind seems to spring from over his shoulder and the light flickers and goes out.

Pierre Quiroule creates and sustains an atmosphere of eeriness together with plausibility as Blake matches wits against his mysterious opponent - The Shadow!

always assumed that the very first Sexton Blake story was in No. 2 of the Union Jack in 1894. It took a dedicated hobbist - Walter Dexter - a world authority on Charles Dickens, to discover that three earlier Blake yarns had appeared in the Halfpenny Marvel. The first historic tale being 'The Missing Millionaire' in No. 6, dated 20th December, 1893.

I've always been extremely puzzled by this late discovery, as certainly even before the last War, there were hundreds of collectors of the early Harmsworth papers, many having complete runs of the Marvel, Pluck, and Union Jack type. Amongst them was our own Herbert Leckenby, who had been an avid collector since boyhood days. Herbert also had a great interest in Sexton Blake, and it still seems incredible to me how he was in ignorance of any of these earlier Marvel stories. Incredible could also be used in the fact that even the publishers of Sexton Blake were unaware of the earlier stories. In the special 1,000th number of the Union Jack, the editor stated that the very first yarn was in that paper entitled 'Sexton Blake Detective'. Herbert in the editorial of the C.D. November 1953 issue, was rather outspoken about the ignorance of the editor, suggesting perhaps that they possibly may have known of the earlier stories, but wanted the Union Jack to get the credit for publishing the first historic story. Twyman who had read these remarks amongst a pile of Collectors' Digests I had loaned him replied to this as follows:-

"I was editor of the Union Jack when this erroneous claim was made, perpetrating it in my editorial page of the 1,000th number as far as I can recall, and perhaps on other occasions too. But those I have forgotten. However, in all instances it was my actual belief that Sexton Blake's initial appearance was in No. 2 of the Union Jack. There was a practical, but mistaken reason for that belief. In explaining the situation it should be emphasised that the editorial routine of producing a packed paper every week, with little assistance, hardly leaves time for research. An editor's facilities are not those of the historian. But on this 1,000 number occasion I did consult the first U.J. volume, mainly for the purpose of obtaining the first Blake cover for reproduction. While doing this I turned up what my predecessor had to say in No. 1 about his forthcoming attraction in No. 2. Regrettable, I haven't copies

of these pioneer issues handy at the moment and cannot quote verbatim, though perhaps one of your fellow collectors will be able to do so, incidentally shedding some light on the earliest Blake data question, and also on the literary origin of Sexton Blake himself.

Again relying on memory, he described the type of character this new detective was to be, suggesting that he was modelled on the Sherlock Holmes of Mr. Conan Doyle. (This was before Holmes' creator got his knighthood.) There was also other information, such as that the Union Jack would never publish stories of a kind to encourage boys to run off with their employer's money, which I quoted in the 1,000 editorial, but of which I likewise have no copy at hand, so cannot be more precise. The acknowledgment of Sexton Blake's literary paternity I judged better not to emphasise.

Now the implication about all this is that I knew nothing of any previous appearance of Blake in the Marvel, which is a fact. There was a volume of the Marvel on the same shelf as Vol. 1 of the Union Jack, but I doubt I ever even handled it. I was not interested in the Marvel. So that the assertion for which I was alone responsible - that Blake first saw print in our No. 2 was a genuine assertion. It was motivated by no wish to claim false credit, and the late Walter Dexters historic Marvel discovery was as much surprise to me as collectors generally. I was led astray by that deceptive editorial in No. 1.

It was a case of pure ignorance -- inexcusable except that hard driven editors can only envy rather than emulate the leisured, scholarly approach of the collector. Had it been otherwise in my case, this dark suspicion of fact-concealment and credit-stealing would never have arisen, but I am happy, even at this late stage, to be able to dissipate a mystery that threatened to remain ever unsolved.

Incidentally on this same subject, Mr. W. H. Back, an early U.J. editor and then editorial director of the Amalgamated Press, once told me that, at a time when he had been running a succession of adventure stories, and wished to feature another detective yarn, he looked through the file of past issues, and came across the forgotten No. 2 and a name that appealed to him. Thus Sexton Blake was resuscitated - for quite a while, as it turned out. It occurs to me that

this anecdote may have been another factor leading me to the belief that Blake was born in no other paper than the Union Jack."

* * * * *

Nelson Lee Column

THE FAIR SEX

by R. J. Godsave

No-one could accuse Charles Hamilton of copying E. S. Brooks or Brooks copying Hamilton. Their style of writing being so very different that no comparison can be made. A difference which stands out more than any was in the treatment of the fair sex. Whether it was because Hamilton was a bachelor that caused him to rarely mention females in his stories, or that he regarded his stories to be written solely for his youthful male readers, as indeed they were.

E. S. Brooks on the other hand had no compunction in introducing ladies into his stories. Eileen Dare, the girl detective, was introduced very early in the Nelson Lee Library. The El Safra Treasure series which Brooks wrote as a sequel to the Jack Mason series in 1919 introduced four sisters of St. Frank's scholars. These four young ladies were Violet Watson, Agnes Christine, Margaret Fenton and Ethel Church. The reader was told that Violet Watson and Agnes Christine were very pretty girls of around 15 years of age. Margaret Fenton was a year younger, and was plump and not pretty in the least. She was however, merry and everybody liked her. Ethel Church was regarded as the boss of the quartette, being sixteen and of a somewhat imposing appearance. The girls were under the direct care of Lady Helen Tregellis-West - Montie's Aunt.

The regular reader of the Nelson Lee would be well aware of how Reggie Pitt was so successful in dressing up as his supposed sister in the Jack Mason series. Reggie Pitt in the El Safra series went one better by borrowing one of Violet Watson's dresses and a silken wrap was placed loosely over his wig and hung down on both sides of his face. A dainty fan concealed the rest of his features. Had one not known of the trick they would have sworn that the person in the deckchair on

Lord Dorriemore's yacht in the deepening twilight was Violet Watson. How Pitt led Handforth along the romantic path makes fine reading. How Handforth fled in confusion after the supposed Violet offered to let him kiss her is E. S. Brooks at his best.

It was Mr. Crowell's absence from St. Frank's and caused by overstrain that led to a vacancy for a temporary Remove Formmaster. How Edith Handforth, Handy's elder sister made a run-a-way marriage against her parents' wishes and how her husband secured the appointment under the name of Clement Heath - his real name being Arthur Kirby - owing to the fact that undermasters at St. Frank's were not permitted to be married. E. O. Handforth was extremely upset in not knowing where his sister and her husband were now living, and we see Handforth in a new sentimental light. It is interesting to note that in this series the almost impossible happened - a split in Study D.

E. S. Brooks fairly hit the bullseye in the series of Petticoat rule at St. Frank's. He portrayed, with one exception, the fair sex in a rather unfavourable light as regards the physical appearance of the House Mistresses and Form Mistresses. Whether he realised that he had gone too far and strove to make amends by describing the Third Form Mistress as a pretty girl of around 22 years of age. It is a fact that career ladies do tend to be on the solemn side and rather severe in the matters of dress.

With the introduction of the Moor View School in the same year 1923 the question of the fair sex was finally settled in that the scholars of this school were now a permanent feature in the Nelson Lee.

Since Brooks made much of his correspondence with his readers it was obvious from letters received that the Nelson Lee had quite a good following of girl readers.

"IT'S THAT KIND OF A HOLIDAY"

by William Lister

Lord Dorimore, a millionaire in his own right, was a kind of fairy godfather to the boys of St. Frank's. Whenever he turned up in a 'Nelson Lee' tale there was a holiday in the offing. Summer meant holidays abroad, and winter brought visits to Dorimore Castle.

In my younger days the 'Nelson Lee' provided me with a lot of things I did not have, nor could ever hope to have.

St. Frank's was more my idea of a school than the council school

I attended. No Lord Dorimore ever turned up to take our boys on holiday, not even to see Wigan pier.

Born in Leeds, the MECCA for Pa, Ma, and myself was Blackpool. To look through a carriage window, and see the Blackpool Tower looming into view through the thick smoke of the railway engine, was indeed, the kingdom of heaven.

For the boys of St. Frank's it was London - Africa - America - South Sea Islands - Northestria and El Dorado.

You name it, the world was their oyster, and if you had a good imagination and 2d. to spare you could go with them, howbeit as a stow-a-way. I did just that, and only gave my imagination a rest when I arrived in Blackpool, that was for real.

In the year of our Lord, 1920, in the month of June, Lord Dorimore organised a trip to El Dorado. If you care to look at the brochure in the form of 'Lord Dorimore's Quest' - 'The Dream City' - 'The White Giants' - 'The Modern El Dorado' - 'Abandoned among the Arzacs' - 'The Traitor King' - 'The Battle of the Giants' - 'The Lake of Gold' and 'The Wanderers Return'. Nelson Lee's No. 264 to 274, covering June 1920 to Sept. 1920, you will note you are warned you may come up against prehistoric monsters, in the shape of Dinosaurs and Pterodactyls, etc. In fact these creatures are duly illustrated in the brochure.

In the space age of 1983 and seeing on T.V. and the big screen, monsters from outer space of every type, via 'Dr. Who' and 'Under the Sea'. Ugly brutes - we get so used to them we take them for granted - the thrill has gone.

However, living in 1920, prehistoric monsters were really something as the space creatures hadn't arrived in their hundreds of thousands then.

H. G. Wells triggered off prehistoric thrills with his 'The Lost World'. As a lad, seeing 'The Lost World' on the silent screen, I was filled with wonder.

Edwy Searles Brooks cottoned on to the thrills of prehistoric monsters and thus the 'El Dorado' series was born.

El Dorado is not the kind of holiday if you are looking for a rest or some sort of relaxation.

From the moment of setting out you will come up against adventure after adventure, pushed along by the pen of Edwy Searles Brooks. You will see one of your group lifted high by a giant snake, only to be rescued as the bullet from Nipper's gun pierced its brain, or watch a friend as he swims frantically from the jaws of a crocodile.

If you think that's hectic, wait till you find yourself standing atop of a small hill with a giant Dinosaur thundering towards you. Watch a full-grown teenager lifted high in the air by the monster bird, a Pterodactyl. Hold your breath as Nipper crawls hand by hand across a tight tope miles above the main road. View a horde of savages shin up the side of your boat. I have never cared for a Rhino, but to see a giant one rushing through the jungle, crushing the trees in its path, is a bit much. If you happen to be a person looking for a bonus there is yet to come a battle with giants, and the chance of being rescued from a raft on a tornado-lashed sea, by (of all things) an Airship.

I'm quite aware that many of my readers, like myself, have reached an age when a real-life adventure doesn't appeal as much as in the days of our youth. The fact is we could be a little like Bilbo Baggins in "The Hobbit" by J. R. R. Tolkien. When told by Gandolf the Wizard that he was looking for someone to share an adventure with, but it was very difficult to find anyone and he replied:- "I should think so - in these parts! We are plain quiet folk and I have no use for adventures. Nasty, disturbing, uncomfortable things. Make you late for dinner! I can't think what anybody sees in them. Sorry, I do not want any adventures today, thank you. Good morning!"

Actually Bilbo did set off on the greatest adventure of his life.

So why not try the Nelson Lee - Eld Dorado series. After all you can take it from the comfort of your armchair.

* * * * *

DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 182 - Magnets 1059-67 - da Costa Series

Charles Hamilton was no great collector of his own works. In an upstairs cupboard at Rose Lawn were a handful of Magnet series of the finest period, each series tied roughly with string. The front cover of

each Magnet was folded back so that the story title on page 3 was visible, with the consequence that the first number in each series had a title page that was faded and dusty. In addition, some pages from the serials at the back might be roughly torn out in order to make spills for the author's pipe. It was enough to make a connoisseur weep, but of course the author of the stories had quite a different standpoint.

Thanks to the generosity of Miss Hood, all these Magnets have found their way into the London Club's library, and whenever I pick up one to read it always adds an extra pleasure to reflect that I am reading the author's own copies. Certainly there can be no doubt why he retained the da Costa series, since it possesses a well-constructed plot, a fine style, and some thoughtful comments on life.

Da Costa was an emissary of Captain Marker, and it was later revealed that if Harry Wharton left Greyfriars in disgrace the Captain would inherit a legacy of £50,000. A half-caste, with Portuguese, English, and Hindu blood in his veins, da Costa had agreed to work for the disgrace of Harry Wharton, and the intermediary was Mr. Gedge, one of the most detestable solicitors Charles Hamilton ever drew. The plot was nicely varied, with da Costa at first impressed by Wharton's good nature, and then seizing opportunities to ruin him, and finally repenting of his conduct and working to assist Wharton.

There was usually one character in a Hamilton series who guessed the truth about a newcomer. The part that Bob Cherry played in the Carter series was allotted here to Hurree Singh, and the contrast between the Hindu prince and the half-caste was brought out in a striking fashion. As it was the summer term, the whole absorbing plot was worked out against a background of cricket matches, and the fact that da Costa was an excellent player added another strand to the complexities of the ever-changing situations.

Charles Hamilton always found space in these classic series to make many reflections on life. In an amusing vein, the following is worthy of consideration:

Crowds of people passed him in Lantham High Street, and not one of them cared whether Bunter was hungry or not. The heartlessness of the world was borne in sadly upon Billy Bunter's mind. It was true that he did not bother to think whether there might be anything amiss with any of the passers-by. But that, of course,

was a different matter.

In a philosophical vein, there were a number of comments about the position of the British in India, but general moral issues were seldom so clearly discussed as in this extract:

For all falsehood, though never so cunning, can never be made to look like truth; and every falsehood carries in it, somewhere and somehow, its own refutation.

The da Costa series was varied, enthralling, and astonishing in its complexity, with an inexorable development quite different from the repetitious plots of the late 'thirties. There are moments to savour, again and again, my particular favourite being the two chapters at the end when Mr. Quelch informed Mr. Mobbs that Ponsonby would leave Greyfriars in the custody of a constable. It is, in short, a simply splendid story.

* * * * *

VINTAGE CH22

by Ernest Holman

1922 - what a year for Charles Hamilton's readers!

St. Jim's opens the year in the Gem with the Levison/Cardew series concerning Dandy Carson, a character from Mr. Levison's unfortunate past. These events are followed by a series of rivalry with the Grammar School and the exploits of Wacky Dang. Then comes another series featuring the misadventures of Aubrey Racke.

In the meantime, Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood are continuing their Boys' Friend series which had started over Christmas. Due to a 'flu epidemic, the boys have remained at the school. As Mr. Manders has been left in charge, it is not difficult to imagine ructions breaking out - especially with Putty Grace on the premises. After this joker has twice disguised himself and posed before Manders as a Doctor and as a 'Mrs.' Manders, the inhabitants start to get rather fed up with the temporary Head. A rebellion develops - Jimmy Silver and Dicky Dalton are sacked by Manders - but turn up again, of course. Eventually the rebellion (like, presumably, the epidemic) fizzles out and, at the request of the returning Headmaster, Mr. Manders departs on a belated holiday.

After several substitute stories in the Magnet, Bunter of

Greyfriars now starts one of his 'visits to other schools'. During the series he looks in at St. Jim's and Rookwood, before returning home. At Rookwood, a Mr. Lucien Durie arrives as the Head's guest and Kit Erroll immediately recognises him as Slippery Smith. Durie sets out to 'take care' of Erroll. In the end, Durie is himself taken away by the authorities. At St. Jim's, Darrell of the Sixth has a young-love fixation and becomes involved in a theft. Cutts and Wildrake are also featured before the appropriate ending.

Gunner arrives at Rookwood and a long sequence of single stories evolve around this character. Now it is time for a Greyfriars rebellion. This time it concerns the Sixth form. Dr. Locke has been replaced (at the insistence of Sir Hilton Popper) by Mr. Carnforth. When the question of caning the Sixth arises, open hostilities break out and the seniors are joined by the Remove. Needless to say, Dr. Locke soon returns. At St. Jim's, Tom Merry is involved in a mystery. Rogue Rackstraw manages to imprison several boys under Wayland Mill. Kit Wildrake and Inspector Fix finally sort the whole matter out satisfactorily.

At Rookwood, Mornington is dropped from the cricket eleven. The worst aspect of this junior now reveals itself. A forged telegram and the theft of the French Master's watch bring Jimmy Silver into the forefront of the action; finally, Mornington confesses and is expelled. The scapegrace finds life at home with his Stacpoole cousins anything but rosy. He turns up at Highcliffe in time to fill a vacancy in the visiting Rookwood team - and wins the match for his former school.

Whilst all this is going on, Timothy Perkins, a footman's son, has come to Greyfriars as Algernon De Vere. As he behaves throughout as a complete snob, he is hardly missed after his brief stay. And Tom Merry & Co. ? Oh, dear, times have become very hard. Study 10, with Study 6, are stony. Gussy, in the manner of Wodehouse's Ukridge, plans a successful scheme by starting a tea room. Greedy customers (including Fatty Wynn) soon put paid to the venture. Various ways of making money all come to nothing - but Gussy has to be rescued by Lord Eastwood after 'popping his ticker'.

Harry Wharton & Co. leave Greyfriars for a summer holiday with Mauly, on board the Silver Scud, pursued by a mysterious Gideon

Gaunt. He is unmasked eventually but not before Harry Wharton has a rough time of it. Tom Merry & Co., however, seem to have overlooked holidays. They are still at St. Jim's when it becomes Gussy's turn to 'visit other schools'. He is not, however, running away - merely retiring. His retirement takes him to Greyfriars, Highcliffe, Cliff House (this includes a hair-raising encounter with Miss Bullivant), Rookwood and Rylcombe Grammar. He finally returns to put everything right, warning his friends that escaping from justice is 'not done'. He hopes that what he is saying will be a lesson to them!

Jimmy Silver & Co., having missed out on their Christmas vacation, are off on a walking tour - accompanied by a horse (Trotsky) and trap kindly loaned to them by the writer, Mr. Frank Richards. Tubby Muffin turns up; Putty Grace rescues a farmer's daughter from drowning; the walkers themselves are almost drowned by an incoming tide; then they meet up with Mornington. The latter, fed up with the Stacpooles, joins the party. Pursued by his uncle, Morny rescues his relative from danger. (An heroic series, it seems!) Morny returns home, on better terms with his uncle. Grundy & Co. of St. Jim's pop up next and have their stolen bikes retrieved by the Rookwood party. A cricket match follows and then, near the end of the holiday, the walkers narrowly miss capturing a burglar.

At Greyfriars, after the holidays, various events feature Coker, Skinner, Prout (a victim of a cure for baldness), Fisher T. Fish and Loder - the latter, as always, looking for trouble. At St. Jim's there has still been no mention of holidays and the Autumn Term is under way. So, too, is a series dealing with the circumstances surrounding Levison's 'leaving' Greyfriars some time ago. The Greyfriars characters are introduced into the stories. Trimble and Tompkins feature in the next Gems. Back at Rookwood, Jimmy Silver thinks he recognises the new football coach, Mr. Wilmot, as the burglar encountered on holiday. Wilmot is arrested but released on proving his identity. It is no great surprise when he is kidnapped by his cousin (Dandy Jim, burglar). The cousin takes Wilmot's place at school, but it all ends with Jimmy & Co. 'putting things right'.

Cardew, at St. Jim's, is in disgrace and, to recover his footing,

sponsors the Cardew Cup. Finding himself having to 'raise the wind', after Grandfather's refusal to foot the bill, R.R.C. pawns a valuable tie-pin in order to purchase the necessary trophy. (During this series, the Gem was enlarged and began its famous era in red, white and blue covers.) Unlike St. Jim's, who have forsaken the idea of holidays, the Greyfriars boys are about to embark on yet another trip. Bob Cherry's relative, Captain Corkran, is off to the Congo in search of ivory treasure. Harry Wharton & Co. join him, along with Bunter - the latter required to give ventriloquial voice to a native idol. Bunter is captured by a native but ends up as Chief of the Tribe. The Autumn Term is nearly over by the time they all return. (During this series, the Magnet was also enlarged, to start on its long run with orange and blue covers.)

During the later stages of the Autumn Term, Jimmy Silver & Co. are intrigued to discover that Mornington is 'haunting' the school, yet cannot be found. A new Bootboy, Sandy Smacke, is suspected of knowing something about the matter because of the similarity of his voice to the missing junior. When Smacke thwarts school intruders and is struck down, his hair comes off! Underneath is 'you-known-who'. Morny, of course, rejoins his chums as a Rookwood junior. (Boys' Friend was also enlarged during this series.)

The year is drawing to its close. St. Jim's stories feature, briefly, Trimble, Cousin Ethel and Gussy. Then, to complete a full year at St. Jim's without a holiday, Tom Merry & Co. decided to 'stay put'. It is now their turn for a rebellion - and the Christmas Barring-Out series starts, to be continued in the following year. At Greyfriars, Harry Wharton & Co. are invited to make their first visit to Mauleverer Towers for Christmas. Bunter, left out of the invitation, offers to join Gussy of St. Jim's at Eastwood House for the vacation. When he rings that worthy, however, Gussy informs him that he can come along if he likes - and join the St. Jim's Barring-Out! Bunter declines, although in subsequent stories in the Gem series he does 'drop in'. At the Towers, the rascally Brian Mauleverer makes his first appearance; and, for the last time, there is no Bunter for Christmas. The Rookwood boys start off for their holiday with a visit to Jimmy Silver's home, where they begin the adventure of the Phantom of the Priory.

Sixty years ago - a Charles Hamilton vintage year.

REVIEW

"HARRY WHARTON'S BANK HOLIDAY"

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker Special)

Back to the glorious Edwardian era, of which Charles Hamilton commented, with truth, "It was a splendid age in which to live".

For us, it is a distant age; another world; but what a grand setting for Frank Richards at his superbly inconsequential and light-hearted best.

This volume contains ten of the halfpenny red-covered Magnets from the year 1909, and it is a glorious treat for all and everyone. Beautifully produced, it just could not be bettered. Charles Hamilton, in 1909, was pouring his longer and well-knitted stories into the Gem, and it is clear that he used the Magnet for relaxation. Writing for the Magnet then was a sheer joy for him, and it is a joy for us, all these years later.

The opening story "The Barring of Bulstrode" is the only one with a serious plot. Bulstrode was an excellent character study in his day, and we often have wondered why he was discarded by his creator after early times. The rest of the yarns are just joyous fun, to be enjoyed over and over again.

"The Greyfriars Photographer" shows Bunter in a new role, and "The Greyfriars Caravan" is an atmospheric period piece to lighten the hours. "The Greyfriars Camp" continues with the same theme.

"The Tenants of Study 13" is the first story to introduce that famous apartment, with Wun Lung playing his charming part, as he often did at this period of time. "Billy Bunter, Editor!" shows Bunter starting a school magazine "Bunter's Weekly". This was before the Owl forgot how to spell, and was able to master King Edward the Seventh's English. A good deal more credible than later times when he wrote on the blackboard "Sorry, sir, I've gone dumm."

"Harry Wharton's Bank Holiday" is full of delight, and introduces Arthur Augustus of St. Jim's and his brother, and contains the famous but unlikely sequence where Gussy goes in a barber's shop for a shave. "Harry Wharton's Eleven" is a cricket story, while the final tale "Boy Scouts from the 'Faderland'" makes fun of the excitable Germans and their attempts to speak English. It would horrify the do-gooders of today who think they can write better than Frank Richards did, but it is one long gurgle of fun for ordinary folk like us.

Part of the joy of this beautiful volume is the artistry of Arthur Clarke - old fashioned, even then, but packed with character and charm. In those days, Clarke was nearly as much a glorious part of the Magnet's delight as Frank Richards was himself.

A lovely, lovely book, for everyone. But, then, I said that before.

* * * * *
GEM No. 1498, "The Last Laugh". Completely readable, but pages ink-stained. Free for postage only. No reply if already disposed of. Drop a line to:-

ERIC FAYNE

MRS. BLYTHE SAYS "THANK YOU!"

Mrs. Louise Blythe is still suffering from the strain of long weeks sitting by Bob's bedside. Now he has been called away, she has received a mountain of letters of sympathy.

Much as Louie would like to reply personally to everyone who wrote, it is an impossibility to do so.

Mrs. Blythe, and Mr. Robert Blythe Jnr. and the family, take this opportunity to thank all who wrote to them in their sorrow. The letters, carrying so much love and tenderness, were a great source of comfort at this sad time. Thank you, all of you, who wrote.

* * * * *

News of the Old Boys' Book Clubs

LONDON

There was an air of sadness at the Walthamstow gathering which became more poignant when Mary Cadogan read out Eric Fayne's editorial tribute to our Bob Blythe from the January issue of the C.D. Other tributes were expressed and it was agreed to set up a memorial fund to honour the two co-founders of the London Club, Bob Blythe and Len Packman. It was agreed to award honours to those hobbyists and collectors who had done good work for the hobby in general. As regards the Nelson Lee section of the club library, one and all will be notified in due course as to who will take over.

The recent columns in the Times newspaper re the old and new Bunter books and a good letter from Gyles Brandeth were read out and discussed.

Eric Lawrence won Miriam Bruning's quiz.

Horace Owen, Josie Packman and Chris Harper were the joint winners of Laurie Sutton's unique quiz.

A fine discourse on Tiger Tim was rendered by Mary Cadogan which she illustrated with many specimens of Rainbow, Playbox and Jack and Jill to mention a few. Mary's Radio Times piece produced a

letter from a lady who met Angela Brazil. To Evelyn B. Flinders, the illustrator, Mary had sent a copy of the Gem Companion.

Ray Hopkins read some more chapters from Union Jack 894. A good attendance and what we would like to see at the 35th Annual General Meeting on Sunday, 13th February, in the historic room at 27 Archdale Road, East Dulwich S.E.22. Tea will be available, but bring own tuck.

BEN WHITER

NORTHERN

Meeting held: Saturday, 8th January, 1983

The first meeting of the new year, saw eleven Members attending, on a mild and pleasant evening. A slight problem did encounter us, though: we found that we could not gain entry to our normal meeting place - a technical "hitch" somewhere along the line!

The success of the Christmas meeting was recalled - one of our best gatherings, ever.

Harry Barlow had brought along an epidioscope, and conducted a quiz on famous faces. Although not directly related to hobby interests, it was certainly light relief.

The evening seemed to be plagued by technical hitches: we found we had no access to kitchen facilities - so Members had to do without refreshments!

Keith Atkinson had brought along one of his word games, which he is particularly clever at devising. Being given mixed up letters, each person had to get as many character names in our hobby papers, as possible. The game was not concluded - time had gone so quickly, that it had to be left over for some future meeting.

One of the items on our programme for February, will be a showing of the "Water Lily" slides. During September 1982, five O.B.B.C. Members embarked on a week's trip on the Thames, following as near as possible the route of the Greyfriars boys in "Six Boys In A Boat". This will be an interesting evening and a welcome is given to all. We meet next on 12th February at the Swarthmore Education Centre, Leeds 3.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

CAMBRIDGE

The Club met at the home of Edward Witten on Sunday, 9th January. In the absence of Vic Hearn, who to the regret of members was still unwell, Mike Rouse was in the chair.

Mike entertained the company with a wonderful series of slides of Seaside Concert Parties along the East coast. He covered among other seaside resorts: North Berwick; Roker; Sunderland; Whitby; Scarborough; Filey; Cromer; Mundesley; Yarmouth; Southwold; Lowestoft; Southend; Westcliff; and among companies and artistes Adeler & Suttons; Pierrots; Pelliesers Follies; Will Catlin; The Cooptimists (with Stanley Holloway); The Fol de Rols; Max Miller at Doncaster; the Merry Arcadians; Webster Booth; Elsie and Doris Waters; Clarkson Rose; Lesley Henson; he talked about the difficulties under which some companies worked, "bottling" the crowd - collecting from among the watchers who had not paid for chairs - the difficulties arising from higher than usual tides or storms and also showed some nostalgic photographs of now lost Piers.

After enjoying Edwards tea, Keith Hodkinson talked about the rise of the paperback books. In the 19th century there had been firms like Routledge and Sampson Low who had produced cheap literature and editions; for example 6d. editions of Jules Verne. An 1880 edition of "Tom Browns Schooldays" in paperback; the paperback "libraries" of the early 1900's such as the "Aldines"; the Boys' Friend Library, etc., American "dime novels", and other such products. Finally, the paperback edition of Jack Overhill's "The Snob", which has been described as the "finest working-class novel ever written". Jack talked about this book, and his other ventures into literature, being, as always, intensely interesting.

The meeting broke up with a warm vote of thanks to Edward for his hospitality.

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FOR SALE/EXCHANGE: Magnets Nos. 1351-1683. Good condition (only one with taped spine). Best offer or would exchange for Champions, H. B. re-prints (Magnet) or Cigarette Cards.

G. HOARE, 13 BURNSIDE, WITTON GILBERT, DURHAM, DH7 6SE

The Postman Called

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

DAVID HOBBS (Seattle): Recently while reading Magnet 249 I was attracted by an advert for the enlarged Christmas Number of Pluck - "the finest double number ever published" writes the Editor. He further advises: " . . . Go to your newsagent . . . order half a dozen copies, keep one for yourself, and send the others to your chums abroad; they'll like it better than a Christmas card, and the postage will be no more." I wonder how many did this!

F. STURDY (Middlesborough): Recently I read "The Housemaster's Mistake". After the first chapter I was inclined to join the "sub" lobby, albeit a very good sub-writer. From then on there was no mistaking the hand of Hamilton. Probably the first chapter was attempted some Monday morning or following a row with someone, or, more probably, twinges connected with age, like his form-master's usually had. Verdict (in my opinion): Definitely Hamilton - and one of his best single stories. Plot excellent.

J. P. H. HOBSON (Reigate): I was looking at the Christmas issue for December 1963 (No. 204) and allowed myself the pleasure of reading the short Greyfriars story "Penalty for Improper Use" before going to sleep. No author of the story is given. It made me wonder whether we could have some more short stories like this in C.D. Why not a competition for the best story, and then publish the best efforts? It would certainly be pleasant always to have one in the Christmas issue, as we did in 1963. Could we have Hamiltoniana back as a definite section?

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: "Penalty for Improper Use" was an Eric Fayne story, written in his salad days. We had a competition on one occasion years ago, and published some of the efforts, but I would doubt whether the average reader would be keen on much of that sort of thing. However, we will think about it. A special slot for Hamilton would really seem a bit unnecessary. After all, the Hamilton glow is evident over the magazine every month.)

GORDON HUDSON (Ouston): I was interested in your recent Editorial on Talbot Baines Reed. I have acquired a few of his books in recent years. I think "My Friend Smith" is a great story; I read "The

Willoughby Captains" earlier in 1982. I think it a pity that, of all Reed's fine stories, only "St. Dominic's" can be found on the shelves of public libraries.

I was interested in Mary Cadogan's notes on the B.O.P. book, "Take a Cold Tub". Just after I read that I saw the book in a Newcastle shop and next to it was a new book on Edwardian songs. One of them was Down the Vale with words by Gunby Hadath. I was interested in the notes on each song but disagreed with one line that said although Gunby Hadath had written over 200 songs he was now completely forgotten. This you will agree is completely wrong for although many nowadays may not know his songs, except for Down the Vale, anyone interested in either the B.O.P. or school stories generally must remember the name with affection. I think this seems to be typical of some of the sweeping statements that some authors make without knowing all the facts.

F. J. OAK (London): Reading through Blakiana recently reminded me of days gone by. I was born and brought up within a stone's throw of Baker Street - as a lad I delivered newspapers (yes, and Gems and Magnets, too) in that famous road and the surrounding area. As a distraction we would search round in an endeavour to find the house where Sexton Blake lived. Little did I dream that in fifty years time I would still be reading articles about him.

A. S. MATHESON (Wick): This year's C.D. Annual is a delight from start to finish. It amazes me every year how you manage to pack such a variety of lovely reading between the covers, and this year's is another winner - a delight from start to finish. Although it is invidious to select any article as better than the others, I especially enjoyed "Hilda and Miss Timms"; also Jack Overhill's article (which brings back memories of earlier similar ones in early Annuals by old Herbert), and, of course, this year's Mr. Buddle tale. I think I found it to be one of the most enjoyable of all the Slade stories down the years.

ESMOND KADISH (London): I can't say I agree with Victor Giles that Johnny Bull was mad to have destroyed Professor Sparkinson's elixir at the end of the "Strong Man Alonzo" series. It would have been quite in keeping with Johnny's character and the professed ethics of the

'thirties - Not Quite Sporting or Playing the Game to have kept the elixir. Besides, "reformers" like Alonzo, and idiots like Bunter, usually open the door to more sinister and less scrupulous characters. Mind you, as the smallest boy in my class in the early 'thirties, I could have done with a drop or two of the Professor's liquid. Come to think of it, I could still do so. If any of your readers know of the present whereabouts of Professor Sparkinson, they might let me know. He's bound to be still alive and active, owing to the powerful, rejuvenating qualities of his new, improved elixir!

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Was the Strong Alonzo series really a "Fantasy" at all? One reads of competitors in the Olympic Games being tested to make sure that they are not under the influence of drugs - are they named "steroids"? - to give them abnormal staying power and strength. Aren't those drugs very similar to the Professor's elixir? The beauty of the Strong Alonzo series - often overlooked - was in the superb characterisation, with the weedy reformer, when he gets the chance, taking advantage of his abnormal strength to further his own ideas.)

Mrs. BETTY HOPTON (Burton-on-Trent): I am writing to say how much I enjoyed the 1982 C.D. Annual. I particularly enjoyed the School Story. What a lovable character Mr. Buddle is! I was absolutely entranced with the Slade School Story. Please let's have lots more of Mr. Buddle. Could we, perhaps, have a serial in the monthly C.D. It's great!

D. LANG (Glasgow): I completely concur that the best place to spend Christmas is at home with the family. I was fortunate to be able to do so myself, and in the train on Christmas Eve I dipped into the seasonal items in the Annual. I very much like the cover, and am looking forward to reading the Buddle story without which it would not be complete. In addition, I can only say that, for myself, the Annual would not be complete without the personal touch of the Introduction. It sums up the spirit of the whole.

It is hard to believe that the Annual has been coming along every Christmas for 36 years. Since I first began getting the C.D. in my 3rd year at school it has seemed to have always been part of my life when I look back. In fact, this year I will have been reading C.D. for half my

life - a thought!

(And it makes me feel very, very mature - nay, over-ripe. - ED.)

LAURIE SUTTON (Orpington): Re your notes on the January "Danny's Diary" about modern film titles, just before Christmas I was on a bus that stopped close to what was once the Lewisham Gaumont - later, the Odeon, now an empty shell. On the other side of the road was a seedy sex cinema, and my 8-year-old daughter spotted the name of the film in the title frame:

"Look, daddy! Flesh Gordon! I wonder if they mean Flash Gordon?" Luckily she accepted my explanation: "Yes. Some silly person has got the letters mixed up, hasn't he?"

We later passed what was once the grand edifice of the Trocadero - now cut down to size, and renamed the "Coronet".

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TOPICAL TIMES

by Denis Gifford

Topical Times has always intrigued me, ever since I bought a copy around 1937 or so, thinking it was a boys' story paper I had not previously stumbled across. I remember reading the detective story, but that was about all I did read, the rest being far too sport-oriented for my taste. I don't think I bought a second copy of the paper until it had long ceased to exist. I obtained a small batch from a local second-hand bookshop, and was immediately intrigued by its curious combination of fact and fiction, pools forecasts, jokes, cartoons, and short stories - all with that unmistakable D. C. Thomson imprint. I have been collecting the paper over the years, and my intrigue deepens with my research. The "grand free gifts" ranging from photographs of sporting personalities, to excellent booklets, not only on sporting matters, but of jokes, wireless stars, and other subjects. Also, the incorporation of another Thomson failure, RADIO REVIEW, which led to a centre supplement which ran for a long time. (It is a set of this series I would particularly like to acquire, being something of a well-known radio fan!) And, of course, a lot of the boys' paper artists illustrated the stories, including Dudley Watkins in his early years.

Bill Lofts' recent item about TOPICAL TIMES can stand a

little correcting, however. The paper did not cease at the end of 1939, but ran continually through until 25th May, 1940, issue number 1071. I know, because in my collection I have both the first and last editions! The last issue has a typical Thomson closure notice of the period: "Owing to the acute paper shortage, it has been decided to suspend publication for duration of the war ..." etc., etc. The promise of a postwar revival was not, however, kept, except that Thomson did eventually revive the title as a Christmas annual. The paper seems to have been incorporated with The Weekly News, as this is recommended as a source for future prizes of five bob for readers' jokes, and the continuation of a series of War Commentaries begun in TOPICAL TIMES by Lord Strabolgi.

Incidentally, I am compiling a detailed index to TOPICAL TIMES and its giveaways, for a future issue of COMIC CUTS (subscription £5 per annum, if you'll pardon my plug!).

* * * * *

LOOKING BACK ON "DANNY'S DIARY"

(from C.D. Feb. 1963)

Extract from February 1913

One evening Dad brought me home two comics, and I liked the pictures which were very good and funny. But the stories were amazing, and for adults. A comic called "Merry & Bright" had a very heavy serial called "Life" and Mum read the instalment and was interested. The other comic "The Jester" had a serial entitled "The Iron Conqueror" about Napoleon and his sweet, sad Josephine. I don't think any boy could enjoy that story.

Mr. G. A. Hutchinson, editor of the Boys' Own Paper ever since it started, has died. I suppose he must have been an old gentleman, for the B.O.P. is an old paper. Doug says the B.O.P. will pack up now, for it couldn't continue without Mr. Hutchinson. But Dad said: "Don't you believe it, boy. Nobody is indispensable."

Doug had an interesting Boys' Friend 3d. Library this month. It was "Beyond the Eternal Ice" by Sidney Drew, which once was in the Magnet as a serial. I don't like Mr. Drew's stories, but Doug kind of gurgles over them. I think they are too silly for words.

