

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 206. THE END OF THE SILVER TRAIL

Fifty years ago, as Danny reminds us in his Diary this month, the Rookwood stories came to a close in the Boys' Friend. They had been running for eleven years, and there can be no doubt of their popularity, not only then, but right down to the present time.

I have, of course, discussed the matter before, but one could not let this anniversary pass without returning to the subject briefly.

There are different views as to whether Rookwood ended on account of an editorial decision or whether Owen Conquest decided that enough was enough. My personal view, as I have said before, is that it was an editorial decision. I do not believe that Hamilton himself would have deliberately cut off a source of a good income. I see no reason why he should have done, and I don't believe that he would have done.

For at least six months, there had been very marked signs of change in the old green paper. The presentation was different. The type of story offered was different. The four-column lay-out replaced the five-column one, and from that moment one sensed that change was in the air. Whether it was change for the sake of change, or whether the circulation was causing uneasiness so a change was regarded as essential we do not know. But with the end of April 1926, all the old series had gone, and now the Boys' Friend was to adopt an entirely new programme which would make it "the greatest paper in the world". The new Boys' Friend was to last for 20 months after Rookwood departed. A sad anti-climax.

As we mentioned last month, Wakefield, who had illustrated Rookwood in the Boys' Friend for about 8 years, departed from that paper at the end of March. Rookwood lasted another 4 weeks, illustrated by an unknown artist.

The series in which Lovell fell out with his closest friends and became junior captain was wound up abruptly, to be followed by a couple of single tales featuring Tubby Muffin - a couple of tales which may have been kept for emergency in the editorial office.

And, as I have previously commented, Rookwood was never

mentioned again in the pages of the Boys' Friend. It was remarkable that a series which had run for eleven years should disappear without trace from the paper. Surely some readers must have written in to the editor and asked: "What about some more Rookwood?" But if any reader actually wrote in that way, the editor never referred to it.

Hamilton wrote very little more about Rookwood at all. And nothing that was memorable. Rookwood, of course, went into the Gem for a time, later on, in serials and complete tales, but they were mostly by some substitute writer.

After the war there was the book length story "The Rivals of Rookwood" which was competent and readable, without having any quality which caused it to remain in the memory. And in the post-war Annuals, not to mention one or two monster books put out to cash in on the Christmas trade, there were a few little pot-boilers on Rookwood which never registered.

The later days of Rookwood in the Boys' Friend were rather marred with too much Lovell. He was starred constantly, but, like Coker, though one loved him, he became a bore in over-large doses.

Not so very many years earlier, there had been that curious hiatus in the Rookwood saga when the Fistical Four were transferred to a ranch in the Wild West in a series of first class tales which lasted for the best part of a year. The four eventually returned, and the saga was resumed, though I thought that Rookwood was never quite the same again.

In the post Wild West period, there were two thoroughly good and memorable series, original in plot at that time. They were the delightful set when Mr. Greeley became Head of his own school, and the charming summer series concerning the paying guests on Captain Muffin's floating boarding-house. The latter was slightly marred with too much Lovell.

Somehow it was a curious error of judgment on the part of Hamilton that he set about grooming Lovell to be the star comedian in the same way that he made the mistake of overplaying a comic Gussy in the latter-day St. Jim's. Probably he was seeking another kind of star after the manner of his prime creation, Billy Bunter.

So Rookwood ended in the Boys' Friend, and to all intents and

purposes it was the end of the saga. But Rookwood was re-living its life in the Popular, and it could be that it was even more successful in that format where no pruning was ever necessary. And a few more years further on, when the Rookwood tales ran to their end in the Popular, that glorious old paper met its end at the same time.

One of the most satisfactory aspects of the Rookwood story in the Boys' Friend, which is the only part of Rookwood which matters, is that the substitute writers had but few fingers in the pie. Something like a dozen of the Boys' Friend Rookwood tales were by the subs. All the rest came in a competent and usually memorable stream from the creator of the school.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT. Long-standing readers of Collectors' Digest now have the entire Rookwood saga in the Boys' Friend covered critically and by title in Danny's Diary. It occurs to me that plenty of our readers might find it interesting and useful to have Danny's survey of Rookwood, with all his comments on every Rookwood story, gathered together and published in booklet-form, together, perhaps, with some of our leading articles on Rookwood. If you like the idea, drop me a line, and we will try to get it out in the Autumn.)

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SCOTT AND HAMILTON

EDWARD SABIN writes: In the February "C.D." Roger Jenkins stated that Charles Hamilton had only a contempt for Scott's characters.

In the March issue of "C.D.", Wm. Thurbon says, "I wish Roger would elaborate on this".

Well Sir, I would like to put a point of view about this. Has Roger forgotten that in 1908 the young Mr. Hamilton, (he would I think, have been 32 then) not only adopted the first name of Scott's Frank Osbaldistone, but insisted in using it for the rest of his life (about 53 years).

It is still the name by which we know him in 1976!

Not much contempt there Roger! Again, we are told in "The World of Frank Richards", that when only 11 years old, he could recite by heart, the whole of Scott's "Lay of the Last Minstrel". A fantastic feat that, considering the length of that poem. Only a great love and regard for a great author there.

There were in Scott's "Rob Roy", eight Osbaldistone's in all.

No. 63. THE ICONOCLAST

Nobody seems to know whether the present publishers of the Bunter books intend to continue the series with new stories from a substitute writer. It appears that in early 1963 we shall see one new story by Charles Hamilton, and later in the year the story on which he was at work at the time of his death. Apparently this story has been finished off by another writer.

The keen Greyfriars fan is perturbed at the idea of the series being continued by a substitute writer. With the memory of substitute writers in the past, we wonder what kind of a picture Greyfriars may present in a few years' time.

I suggest that it was by no means the most gifted writers who necessarily wrote the most successful substitute stories. By which I mean that a man might be a fine author and yet be incapable of writing a Greyfriars or St. Jim's story which was acceptable to the keen fan.

There is a great temptation for the substitute writer to introduce his own characters and his own settings to make the series his own. And if a man destroys tradition, as he is tempted to do, his work will not be acceptable to those who may know Greyfriars better than he does.

This urge on the part of any substitute writer is human and understandable. He is using another man's characters and another man's reputation. The temptation to introduce change and thereby make the series partly his own, must be irresistible. Yet I think it fatal to submit to this temptation.

A reader, whose letter appeared in our "Yours Sincerely" section, spoke in glowing terms of the Cliff House stories written by John Wheway. Our reader referred to the many changes introduced by Wheway, and how "he made Bessie Bunter an entirely different character." I doubt whether our reader would have found himself holding a majority opinion.

As a youngster I read and enjoyed perhaps the first hundred or so School Friend stories. Years later I came on Cliff House again, and I found it unrecognisable. So many old characters dropped; so many new ones introduced; so much change for the sake of change. Worst fault of all, a boys' school was introduced near Cliff House, and this school provided the boy friends of the Cliff House girls. Stupidly enough, Greyfriars was never even mentioned in the Cliff House stories.

No doubt Mr. Wheway was happy. He had made the series his own. But at what cost to the circulation of his paper we shall never know. We only know that Cliff House, as a separate entity, did not long survive

Mr. Wheway.

Many of the substitute writers introduced their own characters and tried hard to make them popular. Mr. G.R. Samways took over the Greyfriars stories in the Penny Popular, reborn after the first world war. In many ways, I think Mr. Samways the most successful of all the substitute writers, for he knew his Greyfriars, and he tried hard to imitate the Hamilton style. But in the "Popular" stories, Mr. Samways introduced a character, Dennis Carr, who was starred for quite a long time. Naturally Mr. Samways had a soft spot in his heart for Dennis Carr. Equally naturally, there must have been a hard core of readers who found Carr a blot on the landscape. The Carr stories had a good run, but they stopped with a sudden jerk, to be replaced with the old Red Magnet stories.

A while back I was criticised for having led readers up the garden path in a very early Annual article by suggesting that Mr. E.S. Brooks wrote most of the Gen stories between 1926 and mid-1931. Said my critic: "Now we hear that Francis Warwick was generally responsible for most of the stories in this period."

In my reply I pointed out that, during the period in question, early 300 stories appeared in the Gen, and it could still be a fallacy to assume that Francis Warwick wrote most of them.

In Blakiana recently, Mr. W.O.G. Lofts contributed an article which showed that Mr. Warwick actually wrote 41 stories for the Gen.

Not a lot of stories, comparatively, but what a lot of change Mr. Warwick brought about. Spalding Hall, a girl's school was put down near St. Jim's and Cousin Ethel went there as a pupil. The Spalding Hall pupils became the girl friends of Tom Merry & Co. Mr. Lofts tells us that Bully Burkett and Cyrus Handcock came from Mr. Warwick's pen. So it was Mr. Warwick who now wrote of Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther and Handcock, the chums of study No. 10.

It appears to have been yet another substitute writer who swept away Mr. Linton, and replaced him with the ill-fated Mr. Pilbeam.

Mr. Warwick was undoubtedly an excellent writer in his own sphere - but he was not a good substitute writer. When my History of the Gen comparatively recently, appeared in the Annual, I did not know who wrote the stories, but I passed the opinion that the writer of the Spalding Hall and Handcock stories was the worst of all the substitute writers - not because he was inexpert with his pen, but because he destroyed tradition. I still think the same.

It is quite likely that any substitute writer, who takes over the modern Bunter series, may not face quite the same perils as the old

sub writers in the Magnet. I think it likely that hard-cover books rely more for their sales on casual purchasers, and less on the support of the loyal and true. It may well be that a new sub writer can be an iconoclast - and get away with it. We of the old brigade can only hope for the best.

It's just my point of view. What's yours?

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CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

NO. 62, THE IDOL

EDWARD THOMSON: I, too, feel that the O.B.B.C. would never have been heard of, had it not been for the beloved tales of Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood. Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee, good as they were, would only have been pleasant memories of our boyhood and not quite good enough to have formed the "Brotherhood of Happy Hours" as dear old Herbert Leckenby called the movement.

JIM HEPBURN: I was with Frank Shaw almost all the way and have felt for a long while that many of our fraternity allow too much sentiment to sway their judgment of the literary value of the work of our beloved Frank Richards. However much Frank loved writing, his work was all on a commercial basis - words and time meant money - and no author could saddle himself with the burden of so many thousand words per week and expect to reach the pinnacle of writers such as Dickens, Haggard or Conan Doyle. Frank was a great writer in his sphere - his characters were all so much alive, and in our day, when reading took up so much leisure time, we grew to love them all.

The nostalgia this keeps alive is understandable, but I still think that we should keep an "even keel" and try to understand that writers like Frank Shaw are writing what they think and not being unfair, or have any intention of upsetting or incurring the wrath of members of the O.B.B.C.

(Our Controversial column has claimed that Frank Richards was Second to None in his own sphere. It has never compared his work with that of Dickens, Haggard or Conan Doyle, for the simple reason that no comparison is possible. All were supreme in their own line. So far as commercial basis goes - what other basis has any professional writer? - E.F.)

CLIFF SMITH: I know that I've a lot for which to thank Charles Hamilton. He entertained and instructed me during my formative years - God bless him. I'm sure that nobody can assess the impact for good he had on the youth of the last fifty years.

MAY LYNE: The battle with Frank Shaw is vastly entertaining; he writes well, and with such good sense; but I think this round goes to you.

MISS E. J. PATE: Three rousing Aussie cheers for Controversial No. 62. I was delighted with your rapier-sharp arguments. Bravo and Viva for your fair-minded outlook.

ARTHUR HOLLAND: For any reader to see idolatry behind your suggestion relating to Charles Hamilton's secrecy regarding his youthful background is absurd. Such a reader fails to distinguish between idolatry and loyalty. I agree wholeheartedly with your suggestion that we should respect Charles Hamilton's wish in this matter.

Whilst he was alive, I looked upon him as a friend of 50 years' standing, who brought much pleasure into my life through the medium of his pen. The high moral tone of

HAMILTONIANA

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 65. THE FOUR HORSEMEN

We all had our likes and dislikes among the various types of stories. A student of character might get a comprehensive knowledge of us - of our intelligence and our personalities - if he could glean from us particulars of our tastes in the old stories.

Tom Hopperton disliked stories of missing heirs, of ventriloquism, and of impersonators. He should then, like St. Jim's better than Greyfriars or Rookwood, for the Gem presented much less of that sort of thing. Offhand, I cannot remember any missing heir story in the Gem. There were plenty at Greyfriars and Rookwood. It is difficult to decide which was the best of them. The Mornington-'Erbert series was maybe the most charming and touching, though it often fringed on melodrama and today there is a scent of old lavender about it. The Flip series is memorable for the affection which the little waif had for Billy Bunter. It contained so many first-class tales.

I never cared for the Skip series. It was typical of the latter-day Magnet and had its moments. It was written with great competence even though, for me, it lacked something which some of the earlier series had possessed.

I think that, possibly, Tom Hopperton was a trifle hard on the missing heir theme, though I agreed with much of what he wrote. With missing heirs, ventriloquists, and impersonators, one had to suspend credulity - but one had to do that when reading most of the stories which we enjoyed in our youth. With the missing heir theme one had to swallow so much coincidence and contrivance.

Most of us enjoyed Bunter as a ventriloquist. But once again, if we didn't like ventriloquists we could turn to St. Jim's which has no resident voice-thrower. Rookwood had Van Ryn, though we heard nothing of his powers after the first few years of Rookwood.

All three schools had their impersonation stories. Kerr was supposed to have a gift as an impersonator in many tales. But it was, of course, Wibley of Greyfriars who made that type of story entirely

his own.

I think it is fairly certain that the average reader liked the stories on any of these themes. In fact, down the years in the Magnet there were so many tales of missing heirs, ventriloquism and impersonation that one would hardly have become a regular reader at all of the Magnet if one did not take such stories in one's stride.

The secret of it all was in the way the stories were told. Charles Hamilton wrote so well that he could make even the ridiculous seem feasible. But, in the hands of a writer without his gifts, even a good plot would have amounted to nothing.

The Strong Alonzo series was sheer fantasy. Yet so well was it told, so brilliant were some of the character etchings it contained, that it became an immensely readable series. I have read it many times, and never cease to enjoy it. However, Strong Alonzo stood alone. It was never rehashed as was the missing heir theme.

Any series had an advantage if it was not predictable by the reader. The missing heir theme was usually obvious from the start, even though, as in the Skip series, it covered eight stories in the telling.

The last of Mr. Hopperton's pet aversions was the school cowboy, and here I am with him all the way. In this instance, the Gem was the main culprit. In the early twenties, Wildrake was introduced to an already overcrowded stage. He was the last new permanent character to be introduced at St. Jim's, and, along with Mr. Hopperton, I should have been happier without him. Why he was ever introduced is a mystery, even though Charles Hamilton may have foreseen that travel series in the Wild West in the Gem a few years later.

In any case, St. Jim's already had Buck Finn, though we saw little of him down the years.

Of Mr. Hopperton's Four Horsemen, I think I liked the school cowboy the least of all. I think we should have lost nothing if he had never been invented. But though I think the missing heir was plugged to death and he often gave me a pain in the neck, I still think we should have lost some worthwhile stories without him, or the ventriloquist, or the impersonator.

It's just my point of view! What's yours?

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WE REMEMBER CLIFF HOUSE

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOS No. 51.

THE ICONOCLAST

It has happened before occasionally, and no doubt it will happen again. Readers

of Larry Inscelles of Greyfriars, whose earlier arrival was later reprinted under the same title in the Schoolboys' Own Library - "The Fighting Form-Master". Their introductions to their respective schools were very similar. Each rendered a service to the headmaster, as a result of which the unsavoury past was forgotten. The Rookwood version certainly wins on the score of sheer entertainment. An old boy came back to horsewhip the headmaster, and only Mr. Dalton was effective in preventing the threatened indignity.

Dicky Dalton was a bright and breezy young man of twenty-five who make a striking contrast with the other prominent middle-aged members of Dr. Chisholm's staff. He was keen and penetrating, a symbol of the new age after the first World War. But I am perverse. I would rather read about the shy, hesitating, lovable Mr. Bootles at any time.

Let's Be Controversial

No. 66: THE VITAL SPARK

Throughout the life of the Magnet Charles Hamilton presented readers of the paper with first-class stories - classics of their type. Tales of school life, or tales of schoolboy adventure. His style changed as the years flowed by, but his competence never varied. There was perhaps no single year in the paper's existence without something outstanding in stories - some milestone.

I have never disguised my opinion that Charles Hamilton was at the peak of his powers between, roughly, the years 1927 and 1934. Those intermediate years are notable, not only for the sudden upsurge in quality but for the remarkable consistency he maintained.

From 1934 onwards the competence was always evident, but the charm lessened. The Vital Spark was missing.

If it seems that I am suggesting that some deterioration took place, that deterioration is only evident in comparison with Charles Hamilton's own work. I firmly believe that if he had written nothing but the stories of the later Magnet, he would still be the world's greatest writer of school stories.

The Vital Spark was missing - or at least dimmed - but there were also changes. The series became a number of tales, all almost complete in themselves, in which the basic plot was not developed. In the Carter series, Carter wished to discredit Bunter, and each story told how he tried some trick and failed. Tracey wanted to leave Greyfriars, and each story told how he tried to bring it about and failed. The individual stories were excellent, but the drumming on one theme week after week involved the risk of tedium.

The Carter series was loosely based on the Da Costa series, but how different the two series were. The plot of the Da Costa series unfolded and developed, with amazing atmosphere of the cricket term; we saw the gradual change in the character of Da Costa under the spell of Greyfriars, the whole giant tale working up to a magnificent climax. The Carter series was static throughout.

A reader could pick up and be quite satisfied with any one story of the Carter series. But anyone reading one tale in the middle of the Da Costa series would not be

satisfied until he discovered what had gone before and what came after.

In what Roger Jenkins has so rightly termed the Golden Age of the Magnet, Charles Hamilton wrote with ease and obvious personal enjoyment. Magnetic charm flowed unceasingly in the stories. The writer seemed to have no care in the world.

I think the stories of the later Magnet were less effortless. Is it possible that school stories in general were losing some of their popularity, and some anxiety found its way into the author's mind? Or was he getting a trifle weary of a lifetime with school stories? I think both possibilities are unlikely. It could be, of course, that editorial policy now required the type of series in which each story was more or less complete in itself. But that would still leave certain aspects of the matter unexplained.

Just why was that Vital Spark lost? It seems to me that there is an obvious explanation.

The editor of the Magnet once said that a panel of men thought out basic skeleton plots which were submitted to the author to be written up into stories. There is nothing belittling to Mr. Hamilton in this. These plots would have been nothing without the skill of a brilliant writer to turn them into little masterpieces which could be read and read again with keen enjoyment. But the gifted author, without having to bother about the plot question, could pour all his skill, charm and imagination into his writing.

In my opinion there is no doubt at all that this panel existed for a long time, for common-sense tells us that it must have done. We know, and marvel at, Charles Hamilton's enormous weekly output. Our minds boggle at the drudgery at the typewriter, day after day, week after week, year after year. Just why did he condemn himself to this life of slavery at the machine? Was it for the financial reward? Or was it the dedication of a man inspired? Whatever the reason, we were the lucky ones. We reaped the harvest of his labour.

I contend that his enormous output, combined with quality, would have been a sheer impossibility if he had been obliged to think up all his plots as well as write his splendid stories. Even the most gifted writer has to pause while he thinks out his plots. And we know that Charles Hamilton never paused.

I believe that in the later years of the Magnet the panel system for supplying a proportion of the plots was abandoned, possibly at the author's own wish. Did he then have to supply all his own plots round which to weave his stories? Was this the reason why a plot which would have been covered in two or three stories in earlier times was now spread out to great length in the later Magnet so that some series overstayed their welcome? Was this why so many of the old plots were given a fresh airing in later days? I think it was. And I think that, in the turmoil for searching out his own plots and making them last as long as possible, our gifted writer lost a little of that Vital Spark.

Nowhere was the change more evident than in the travel series. The South Seas series of 1937 had its moments of greatness, but it is small beer when placed beside the earlier South Seas series with its impeccable atmosphere, its plot development, and the general charm of its writing. Let us place the Texas Series of 1937 beside the China Series if we have any doubt that some deterioration took place.

The most vivid contrast can be seen between the Victor Cleeve stories (the last series which Charles Hamilton wrote for the Gem until 1939), and the Silverson Series. In the Cleeve series we find smooth plot development, superb character work and summer term atmosphere, with convincing dialogue, all beautifully carried in four perfect school stories. The Silverson Series, with no plot development at all, based on an old theme, joried and jumped from one story to another, all basically the same, for seven-teen weeks.

I enjoyed the Silverson Series, the individual stories being written with unflinching competence. But it is surely impossible not to see that the Silverson Series lacked that something - that Vital Spark - which the Victor Cleeve series possessed.

It's just my point of view! What's yours?

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOESNo. 65: THE FOUR HORSEMEN

ROGER JENKINS: It is a challenging and fascinating pursuit to list one's aversions in Hamiltoniana. I personally seem to have dislikes that no one else shares. I can tolerate ventriloquists and impersonators, but for some reason or other I cannot abide stories about 'Tom Merry's Weekly'. I think it must be because they were all the same - some embarrassing insertion, put in by trickery, which landed the editors in the soup. I am also strongly averse to stories about pets, especially Pongo and Towser, perhaps again because the humour of these tales was so stereotyped. Finally, I heartily dislike type-names: Miss Bunn, the baker's daughter (whom Maulverer fell in love with), and Mr. Tiper, the printer of Rycombe, are obvious examples. Mr. Sands, the grocer, is not so blatant an example unless one recalls the habit of mixing sugar with sand to make it go further. These type-names are hallowed in eighteenth century literature by Fielding and his successors, but to me they always struck such a discordant note that they seemed to bring the stories down to the level of a comic strip.

JOHN WERHAM: Although the first Gem I ever read was "Redfern's Barring Out" and I remember the story with some affection, I do not like barring out stories, or those which are entirely devoted to ragging. I do not like all sporting stories but, turning up just in time to save the innings after some hair-raising adventures en route is quite another matter. The best Greyfriars stories for me involved a storm over Pegg Bay or the lazy lapping of the river in summer time. At St. Jim's I preferred the stronger meat in such characters as Outran, Talbot and Captain Mellish. I like them all really.

BOB WRITER: You are right. The secret of it all was in the way the stories were told. I always liked the ventriloquist and the impersonator, however improbable they may have been. Both escapades appealed to us as boys because we would have loved to be able to do the same thing. I love cowboys, and didn't mind the school cowboy. I preferred Wildrake to Buck Finn. I liked Kit in the Bloor Kmas story, and, of course, the Rogue Rackstraw series. I also enjoyed the brief visit of Texas Lick in the Rookwood saga.

JOHN TROYELL: Credibility was the success of so many Magnet and Gem series, and any that deviated from this never had the same appeal. My particular aversion was Bunter's ventriloquism, and it persists even to this day. Wibley's impersonations, to a lesser extent, never appealed, and Strong Alonzo I try hard to forget was ever published. I am convinced that Charles Hamilton would have been even more successful without his ventriloquist, impersonator, superman schoolboy, or hypnotist, but an occasional missing heir had at least the virtue of authenticity.

LEE ROWLEY: You have my firm support in the matter of 'cowboy' scholars - or for that matter cowboys of any kind, the Rio Kid included. My love is a school story, and the school story was Hamilton's metier, not outlawed cowboys nor South Seas adventurers nor juvenile vagabonds. The missing heir there has, I think, provided some good series but I did not like the 'Alonzo the Great' series at all. It served to remind us that Greyfriars was fiction and disturbed a long sequence of pleasant dreams. Bunter as a ventriloquist is still within the realm of possibility and has always been acceptable to me.

No. 64: ET TU BRUTE (Further views)

RAY HOPKINS: I am prepared to read with enjoyment any new adventure of the old "E & Co's." If you are taking a poll for or against "Late Summer Folly", you may put me down on the list as FOR. If you have another list which says Yea or Nay to Glade, you may include

me in those who say YEA. In other words, when your author finds time to invent another adventure involving any of our favourite old schools or of what is rapidly getting the favourite NEW school (Slade), then I may encourage him with a nice cup of tea, a silent room with a typewriter, and tell him to go ahead.

WALTER FLEMING: I read the Companion Papers regularly as a youngster, and always my only interest was in a good story. I certainly was not discerning enough to distinguish between Frank Richards and a sub writer. I realised early that Richards and Clifford were one and the same, but I was not really interested in that aspect. The real criterion was the quality of the story. So, more power to your elbow, and let us have more cameos like "Late Summer Folly".

TON WEBSTER: I sincerely hope that "Late Summer Folly" will not be the last of our "substitute" tales.

E. N. LAMBERT: Providing the substitute writer is an authority on the works of Mr. Hamilton, I see no reason why the famous characters should not live on in new adventures in this modern age. It is said that collecting enthusiasts fall into two types. I fear I am in the category of those who just love the old schools and characters and enjoy anything about them.

JILL LEE: No harm can befall our much loved Hamilton schools and boys if they are handled by an expert who knows and believes in them as much as Charles Hamilton ever did. That is the reason why "Late Summer Folly" was such a great success and so very enjoyable. The Digest and Annual are both remarkable, and the factual articles are most interesting and informative, but I always feel they have an added sparkle whenever a Hamilton or a Buddie adventure appears.

L. F. ASHLEY: I think that "Late Summer Folly" was worth inclusion, for the ordinary contextual remarks do not apply in this case. I would say: 'Go to it - produce more!'

FRANK UMIN: Sometimes, I'm afraid we sacrifice the substance for the shadow, and, for the life of me, I just cannot understand the objections against excellent short stories of the "Late Summer Folly" type. I enjoyed it immensely, and I hope you won't be persuaded to deny us the pleasure of further stories of this calibre.

GEOFFREY WILDE: Charles Hamilton's life-work is complete, and a wonderful canon it is. It happens also to be the largest output of any known writer. What an extraordinary gluttony we are guilty of when even this will not do for us. What a curious compliment we pay him by imagining that the appetite can be satisfied when the magic is missing. If it can be said that others can supply the magic then we contradict ourselves: they can't, of course, not even the best of them. In general I am opposed to any attempt to "add" to the Hamiltonian canon, and feel we should resist as strongly as possible any suggestion of publishing "new" Bunter books by any other hand.

CHARLES CHURCHILL: I must join those who appreciated "Late Summer Folly". I thought it excellent, and hope you will not stop this kind of story in future. If a few people do not like the idea, they need not read!

POINT OF VIEW

Belfast reader, Miss E. Magoveny, sends us an interesting letter in which she makes the following comment:

'I think Frank Richards was jealous of Pentelaw. He never mentioned Piet Delarey (cont'd on page 23...)

stories did not exist. If this is done, it can be enjoyed for what it is, a competent and interesting tale of Levison's reactions to a sudden and unexpected blow. The blind faith of Frank Levison can be a little trying at times, but the whimsical loyalty of Cardew is always a joy to read about. The series had a great sense of dramatic purpose and unity, and at times even a particular episode was carried over from one week to another, thus giving the desired impression that everything happened in the space of a few days.

1922 had much to commend it, and Charles Hamilton told me, at an interview, that there was a great deal to be said for considering the years mid-1921 to mid-1923 as being the finest two consecutive years in the history of the Gem. But though the plots were good and the details well thought out, there was undoubtedly something missing. The long stories of the blue Gem afforded a more leisurely approach, and the upheaval of the war and Charles Hamilton's military service had robbed much of his work of its customary polish in the early 'twenties. It was not until the advent of the coloured covers that the Indian Summer of the Gem really began.

Let's Be Controversial

No. 67. THE BRANCH LINE

It is more than obvious that there need never have been a substitute story in the Magnet or the Gem. Charles Hamilton was perfectly able to have kept both papers supplied with new stories for every week throughout the lives of both papers. He had the talent and the stamina. He never dried up owing to indifferent health or to holidays. In fact, he was a demon for work. It is hard to think that he was ever very happy away from the typewriter.

It is easier to wonder that any man was able to churn out two long stories - one of Greyfriars and one of St. Jim's - each week. Yet we know that he did it, at different times, for long periods of time. He could have done it all the time, if he had been so inclined.

We had substitute stories in the Gem and Magnet, not because Charles Hamilton had dried up or was ailing or was on holiday, but simply and solely because he turned his talents on to branch lines.

In 1915 he branched away to Rookwood, writing himself all but a handful of this series until the Spring of 1926.

In 1917 he branched yet again, this time to Cedar Creek, writing every one of the 205 stories for the next four years.

In 1919 he took a third branch to the Benbow, writing every story for the next two years or more.

And while Rookwood, Cedar Creek and the Benbow were claiming

his attention, the substitute writers took command of the Gem and the Magnet. Rookwood and Cedar Creek, most readers will agree, were worth it. The Benbow was not.

The Benbow stories were purely run of the mill yarns, agreeable reading like all the writer's work, but lacking originality in plot or characterization. The only novelty was the fact that we had a school on a ship.

Oddly enough, in all of these branch lines, Charles Hamilton branches away to a branch within a branch, as it were.

For thirty weeks in 1923, the Rookwood chums went to the Wild West. That was a long time for school stories to be turned into westerns. The chums returned to Rookwood at long last, but I, personally, thought that the Rookwood series was never quite the same again.

The Benbow series branches in the same way. After a year or so, the ship was fitted out and went to sea in a long voyage to the West Indies. I have little doubt that that long voyage was a mistake. It was, at any rate, the end of the Benbow.

No criticism can be really offered against the long branch line into which the Cedar Creek series turned, forming what was to be the swan song for Cedar Creek. In the last series of all, in the Backwood stories, Frank Richards ran away from Cedar Creek, to meet with some delightful adventures which lasted for 17 weeks, and ended the long run of that unusual series.

A contributor to this month's Digest was reminded of this final Cedar Creek series by the events in a modern film. I felt the urge to look up the series and read it again. Much water has flowed under the bridges since I last enjoyed it.

Frank Richards was accused of theft and compelled to leave Cedar Creek. His uncle, Rancher Lawless, decided to send the boy to a distant school which handled hard cases - a rather drastic decision for an affectionate relative to make. Rather than become a hard case, Frank ran away from the Lawless Ranch. He fell in with rustlers who were planning to rob a brutal horse-dealer. He became a chore-boy to the horse-dealer. He met up with the thirsty Mr. Penrose, and became a partner in producing a backwoods newspaper until Mr. Penrose's thirst got beyond control. Wandering on as a rolling stone, Frank joined up with a gold-seeker, and accumulated a few hundred dollars which several sinister people tried to steal. He met with the Black Sack gang, and rescued an English nobleman, Lord St. Austells, who was a relative of Vere Beauclerc. Finally Frank returned to Cedar Creek with his name

cleared. Lord St. Austella wanted to take him to England, send him to University, and set him on the road to authorship. But Frank felt "The Call of the Prairies" and stayed on at Cedar Creek.

So ended the Cedar Creek series. Charles Hamilton was never to write another story of the School in the Backwoods. One wonders why it ended then, for it must have been popular. Possibly the powers-that-be decided that Mr. Hamilton should once again concentrate on St. Jim's for a time.

Read today, these last seventeen stories of Frank Richards' Schooldays have lost little if any of their charm, which is remarkable when one realizes that they were written over forty years ago. Just here and there, on the rare occasion, they are mildly dated, by style. In the more dramatic moments, particularly where Frank is accused of the theft, the dialogue is stilted and old-fashioned. When a rascal is being thrashed brutally, "the schoolboy would fain have looked away." But it is only at rare moments that the age of the stories peeps through. With just the slightest amendment to dialogue in places, these seventeen tales could be issued as one story today and would make reading matter which would surely appeal to any modern boy.

No doubt when the stories appeared, readers were longing for Frank to return to Cedar Creek. All the same, the author was at his most successful when he was doing a "solo" turn of this type. The hero was in the limelight all the time. The Rio Kid stories, better written and more convincing, owed much of their success to keeping the hero in the lead with the supporting cast small and ever changing.

The entire Cedar Creek series, with the exception of about three stories, was republished in the golden age of the Popular. Those three stories were undoubtedly missed through the carelessness of some sub-editor.

Cedar Creek was assuredly a worth-while branch line. Every story was excellent of its class, and Charles Hamilton wrote the lot. Possibly the most memorable stories of the whole lot are the last seventeen in which Frank Richards appeared solo, and became a rolling-stone.

It's just my point of view! What's yours?

* * * * *

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

On earlier topics.

LEN PACKMAN: I am quite happy to read and enjoy everything that appears in C.D. or C.D. Annual, but I must confess I would much rather read articles about the old papers and stories than what are virtually substitute tales - whoever writes them. When it comes to reading yarns about Greyfriars, St. Jim's and so on, nothing can give me greater

Hamiltoniana

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 69. THE GHOST STORY

We know that large numbers of substitute stories of Greyfriars and St. Jin's, commissioned by the editors, appeared in the Magnet and the Gem. So far as I know it has never been suggested that any of our favourite authors themselves employed "ghost" writers to do any work for them.

It would, at any rate, explain some of the controversy which has occasionally occurred in our Blakiana column, when one contributor declares that a certain author was paid for a particular story, while another contributor avers emphatically that the particular story bears the hall-mark of another writer.

Did Charles Hamilton, staggering under the incessant demand from editors for more and more of his work, ever employ a "ghost" writer? I am quite certain that he did not after the first World War. Of the few years before the first World War I am not so certain.

There are some stories in that period, in both the Magnet and the Gem, which have a strangely hybrid flavour. There are stories which were obviously written by a substitute author, yet show the Hamilton touch in places.

I do not believe for a moment that Charles Hamilton ever had the time or the inclination for reading substitute stories after they were in print. How was it then that occasionally the creations of substitute writers appeared in his stories. In the middle history of the papers I believe that this was due to the editors changing names on the manuscripts. Certainly it happened in the case of Mr. Pilbeam.

About 1930 a Gem substitute author retired Mr. Linton and replaced him with Mr. Pilbeam. In at least one of the stories which the genuine writer contributed before the reprints commenced, Mr. Pilbeam appeared. Charles Hamilton told me that he had never even heard of Mr. Pilbeam. In his stories he wrote of Mr. Linton. Somebody in the editorial

office changed the name. The overall impression at the time was that the genuine Clifford had used a substitute writer's character.

Delarey and Phyllis Howell, to mention but two of Pentelow's creations, were referred to by the genuine writer in his stories. Here, I think it likely, we have instance of Pentelow altering the names in the manuscripts.

Not so easy to explain away, however, is the case of Mr. Erasmus Zachariah Pepper, who owned a barn. Mr. Pepper and his barn appear to have been an invention of Pentelow, but both were featured in genuine Hamilton stories some years after Pentelow's influence had left the Gem.

Mr. Poppers barn was the rendezvous for Pentelow's stories of the St. Jim's parliament. Years earlier, when the blue Gem was very young, there were genuine stories about a St. Jim's parliament.

For a time there does seem to have been a link-up between the stories of Charles Hamilton and Pentelow which is all the more remarkable because the styles of the two authors were so utterly dissimilar. It is known that the two men clashed.

Yet it is a fact that, some years later, the brilliant little series of the Story Seven saw Tom Merry & Co running a teashop in Mr. Pepper's barn. It really does not make sense, unless he created Mr. Pepper and the barn, that Charles Hamilton should use them, long after, or even know anything about them.

Odd is the case of Clifton Dane in the blue Gem. Dane was the creation of a substitute writer, a man whose style was quite unlike Hamilton's. Yet Hamilton adopted Dane, and, in blue cover stories, often introduced him. It is inconceivable to me that, with the very large St. Jim's cast of his own creation, the genuine author should read a substitute story which was published against his wishes, and adopt the new character therefrom. The most feasible explanation is that the substitute writer introduced Dane under the instructions of the genuine Martin Clifford.

Charles Hamilton told me emphatically that, with the exception of "The School Under Canvas," he never wrote a story which appeared under the pen-name of Prosper Howard. Yet Prosper Howard created Gordon Gay in the Empire Library - and, down the years, Charles Hamilton frequently used Gordon Gay.

In the blue Gem and the red Magnet the majority of stories stand out, without any doubt as genuine material. There are some which are obviously substitute efforts. But there are a number on which it is difficult to pass an opinion - and it is hard to see why this should be so. It has been suggested occasionally that these were written by

Charles Hamilton on an "off" day. More likely, I think, that they were ghost stories, touched up by the genuine hand. One does not, at any rate, find any of them after the first World War.

Bernard Glyn was certainly a genuine character. Yet Glyn was spoken of as being at the school, in a substitute story which appeared before the genuine one which told of Glyn's arrival. Unless Mr. Hamilton himself told the sub-writer about Glyn, the sub writer must have read the genuine Glyn story in manuscript form in the editor's office. In that case, the editor held back the genuine story to replace it with a sub story which at that time had not been written. It doesn't make sense.

To my mind the most striking indication of a possible ghost writer is found in the 1913 blue Gem story "Misunderstood." As a sub story it is fairly successful, though it lacks the Hamilton magic and would never deceive the real student. But this story has a stock Hamilton theme. The boy who sees two people in danger, goes to help the one whose need is the greater, and is accused of cowardice for neglecting the other. Down the years this theme was used a good many times at the various schools, though I believe (without checking) that this was the first instance of its being used. At the end of the story Manners was presented with his famous camera.

If the story were a normal sub specimen, slipped in by the editor, the fact of Charles Hamilton repeating the same theme and keeping Manners' camera as a stock topic, is strange. But if the theme was sketched out by the genuine writer, and worked on by a ghost writer under his direction, the whole puzzle falls into place.

I have just been reading an article which Roger Jenkins wrote in 1946. Now I am sure it is unfair to quote from an article which a colleague wrote long ago. With the passing of the years our taste may change a little; our knowledge increases; we become less hampered by prejudice. I loathe my own articles which I wrote even a few years back, and it embarrasses me if I ever read them. I could often be confounded if anyone was so unkind as to quote many of my own old articles.

Roger's old articles stand up to the passing of time far better than mine do, so I hope he will forgive me for quoting him here. I only do so because a comment he made in his 1946 article provides an interesting point in connection with the theme I am now handling.

Mr. Jenkin's wrote:

"These (the 'Nippy from Nowhere' series in the Gem) were in all probability written by Clive R. Fenn, the only person

who ever used Mr. Hamilton's pen-names without his disapproval. And one can appreciate the reason, for these tales seem to be written by the hand of the master himself. It is unfortunate that if the employment of substitute writers was inevitable, the A.P. did not always call at first on the son of Marville Fenn,"

I don't suppose that today, seventeen years later, Roger would be of the opinion that the "Nippy from Nowhere" series, which told of the St. Jim's chums on tour with a motor caravan, seemed to be written by the hand of the master himself. According to the Gem catalogue, the Nippy series were written by S. E. Austin, who wrote a large number of sub stories in both the Magnet and the Gem.

However, my reference to Mr. Jenkin's very old article is not on account of the Nippy series. I have quoted from the article simply for the statement: "Clive Fenn, the only person who ever used Mr. Hamilton's pen-names without his disapproval."

It seems obvious that Roger must have got that from Charles Hamilton himself. But, so far as I know, there is no reference anywhere to Clive Fenn having written any substitute story. There seems to be no record that Fenn ever wrote a Magnet or Gem sub story for the editors. Yet he was the only man who used Charles Hamilton's pen-names without his disapproval.

Then for whom did he write?

Surely for Charles Hamilton. Is it not feasible to think that he may have been a "ghost" writer - working under the direction of the genuine author?

Much of this is conjecture - but it is fascinating to conjecture. No doubt we shall go on conjecturing for many years to come.

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CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 68. THE HEAVENLY TWINS

GEORGE WILDE: Though one always thought of the Gem and Magnet as the 'Heavenly Twins' it was hardly to be expected that the 'Vital Spark' could glow equally bright in both simultaneously. Probably the 1933-35 period was the time when their combined level was at its highest, though for the connoisseur this is perhaps clouded by the realization that the Gem was carrying reprints which, for all their quality, were not quite what the originals had been. The two papers touched a high level simultaneously, though, in the summer of 1939, with the Black Box series in the Gem and the Water-Lily series in the Magnet.

Though the vital spark is an unmistakable feature of Hamilton's best stories, I've

never quite found myself in agreement with the idea that it disappeared after about 1934. The '27 - '34 period stands supreme because the lamp of genius burned steadily throughout; thereafter there were times when it fluttered a little. But such splendid tales as the Portercliffe series of 1935, the Watch-Chain and Geshill Park series of 1937 and the Carter series of 1938 - and I think there are others - show no diminution of the flame that I can see. I agree that there are noticeable modifications of style and mood, but these I would regard as marking a normal difference between what might be called middle-period and late-period work, observable in any writer. Here I follow Roger, but I do feel he goes too far in suggesting that the greatest of any man's work comes in his middle period. True that we here find some of the freshness and inventiveness of youth combined with the greater maturity and wisdom of experience; but what of that particular sanity, depth and serenity that comes with age? In any case, are Othello, Lear and Antony and Cleopatra really middle-period Shakespeares? Surely not.

BASIL ADAMS: I really must put in a word in favour of the sunny yellow covers of the "Magnet". When I first bought the Magnet in the early 1930's I was always attracted by its cheerful cover, especially in the summer months when it seemed to personify for me, at any rate, the long beautiful summers of that period. Mr. Shield's illustrations covering the great Lancaster series, and most of the other great series at this time were much more adult than later illustrations in the Magnet. I must admit that some of the red, white and blue Gems were attractive too.

PETER HANGER: When I came into contact with the Magnet (1939) the Gem had almost finished and I had no interest in it till I discovered that Martin and Frank were the same chappie. I have always enjoyed stories of St. Jim's, but they never seem to ring the bell like Greyfriars and Rookwood do. I can't put my finger on the reason for this, but I know that I prefer post-war St. Jim's to the pre-war variety. And to my surprise I even prefer it to the post-war Greyfriars.

GEORGE SELLARS: I am certain that the blue Gems and the red Magnets were the finest stories of Charles Hamilton, and this is proved by the fact that the majority of readers are keen to obtain these papers and pay high prices for them. Why were they reprinted so many times? The answer is clear. The secret was the atmosphere in those stories which was never repeated in any later period of that very famous pair, the Gem and the Magnet.

ROBERT KELLY: From a purely artistic point of view I agree that the Gem covers were probably better than the Magnet. But surely the Magnet front covers had much more individuality and perhaps greater distinction. Leonard Shields of course did most of the covers from 1927 onwards and at his best he was unequalled in this field.

So far as the actual contents of the two magazines were concerned in the red, white and blue and yellow and orange period, at least it can be said for the Magnet that, the serial apart, all the features were complimentary to the main school story. This was not true of the Gem either during its "Indian Summer" or in the reprint period.

Finally, I agree that the Magnet in its last years achieved dignity and perhaps a little dullness too.

GREYFRIARS IS COMING BACK

The GUARDIAN, in an article by Terry Coleman, has given the glad news that some of the old Greyfriars stories are to be reprinted in LOOK and LEARN. In his article, Mr. Coleman makes the following statements:

Now this magazine, which is weekly, costs 1s. and looks like a tabloid version of

to read, despite their abridgements: they contain a series of climaxes, which give a satisfying ebb and flow to each reprint, whereas the double numbers and Bunter books have only one climax apiece.

Finally, mention must be made of the coloured cover of Magnet No. 268, a sailing boat containing three schoolboys with a background of a pier jutting out into the sea. It has no connection with the story, but it typifies the serene, halcyon world that existed when the double numbers were in their heyday.

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 70. THE ONE AND ONLY

Surely the most lovable character in the whole of Hamiltonia is Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's. Oddly enough, he was never imitated at any of the other Hamilton schools. I say oddly enough, because most of the big Hamilton successes in characterisation found their counterparts elsewhere as time passed.

Gussy was created at the end of 1906. He was really believable only for a few years following his creation. Ten years later he was dated. Yet we have gone on reading about him down the years, and even to-day we do not feel that we are reading of a dated character.

By the end of 1906 Charles Hamilton had created a number of schools which had stayed for a short time and then passed on. He had no reason to think that St. Jim's would last any longer than the others had done, or that Arthur Augustus, whom he had introduced into that modest little series in Pluck, would still be featuring in new tales fifty years on.

Gussy was not larger than life. As a schoolmaster I would hesitate to say that any fictional schoolboy, with the exception of the very wicked, was larger than life. But Gussy was dated by his monocle, his speech impediment, his "fivahs".

Even when most of us were children, Gussy was dated, though it never occurred to us. We loved his aristocratic background without any sense of jealousy. Although we seldom had five pence in our own pockets, we were thrilled to read of a boy who frequently received five pounds from his "patah". I doubt whether Gussy is any more dated in 1963 than he was in 1923, but I think he would cause more resentment to-day, with far less reason.

When Gussy was introduced to St. Jim's in 1906, he was really a stock Edwardian character. Clearly he was originally intended for

light relief only. It was left to Martin Clifford, as the years slipped by, to develop Arthur Augustus into one of the Hamilton "greats".

We were never told whether the monocle was merely affectation or whether Gussy was defective in the sight of one eye. We can accept that Gussy had one weak eye, for though he was fastidious, he was never affected.

But the monocle heavily dated Gussy. None of us, I would wager, ever saw a schoolboy wearing a monocle on account of weak sight. For the past fifty years, I would imagine, no school in the country would allow a boy to attend wearing a monocle. Yet, to us, Gussy without his monocle, would not be Gussy at all. In the post-war stories, Charles Hamilton played down that monocle. There was but little reference to it - but we old-stagers must always have sensed that it was there.

The speech impediment dated Gussy even more than his monocle, yet so much of the gentle charm of Arthur Augustus lay in that speech impediment. To-day there is much in speech which grates horribly upon sensitive nerves, but actual speech impediment is almost unknown in normal youngsters.

Martin Clifford developed Gussy from the stock dude of the earlier stories to the simple, kind-hearted youngster who was one of nature's gentlemen in the finest sense of the expression. In almost every story of St. Jim's ever written Gussy played his part, and he starred on countless occasions in innumerable great stories. In many ways, in certain circumstances, Gussy served Martin Clifford every bit as well as Billy Bunter served Frank Richards.

The story "Bought Honours" is a classic among school stories for every one who has ever read it. In this story, the simple Gussy was persuaded by the cunning Levison to cheat in an exam. It is an unforgettable episode in the St. Jim's saga. It was Gussy's connection with Oliver Lynn which placed the Schoolboy Pug series among the Gen's greatest. So often Gussy's simple faith - sometimes misplaced but always endearing - brought the lump to the throat. In lighter mood we recall Gussy and his chequebook; Gussy adopting a donkey in the brilliant little "D'Arcy Maximas"; Gussy going to work at various jobs, and always with hilarious results; and Gussy running away from school and taking refuge in turn at Greyfriars, Rookwood, and Cliff House in a series which is as delightful to-day as when it was written forty years ago.

Gussy was undoubtedly the greatest piece of character painting

at St. Jim's. Yet it was Gussy who inevitably dated St. Jim's. But it was a dating which, in my view, the reader never really noticed.

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DAVID NIXON GOES TO GREYFRIARS

David Nixon, one of the most likeable personalities on television, joins the cast of the Bunter show in the West End this coming Christmas season. With the intriguing title of BILLY BUNTER MEETS MAGIC, the play, which opens at the Shaftesbury Theatre on December 23rd, would seem assured of success.

David Nixon plays a conjuror who can do wonderful tricks when he is all alone, but finds things begin to go wrong when anyone else is present. And when Billy Bunter happens to be present - well, imagination boggles. In recent years there have been a few minor grumbles because the Greyfriars chums spent Christmas abroad. This year they are in good old England - at a lonely place in Cornwall - and surely many hearts will warm spontaneously when we say that the place has been named POLPELLE.

Peter Bridgmont, who was such an outstanding success last year, once again plays Billy Bunter. When he meets David Nixon, who plays a conjuror who has a mild flair for villainy, things really happen.

Last year the Billy Bunter show, though it did the best business of all the Christmas matinee shows, was hard hit by the weather. Another bad season would mean the end of Billy Bunter as a stage attraction. Let us hope for good weather, and give the show every support in our power. If you can display a bill profitably, let us know here at the Digest Office, and we will send one to you.

Make an early appointment to meet Billy Bunter and the Greyfriars chums, not forgetting Mr. Quelch, when BILLY BUNTER MEETS MAGIC at the Shaftesbury Theatre. More news of the show in future issues of Collectors' Digest.

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SUPPLIERS OF HAMILTON'S PLOTS

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By Derek Adley

Once again it was a pleasure to read an article by Roger Jenkins in C.D. - I refer to 'More News from Rose Lawn'. It was indeed interesting to read about Charles Hamilton's home and neighbourhood, and note that Roger felt there was little to support the idea that Hamilton was ever supplied with plots for his stories.

(continued on page 18) ..

to a pond opposite the school gates.

In 901 "...never been seen in Greyfriars" (not the usual at); in 972, "...better than anyone in Greyfriars."

In 901, "The remainder of the day passed uneventfully enough;" in 905, "The rest of the lesson passed uneventfully enough."

Without detracting from the tremendous amount of work and research that Bill Loftis has accomplished in this field, it does seem to me on the strength of this evidence that he has been misinformed as to the authorship of many of the stories published in "The Next Best Thing", and that we still do not have anything like an accurate and complete list of substitute stories and their authors. In point of fact it is quite clear that such a desirable state of affairs is impossible considering the lapse of time since the publication of the stories. It is our misfortune that the Magnet and Gem authors apparently failed to keep detailed records of all the stories they had published in these papers; and still more so that the A.P. doesn't appear to have detailed and reliable records.

I must confess I am a bit dubious about accepting the assurance of authors about stories they claim from memory to have written between thirty and fifty years ago; particularly in view of the recurrence of themes and similarity (and even duplication) of many titles. No doubt many titles were altered by bright editors, anyway!

My own careful and critical study of many hundreds of Magnet and Gem stories indicates that there are literally dozens of substitute stories in our O.B.B.C. "official" lists which are still credited to Charles Hamilton. Many of these are, I feel, an insult to his memory, being utterly absurd, worthless, and in the same category as others that are acknowledged as such. I have, in fact, an abundance of evidence and quotations to support my view of the stories I have in mind, quite apart from the faulty characterization (characters acting "out of character") which is usually the best guide to a substitute story.

I hope shortly to elaborate on this subject with the help of quotations that will, I am certain, convince any student of Hamiltoniana that he can safely add a considerable number of additional titles to his list of substitute stories in the Magnet and Gem.

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 71: A HIT OR A MISS

The topic of the substitute writer is always with us, and there is little doubt that it always will be with us. A reader whose letter appeared recently in Yours Sincerely makes some extremely interesting comments on the subject though some of his conclusions are fallacies.

Our reader said: "It is only since we have grown up that we criticise." He contended that when we were boys we could not tell a substitute story from the genuine article.

I am aware that there are some readers who claim that they could never detect one from the other, and it always surprises me. My own view is that any youngster who thought the substitute stories and the genuine ones all came from the same pen cannot have been a very avid reader of Hamiltonia at all. I myself read the Gem and the Magnet from a very early age and I have read them ever since. I cannot recall any time when, to quote Gerry Allison's apt illustration, the sub story did not cause the cinder to grate between my teeth. (cont'd on page 18) ..

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL (conti'd from page 15)..

Our reader enquires: "Who would you call a substitute writer for Sexton Blake?" Here he is wide of the mark, for there is no connection at all. It was never claimed at any time that all the Sexton Blake stories came from the same man. But in the case of the Magnet and the Gem the editors maintained the myth that two separate writers turned out every story of Greyfriars and St. Jim's that appeared.

It has been suggested by some of our contributors in the past, that the great scandal of the old papers was that the work of substitute writers was published under the pen-names of Charles Hamilton. The genuine writer himself, though possibly with tongue slightly in cheek, subscribed to this view. Substitute stories may have been necessary to maintain the sequence - but such stories should not have appeared under the pen-names Frank Richards or Martin Clifford.

There is much common-sense, much justice, in that.

But pause, for a moment, and consider. The Sexton Blake saga belongs to nobody, although we may have preferred one author to another.

Things were very different with Greyfriars and St. Jim's. They belong exclusively to Charles Hamilton. There is not one man in the world who would suggest otherwise. But it might have been vastly different if every substitute story had been published under the name of its actual writer. Names like Pentelow, Samways, Warwick, and many others who butted in to fill the gap while the genuine writer was engaged in other fields. If those substitute stories had been published under the names of the actual writers things would have been vastly different. They would have been part of the Greyfriars and St. Jim's sagas and accepted as such - in the same way that every Sexton Blake story is accepted.

In my opinion only one man really gained - the financial aspect excluded, of course - from the fact that all the stories appeared under the pen-names of Charles Hamilton - and that man was Charles Hamilton himself. True, very much indifferent material was published under those pen-names, but this very system threw two things into violent contrast - the genuine and the imitation.

Charles Hamilton's reputation has lost nothing from the activities of the substitute writers. In fact, it gained enormously.

We should have liked the substitute stories no more and no less had they been published under the names of their real writers. But they would have been given some credit as part of the saga and they

would have avoided the odium which has become their lot for all time.

Plenty of Sexton Blake stories down the years were boring and badly written, but they never remained in the memory as the substitute Gems and Magnets did. I can recall only one Sexton Blake story which gave me the "cinder crunch". That was "The Man From Tokio". The original Granite Grant stories had been published anonymously. Before I had completed the first page of "The Man From Tokio" I knew that it was not by the original writer and my disappointment was intense. In consequence, I have never forgotten it. Had I known in advance that the story was by a different writer there would have been no disappointment.

It was the recurring hopes and disappointments of the Gem and the Magnet which deeply blackened the substitute periods in the papers. Had we known in advance the names of the writers of the stories there would have been no lasting odium, for we should have bought and read only the stories of the writer or writers who appealed to us. In the same way as the readers of the Sexton Blake Library did before the war when copies of all the periodicals were in the shops to be bought or ignored as the whim took the purchaser.

Our Yours Sincerely writer said, referring to two substitute stories which were reprinted in the Gem: "Both stories were considered good enough for the re-prints, and some of Frank Richards' own stories were not."

But our correspondent is mistaken. Many of the genuine tales were omitted - but not because they were not good enough for reprinting. Simply because they were dated by topicalities, like "The Diabolists", "Tom at the Franco-British", and plenty of others, or were over-sentimental like "Figgy's Folly" and some of the Dick Brooke stories in a way which would have failed to ring the bell in the nineteen-thirties. As a result of these inevitable omissions - and other factors like the publication of the Christmas stories in November in earlier days - the seasons rushed by too quickly for the selector, so he had to leap ahead. In those days I was responsible for any amount of picking up of genuine stories which had been omitted on account of these leaps ahead. I think we can all rest assured that no genuine story was omitted because it was "not good enough for re-printing."

The number of substitute tales reprinted was very small. It is my impression that the intention was to reprint none and that a few crept in through the carelessness of someone in the editorial office.

It's just my point of view. What's yours?

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOESNo. 69: THE GHOST STORY

ROGER JENKINS: Anything that I wrote seventeen years ago is surely too faint now to have any echoes left at all. I have, however, confirmed with John Shaw that it was Charles Hamilton himself who wrote that comment about the Nippy from Nowhere stories. Clive Fenn was the son of George Manville Fenn, and was the only writer of stories about Charles Hamilton's characters who was not disapproved of by the creator of those characters.

Charles Hamilton admitted being vague about dates, but he was never uncertain about stories. He always remembered his own stories, and this is clear from the letters John Shaw received from him early in the last war, when he confirmed his authorship of very many stories, during the course of a long correspondence. For this reason I have always regarded John Shaw's list of substitute stories as being the most authentic and reliable of all. Similarly, I am prepared to accept Charles Hamilton's statement about the authorship of the Nippy from Nowhere stories.

Why Charles Hamilton did not disapprove of Clive Fenn's stories is not altogether certain. It is, however, clear that there was a momentous disagreement over the Gem in the late 'twenties, and Charles Hamilton refused to write anything for it for many years. In the particular circumstances of the time, it might well be the case that he preferred the St. Jim's stories to be written by Clive Fenn rather than by anyone else. Compared with some of the stories of the time in the Gem - for example, St. Jim's besieged by Russians in the Edwy Seagles Brooks series - I expect that Clive Fenn's tales seemed almost as good as those by the genuine Martin Clifford himself.

W.O.C. LOFTS: Owen Evans; G. H. Teed; Michael Storm; Andrew Murray; J. W. Robin; J. G. Brandon; and another very popular writer who it would be tactful not to mention - all had 'Ghost' writers for some of their Sexton Blake yarns.

Phyllis Howell was a creation of G. R. Sawways, and not J. N. Pentelow, though, as you rightly suggest, the characters names were interloped in Mr. Hamilton's stories without his knowledge. Regarding the story 'Misunderstood' in the GEM it was actually written by E. S. Brooks, and was originally entitled 'The Coward of St. Jim's' - but there is no record to show that Brooks and Hamilton ever collaborated in stories for the Companion papers.

Clive R. Fenn most certainly did not write any substitute stories in the MAGNET or GEM - not only by official records. When Mr. Fenn was contacted some years ago by Tom Hopperton he remarked 'that the only story he ever wrote was rejected by Pentelow the editor. Then he (Fenn) was later most astonished to see that Pentelow had carved up his idea into five or six stories, which were later published. Clive R. Fenn's job was simply to answer readers letters in the MAGNET office.

Mr. C. M. Down recently told me that Charles Hamilton did create Gordon Gay & Co. in the EMPIRE LIBRARY, but only wrote the first few stories, and afterwards he (Down) and H. A. Hinton wrote the stories under the 'Prosper Howard' pen-name between them. A full explanation about all this would take an article by itself. The mystery of the creation of Clifton Dane in the GEM is most easily explained. Readers who have the GEM will have to have a full list of additional data since that was published in due course!

No. 57 THE FEUD OF THE FOURTH which introduced Clifton Dane was written by the editor PERCY GRIFFITH!

The substitute writer who retired Mr. Linton, and replaced him with Mr. Pilbeam was FRANCIS WARNICK, who wrote more stories than credited to him in the GEM CATALOGUE.

Personally I don't think Clive R. Fenn had the ability to 'ghost' for Charles Hamilton. According to Stanton-Hope, and I'm only quoting what he told me, 'he (Hope) as a personal friend of Mr. Hamilton had his full approval when he used his characters in stories.

W. H. GANDER: Phyllis Howell is found in G. R. Sawways 'School and Sport' and also in Magnets No. 414 and 419. Presumably, these two Magnets were also written by Sawways. An

Interesting points in Magnet 468 it is stated that Phyllis Howell had lost her only brother in the war a year before, but, later, Samways introduced her brother, Archie, to Greyfriars.

Gerry Was Right!

By W.O.G. Lofts

Some years ago, I took friend Gerry Allison to task, for suggesting that he could detect a substitute story in a few words. Although I still maintain that with sub-editing, interloping of phrases and other factors by sub-editors, one can be so wrong, though a general examination by an expert could possibly tell the difference - on this occasion I am most pleased to say that Gerry was right. "Wanted a Poet" No. 953 the Cedar Creek story in the BOYS FRIEND was written by a sub-writer but not as Gerry so strongly hints by G. R. Samways - but by Reginald S. Kirkham - who was a close friend of his.

In fairness to Eric Payne our editor, who suggested recently that Charles Hamilton had written all the 205 stories, he had not only been misled by Mr. Hamilton, (who probably assumed he wrote them all) but it has been many years since he last read them, and one's opinions can alter a lot in a fresh perusal of them.

I have found evidence, that the above story was written in a great hurry, so probably the writer can be excused to some extent. At the same time I can also answer Ray Hopkins query in the August 'Yours Sincerely' on details about R. S. Kirkham - or 'Kirks' as he was affectionately called.

'Kirks' was considered a great humorous writer at the Amalgamated Press. Starting writing for THE SCOUT, he later wrote some early substitute Magnet stories, and at least GEM 568 "Denounced as a Coward". In 1919 he wrote many Bessie Bunter stories in THE SCHOOLFRIEND, mainly the humorous ones, whilst Horace Phillips wrote the serious themes. 'Kirks' wrote boys stories under the name of 'Frank Vincent' as well as numerous girls tales.

Around 1930 'Kirks' was left a large sum of money by his father, who had owned a large store in the South. Giving up writing, he went on a cruise round the world, and on his return started a successful fruit growing business in Kent. On his death a few years ago, he left over £32,000.

'Kirks' was an exceedingly popular man at the A.P., and was a leading light in all the house dinners, parties, and functions, and he was certainly far from unknown.

So congratulations, Gerry on proving that a Cedar Creek story was a sub, and I'm only too pleased to confirm (providing that they are correct) any Hamilton queries in the future.

slow in rising.

He seemed to be glued to his chair, and to detach himself therefrom with a herculean effort.

(In a few months' time there will be a special competition in connection with this latest series of Gags of Hamiltonia. Watch for announcements!)

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 70. THE ONE AND ONLY:

GEORGE SELLARS: Dear Old Gussy, A very colourful character, and a pillar of St. Jim's. Any story of Tom Merry & Co without him in it would have seemed dull indeed. He played a worthy part in countless tales, and I liked him as much in drama as in comedy.

The stories I used to love (and still do) were those of his love affairs, always mid-way between pathos and laughter. Needless to say, Gussy is a great favourite of mine. In "Cousin Ethel's Schooldays", Manners made up a song about him for a concert. This is a verse of it:

He's always dressed
In his Sunday best,
Complete with shining topper.
A modest cap, this lofty chap
Regards as most improper.
His waistcoat, too, is pink and blue;
For spats he's fairly fussy;
He is the nuttiest of the nuts,
Our own immortal Gussy.

CHARLES CHURCHILL: I quite agree that Gussy was without doubt one of the pillars of the Gen. I never thought, though, that we had too much of him as we did of Billy Bunter in the Magnet. In my view the latter paper suffered from a surfeit of Bunter, and I always preferred St. Jim's and Rockwood because of it.

STAN KNIGHT: The one and only Gustavus was always a great favourite of mine, too. I much preferred him to Billy Bunter.

ANDREW LANCHAN: I was delighted with the survey you gave of the One and Only, and thought it the best Controversial of an excellent year. I have always loved Gussy, and you presented an aspect of this great piece of characterisation which I had never appreciated before. I hope that you may be tempted to select some of the other outstanding characters, now and again, and spotlight them in the same way in Let's Be Controversial.

ERIC FAYNE adds: In an article entitled "Gerry Was Right" in our November issue my friend, Bill Lofts, commenting on the fact that I stated that Charles Hamilton wrote all the Cedar Creek stories, said that I had been misled by Mr. Hamilton. This was not the case. So far as I know, Charles Hamilton never claimed that he wrote all the Cedar Creek stories. Certainly he never made such a claim to me. My slip was entirely due to a faulty memory, and the great lapse of years since I read the Cedar Creek tales.



Hamiltoniana



LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 72: NOT FLAWLESS, BUT —!

Roger Jenkins's article in the Annual was thought-provoking. Though entitled "Flaws in the Diamond" it devotes only its first half to the flaws. The second half concerns the substitute writers.

As to the flaws - well, I am not certain that they were really flaws at all. If they were, then one gets the impression that Roger had to scrape the bottom to find them - and that is something of a compliment to Charles Hamilton.

I think that topographical details were important in maintaining illusion. When slips occurred, as they did occasionally, they were due to a faulty memory. The astonishing thing is not that there were topographical slips, but that there were so few of them, considering the author's enormous output and the range of his work. Such slips were only obvious at all to someone who read the stories closely over a number of years.

The abandonment of the Black Rock was surprising, for it featured a good deal in the early Magnet. But abandonments, both in topography and characterisation, were by no means unknown in the Hamilton story down the years.

When I was a lad, the names of the starring characters never struck me as anything but perfect. Whether they originated in Burke's peerage and Debrett I could not say even now - I accept anybody's word that they did - but I don't see that it matters. Charles Hamilton was, to some extent, the victim of his own popularity. His stories ran for such a very long time. Tom Merry was created early in 1907, and it may have been fashionable at that time for authors to give their heroes symbolic names. As I wrote a month or two ago, Arthur Augustus was a typical dude of Edwardian fiction, but a few years later he was dated. Readers did not notice it. It was not the author's fault his work was so popular that, by demand, St. Jim's

and Greyfriars went on and on and on.

Roger comments that by 1915 when Rookwood was created Charles Hamilton had had time to learn by his mistakes. Perhaps that is true. Yet, though Rookwood may have been more flawless than St. Jim's and Greyfriars, it had nothing like the same success. Nor do I believe that Jimmy Silver ever caught the imagination of readers as Tom Merry did.

Astonishing, I think, was the repetition of names. Most inexplicable of all was the use of Mr. Quelch and George Wingate at Clavering in the spring of 1907, and then to find the same names and identical characters at Greyfriars in early 1908. Not flaws, perhaps, but certainly oddities. And long, long afterwards we found names like Punter and Poynings continually cropping up.

I agree with Roger about unpleasant names for unpleasant people. For the record I would mention that Snipe was not a Hamilton creation. It was an editorial name given to Levison for a time in the reprint period when stories were printed out of original sequence.

I don't think the Happy Family names ever bothered me much, but I was unhappy over names like Professor Balmyscrumpet. That sort of thing lowered the standard of the papers with a bump to comic paper level.

I do not really agree with Roger that the way in which Greyfriars boys read the Gem, or the way in which Gussy once met Martin Clifford, shattered illusion. At any rate, it always had the reverse effect upon me. More shattering to my illusions were the Greyfriars Herald and Billy Bunter's Weekly supplements. But we all knew that the author had nothing to do with those.

As an adult I find very few real flaws in the diamond. I think that the adverb "quietly" was used too frequently. I think that "Ha! Ha! Ha's" and "Yarooohs!" were quite superfluous. I am surprised that, at any rate in later years, they were not blue-pencilled. I agree with Roger that there was an air of gentle patronage in the presentation of the so-called working classes, but I am sure it never gave offence. I believe that ninety per cent of Charles Hamilton's readers were of those working classes and of the middle class which, as Roger so truly says, never really existed in the stories.

I had my own pet aversions among themes, as who of us has not? Long series, in my view, were a mistake. I believe, as I have said before, that the very long series came about on account of the need of the author, in later years, to make one plot last as long as possible.

It irritated me when, almost invariably, Charles Hamilton

translated any piece of foreign language used. Monsieur Charpentier always translated his French expressions into English. It is the only instance that I can call to mind of Charles Hamilton ever writing down to his readers.

But these criticisms are really carping. Charles Hamilton's achievements were so immense in turning out wholesome and readable stories in huge quantities for boys, as both Roger and I fully agree, that one has to be carping to find fault.

In all but one point, I fully agree with Roger's masterful summing-up of the substitution question. Roger tells us that the dearth of genuine stories in the Gem in the late twenties was due to a bitter argument which the author had with the editor of the Gem. I find it rather hard to accept this, though I presume that Roger obtained his information from Charles Hamilton himself.

I discussed the Gem more than any other paper with Charles Hamilton, and he never told me anything of the sort. The editor of the Gem was also the editor of the Magnet, and surely a dispute with one would have been a dispute with the other. I believe that Mr. Down was the editor at this time, and the author always spoke of him as the easiest of men with whom to co-operate.

Furthermore, the trend of ever-increasing substitute work was clear during most of the twenties. Even in the earlier twenties the genuine stories, though consistently excellent, were regrettably short. In 1924 there was a large number of substitute stories. In 1925 more than half the stories were by substitute writers. In 1926 there was a mere handful of genuine stories. 1927 showed an improvement, when Charles Hamilton contributed the summer series of Tom Merry & Co in Canada. 1928 had only the Victor Cleve series of four tales. In 1929 there were no genuine stories at all.

In 1930 and in the first six months of 1931 there were about eight genuine stories. After the reprints started, new stories were no longer required from anyone for the Gem.

In my opinion, had there been a bitter dispute over the Gem, Charles Hamilton would have written no new stories at all for it in those years. My view is that he had other fish to fry, and just had no time for many Gem stories.

Finally, I do not agree with Roger that in the Gem of the middle twenties onwards, the imitations were "very cleverly done indeed." He is, of course, speaking of his personal reactions to those stories, but I find it surprising that he should have found it necessary to read several chapters in some cases before becoming certain that the

story in question was an imitation. Such was never my experience. I recall the bitter disappointment I used to suffer when, week after week, I used to look in vain for a genuine story.

I do not know which particular substitute stories Roger has in mind, but I can think of none in that period which I would regard in any way as approaching the real thing.

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CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 71: A HIT OR A MISS

W.O.G. LOFTS: One could never speak of a substitute Sexton Blake writer, though one could refer to substitute "character writers." No other writer could ever write a Granite Grant story like W. W. Sayer, the creator. With regard to the reprinting of the old Gem stories, the following is an extract from a letter received from Mr. R. C. Hewitt, who was a sub-editor on the Magnet and Gem in the 30's.

"The Gem reprints were selected by Mr. Arthur Aldcroft, who was in charge of the Gem at that time (under Mr. C. M. Down). He typed them direct from the volumes, and he had instructions to use genuine Charles Hamilton stories only. It is quite possible that a few substitute stories crept in, but this was unintentional. A few genuine stories had to be omitted as they were dated from some reason or other."

HARRY BROSTER: I think you have hit on a very sensible and wise view of the substitute writers and their stories, and I think you are dead correct. Just as we all accepted the various authors of Sexton Blake, so would we have tolerated the substitute writers, had their names been disclosed. Some of the sub yarns were putrid stuff, but they have suffered more since the disclosure that they were not genuine. Yours is a good point, and I think injustice to the well-meaning but inferior sub-writers would have been avoided.

FRANK LAY: I can appreciate that some discerning readers could detect some sub-stories, but I fail to see how anyone could detect them all, as, even now, there is still argument as to whether some stories are subs or not. Like all authors with a huge output and deadlines to meet, C.H. turned out some pot-boilers.

As regards deductions as to authorship from internal evidence so ably put by Laurie Sutton and Walter Webb, these deductions have so often been proved wrong that I feel they take up space that could be put to better use. But Laurie Sutton is quite correct in refusing to accept authors' statements as to stories they wrote even 20 years ago. But what about the dozens of sub-stories which he says are still credited to C.H.? From your own statements you should be able to settle this. Can you? I should very much doubt that Penn ever ghosted for C.H. I regard him as one of the poorest of the A.P. authors.

ERIC FAYNE adds: I presume that Mr. Sutton was referring to many substitute stories which are not shown as such in the London Club's Gem catalogue. In a review of this catalogue in Collectors' Digest for October 1962, we made the following observation: "The only criticism one can make is that substitute stories might have been indicated as such, even when the name of the actual writer was not known. As it is, one gets the overall impression that Charles Hamilton wrote even more stories for the Gem than he actually did."

However, the fault lay with the compilers of the catalogue. It did not mean that, in the minds of any experts, substitute stories were credited to Charles Hamilton. Personally I do not believe that any sub story in the Gem or Magnet would deceive an expert, but I think one might have doubts on certain stories which were genuine but not up to the usual standard of Hamilton.

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'HAMILTONIANA' (continued on page 22)

"And you'll destroy all the remaining copies of that number, with the dud in it, and I'll see you do it!" said Frank, determinedly. "That's the condition. Otherwise I'm going to the sheriff."

Mr. Penrose had to give in. In the presence of Frank Richards & Co., all the remaining stock of the current number of the "Thompson Press" were taken out, piled into a heap in the yard, and set fire to.

There is no doubt in my opinion, that this Cedar Creek story was provoked by the appearance of "Wanted a Poet" in Boys' Friend No. 933. Mr. Penrose was made to stand in as whipping boy for Percy Griffith - the original offender. Although substitute stories about Greyfriars and St. Jim's continued to appear, and there is no record of piles of Magnets and Gems having to be burned, at least the pure Hamiltonian air in British Columbia remained unsullied. For no other sub-writer seems to have visited the School in the Backwoods.

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 73. A QUESTION OF TASTE:

Some time ago, in this series, I criticised as unbelievable the Hamilton character Tom Dutton. Some of my colleagues agreed with me, and the subject has been referred to more than once since then.

I found, however, that my colleagues took a dim view of Dutton for different reasons from my own. They condemned Dutton as a character drawn in poor taste - deafness is no subject for humour.

I have to confess that, in making my criticism of Dutton, I gave no thought at all to the "poor taste" side of the matter. I condemned Dutton because he was not true-to-life. Nowadays, and for many years past, a boy afflicted with deafness would wear a hearing-aid.

Adults, whose sense of hearing deteriorates with the passing of the years, find themselves handicapped and liable to misinterpret what is said to them. But deaf children are usually amazing at the art of lip-reading. They acquire the gift unconsciously. Years ago, in my own school, we discovered that a boy was lip-reading. He was taken to a doctor who verified that the boy was actually very deaf indeed, though the parents had never suspected it.

Dutton irritated me as a boy who would never exist in any real school. Invariably I found his misunderstandings tedious, not because I thought them in poor taste, but because they were crude. Had they been really funny, or shown wit on the part of the author, I might have been amused.

Goethe once said that nothing shows a man's character more than the things he laughs at. Goethe may have had something there.

My mother detested anything which cast fun upon stuttering. She was disgusted with songs which relied upon stuttering for their humour. Anything which might hurt the feelings of a person afflicted with stuttering caused her intense anger. She instilled me with the same view.

Yet I never heard her express any annoyance at jokes involving deafness - possibly because she herself was hard of hearing. She was the first to laugh at anything incongruous resulting from her deafness.

I recall a music hall act - a married couple known as Nat Mills and Bobbie. I thought them brilliant. One of their many sketches depicted an elderly couple, both afflicted with deafness, who met after many years and exchanged reminiscences. The old gentleman said: "Do you remember when I put you across my knee and spanked you?" and the deaf old lady replied: "You wouldn't know the old place now."

I laughed heartily. Yet if they had given a stuttering song I should have found it revolting. I could laugh at humour from deafness, but humour from stuttering would be anathema to me.

Utterly inconsistent!

Yet aren't most of us inconsistent over the things we laugh at. I would regard a stuttering character as drawn with very poor taste, yet I never cease to delight in the speech impediment of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Is it not a certainty that many who would give Charles Hamilton a black mark for getting fun out of Dutton's deafness would still give him full marks for the humour he extracted from Gussy's impediment?

What about the obesity of Bunter and the other fat boys of the Hamilton story? Rarely is obesity due to overeating. Usually the cause is some physical disorder over which the sufferer has no control. The discomfort must be at least equal to that of deafness, and it is far more dangerous. Some readers and writers do not like Bunter (and I do not agree with them), but I have never yet heard him slammed because his fatness was portrayed in questionable taste.

Occasionally Bunter's short-sightedness was made the subject of comedy. I have never known this criticised, and the author himself, and his sister, suffered from poor eyesight for most of their lives.

Mr. Selby's red nose and irascible temper were due to indigestion, but there is nothing funny in indigestion in real life. Clarence Cuffy was, to put it mildly, a little simple - but most of us found him a joy.

Authors, when trying to be funny, make full use of the ills to which the flesh is heir, and they often try to extract humour at the expense of the frailties of human nature. Where, in fact, should an author draw the line in these matters?

Candidly, I do not believe that Charles Hamilton was ever guilty of bad taste in his stories, but if we condemn Dutton's deafness as being a breach of good taste we must equally condemn the obesity of every fat boy in fiction. Which surely would be carrying things too far.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that the character work in connection with these ills makes a big difference. And Dutton's deafness was never used as anything but a subject for comedy. It had no other purpose.

Some, then, say that Dutton was a character in poor taste. I say he was unreal. So perhaps Greyfriars would have been all the better had he never been created.

But would it?

CONTROVERSIAL ESSAYS

No. 72. NOT FLAWLESS, BUT ---

ROBERT KELLY: I agree wholeheartedly with your recent comments in the Digest about substitute stories in the Gem from 1920 onwards. Hamilton was obviously on good terms with C. M. Down, the editor of the two companion papers. I feel that Hamilton by the 1920s was to some extent a victim of his own success. With the competition of the Thomson papers becoming acute the A.P. seems to have shuttled him between one paper and another to help save declining publications and get new weeklies like Modern Boy and Ranger off to a good start. The result was that for some years both the Magnet and Gem carried large numbers of sub stories despite the good relations between Hamilton and Down.

My guess is that some time in 1926 the decision was made (perhaps at Hamilton's own insistence) that rather than have both papers carrying large numbers of sub stories one should revert to being a purely Hamilton paper. As the Magnet was the more popular by 1926 it was the obvious choice. How else can one explain the sudden ending of long runs of sub stories in mid-1926. From this time onwards substitute stories were very much the exception in The Magnet. Admittedly the Gem had a run of Hamilton stories round about 1926-1927 but this is probably explained by the gap between the ending of the Rookwood

stories in the Boys Friend and the beginning of the Ric Kid in the Popular and Ken King in Modern Boy.

Hamilton's earlier relations with Pentelow are a different matter although this period saw the beginning of his diversification with Rookwood and Cedar Creek in the Boys Friend.

W. O. G. LOFTS: I was surprised to read in Roger's article that "Mr. Hamilton had a bitter argument with the editor of the Gem in the late twenties." I have been in touch with Mr. Down for a number of years. He has always spoken highly of C. H., and never, to my knowledge, had any dispute with him. It is true that there were editors on each paper, e.g. Hedley O'Mant (Magnet) and Arthur Aldcroft (Gem), but on his rare visits to Fleetway, C.H. only ever saw the man at the top - C. M. Down. The explanation I heard as to why C. H. did not write so much for the Gem was that he was more enthusiastic about Jimmy Silver than Tom Merry at that particular time. It seems that he used to send in about a dozen complete Rookwood yarns, which was something which never happened in connection with Greyfriars or St. Jim's. By 1928, perhaps the Modern Boy tales were more attractive to him, but this paper was also under the control of C. M. Down. The Boy's Friend was in a different group, and came under R. T. Eves.

PETER HANGER: I agree with you that Roger Jenkins had to scrape the bottom to find flaws in the diamond, but, as you so aptly add, that is something of a compliment to Charles Hamilton.

LAURIE SUTTON: Concerning Happy Family names, I am surprised that Roger Jenkins is so worried by this matter. Has not he met with "names for the job" in real life? I can offer Mr. Cotton, my tailor; Cakebread, the baker; Carver, the Lewisham butcher; Tyler, the man who repaired my roof; Glazier, the Crystal Palace goalkeeper.

Why was D'Arcy a name too good to be true? It is quite a common name among professional and amateur footballers. I can't see any objection to Mr. Lambe, the vicar, or to Skinner, Gore, and Croke - all quite common names.

I agree with you about Professor Balmcrumpet, to which I would add the Welsh Stakes and the Swindlem Handicap. I don't share your irritation at the translation of foreign phrases. Council school readers didn't learn languages, and the translations were an education. For millions, their only French lessons came from Mosses.

ERIC FAYNE adds: Boys did not buy the Magnet in order to learn languages. Monsieur Charpentier's repetition in English of everything