

The Collectors' Digest

Vol. 12, No. 139

1/6

JULY 1958



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—THE COLLECTORS DIGEST—

Vol. 12

No. 139

Price 1s. 6d.

JULY, 1958

Editor: HERBERT LECKENBY
12 Herbert Street,
Hull Road, York.

O R

c/o YORK DUPLICATING SERVICES,
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From The Editor's Chair

THE TWELFTH ANNUAL. With this issue you will find the now familiar forms. Now, practically all of you will be ordering the Annual, so why not fill in the forms straight away, before you mislay them. That will make it all the easier for me and, of course, there's no need to send the cash yet, if not convenient.

Since I last wrote I've received a gem of an article from Leslie Rowley of Greyfriars Cup fame. Les calls it "On Hearing the Greyfriars Chimes at Midnight." In an accompanying letter he said "It's always been my ambition to get into the Annual." Well within an hour of getting the article an air letter was on the way to Les saying "You're in." The only complaint I have is that I wish it was longer. However Leslie may put that right.

Also to hand is Geoff Hockley's "Buffalo Bill and His Rivals." It's in Geoff's usual breezy style, so no more need be said.

Bill Hubbard has also sent me some excellent suggestions for articles. Among them are "Something on the Scout" "The Wu Ling Saga" "The Ferrers Lord Stories" "The School Stories in the B.O.P." and an article on the numerous stories of prison life, which used to be so popular.

Well, there's something to think about there - any volunteers?

* * *

BELIEVE IT OR NOT. You all know that Harry Broster, indefatigable secretary of the Midland O.B.B.C., has a great admiration for the school stories written by the late J. N. Pentelow. Well, recently Harry's daughter Margaret married a master at Wycliffe School, Leicester. Moreover, Margaret herself a teacher, had a pupil named Pentelow! A very uncommon name. For a couple of coincidences that will take some beating. Amazing how they keep cropping up.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY

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Blakiana

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

27, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22.

When I reproduced the late G. H. Teed's letter (May C.D.) I felt sure it would be of interest to readers of Blakiana. I am now very pleased to say that I have received several letters to this effect. One correspondent said he had thought of suggesting the reproduction of the letter some time ago; he had not done so, however, as he did not think I should be able to spare the space.

There is ALWAYS room in Blakiana for anything of this nature, so if anyone else has any suggestions for the inclusion of material of this kind I shall be pleased to have them.

It may be of interest to readers to know that I now have six original Blake stories by Teed in bound book form. In every case the wording of the story is identical, only the names of Blake and Tinker have been changed - for reasons which are obvious.

J. PACKMAN.

* * *

PICTURESQUE PARS FROM SEXTON BLAKE PAPERS

by Victor Colby

Have you ever been impressed by the great wealth of delightful expressions scattered throughout the Blake publications like scintillating diamonds on the commonplace crust of Mother Earth?

Here is a tremendous field, and however inexpert the lover of Blake on matters appertaining to the detective's tradition, he can, with a few miscellaneous Blake papers, a quiet corner, and a little patience, have a splendid game picking out the plums from the pudding, receiving enjoyment himself and providing it for others too, if only he will pass on the result to our livewire editor Josie Packman. For I am sure that she would be able to use these highlights to supplement the more conventional articles of Blakiana. The editor is always glad of copy. Here is one way we can all help, no writing ability being necessary, but only an appreciation of those gems of wit and wisdom that pervade the Blake publications.

Here is my contribution. The following items are included as

being of interest from a descriptive, humorous, lively or novel standpoint.

U.J. No. 124 "The Diver Detective"

(1) The water lapped sullenly and sluggishly against the base of the rocks, and the place seemed full of strange soft noises, like the whisperings of spirits.....

The lake lay gloomy and silent, without a ripple on its surface. Even the fierce rays of the noonday sun failed to draw a sparkle of light from it. The water, however, was clear, and as Blake peered down into its depths, he fancied he could discern the outlines of buildings, glimmering white and ghostly far below.

Fifty fathoms down were the ruins of a huge building with massive columns that had one supported a roof. A broad flight of marble steps led up to the great arched entrance, which was still in tact. Beyond these were other buildings, stretching away until they became mere ghostly shadows in the dim, green haze of the watery distances.

(2) Tinker was just in time to see a big Nubian emerging from the boat's hatchway. Lowering his head, he charged, butting the negro in that part of his anatomy where the lower button of his waistcoat would have been had he worn such a garment. With a noise between a gasp and a howl, the Nubian doubled up and vanished.

(3) Sexton Blake rose to his feet and faced the Portugese. "I have told you the exact truth," he said quietly, "and I am not accustomed to have my word doubted."

"You do not trick me with your lies," said the Portugese.

"What?"

"I say you are a liar....."

The word was barely spoken when Sexton Blake struck the miscreant full on the mouth, and sent him reeling across the tent.

"You hound!" he cried.

* * *

U.J. No. 131 "The Tram Ticket Clue"

(1) In the performance of his duties, Tinker had become a tram conductor. It was his first day on the tram.

A thin hatchet faced matron with an aggressive eye got on to the car, carrying a well filled basket, and accompanied by a lanky boy of perhaps fourteen, who wore a straw hat and a sailor suit. With a sigh of content she sat down, put the basket on the floor, and took

the budding youth on her lap. When Tinker reached her, she coolly offered him a penny.

"Twopence please," he said.

"Wot for?" asked the woman. "I'm only going as far as Kew Bridge."

"That will be two fares - one for yourself, and one for your son,"

Tinker explained.

"But I'm only taking up one seat. Where are your eyes young man?"

Can't you see that I'm holding my Sammy on my lap?"

There were titters of laughter at this, and Tinker began to get uncomfortable.

"Madam, one fare will not be enough," he declared trying to keep cool, "the regulations of the company state plainly that all children, except infants in arms, must be paid for."

"And wot of it?" snorted the woman. "My child is in harms, and he's an infant. Wot more do you want?"

"What a beautiful bouncing boy!" remarked an ancient dame with cork-screw ringlets hanging over her ears, sitting opposite. "Do you give him the bottle?"

"You say that again," cried the mother of the little cherub glaring at the speaker, "and I'll pull your false hair off!"

Again she offered the coin to Tinker. "Take it or leave it," she said.

"How old are you?" Tinker helplessly enquired of the strapping infant of fourteen. The boy looked up sheepishly with finger in mouth.

"I dunno!" he mumbled. "Ask Ma!"

"If you want to know it," snapped Ma, "my Sammy has just turned six!"

"Then he must have been fed on Mellin's Food from the way he's growed!" put in a navvy in the corner.

"You mind your own business, you jackanapes!" the woman told him.

"Madam, this won't do!" said Tinker, turning very red. "If you won't pay twopence, I shall be compelled to put you off the car."

"Oh you will will you?" replied the woman, as she cuddled her precocious infant. "Just you dare to try it, that's all."

Stung by taunts from the other passengers, Ma rose to do battle, was restrained by Tinker, only to have his face smartly smacked. Blow after blow the virago rained on him, and all was noise and confusion. Fortunately a policeman joined the car. "What's all this about?" he asked.

"It's that creature....." declared the ancient dame.

"Shut your brazen face, you bag of bones and false hair," snapped the creature referred to. She shook a skinny fist at Tinker.

"Arrest this young varmint, constable, he's been battering and assaulting me."

However, the limb of the law was not to be trifled with, and having heard the full story, insisted on Ma coughing up the extra penny.

(2) Sexton Blake, who was driving the tram, was vastly amused by the foregoing incident, but his turn was soon to come. An obstruction ahead took the form of a brewer's dray, piled high with empty beer casks, on the top of which lounged the driver, a big beefy man with a red beard.

"Get over by the pavement and let us pass," called Blake.

"Not me, you and your blessed company don't own the earth."

Clang, clang went Blake's bell, but it was no use, the dray remained on the lines, and Blake had perforce to crawl along behind at a snail's pace, abused by his own passengers and by the crew of the following trams, while small boys jeered from the pavement, and from passing vehicles came coarse laughter and jest.

Sexton Blake's temper was by no means improved by a running flow of chaff from the driver of the dray, who was enjoying himself hugely.

"Yah! Yah!" he cried. "Keep your shirt on, Guv'nor - and don't get waxy! I'll move when I'm ready and not before! I have as much right here as your old tramcar! Go and chase yourself. You needn't think that because you wear a bloomin' uniform with brass buttons on it that you can walk over a poor man wot earns his daily bread by the sweat of his brow."

Tinker stepped off the platform, darted by the dray, and seized the two horses by the bridle. He jerked and tugged at them, drawing them and the dray to one side.

"You young scamp!" roared the man with an oath, "just wait 'til I....."

His voice broke into a yell, which was drowned by a thunderous clatter as the stacked-up pile of beer casks suddenly gave way, and rolled in an avalanche to the ground, the driver on top of them. As the driver staggered to his feet, he upset a little girl who was coming out of a grocer's shop with a jug of treacle, and bespattered with the sticky liquid, he danced about wildly and rushed at Tinker. Another limb of the law put in a providential appearance, however, and everything was sorted out.

"If we are to have much more of this sort of thing, my boy, it will turn my hair grey," said Sexton Blake with feeling.

ANSWER TO MEMORY TEASER No. 12(June, 1958 C.D.)

Those of you who were unable to solve last month's Teaser are reminded that there was a particularly vital clue to the identity of the author in the last line of Extract No. 4, which read: He (Blake) rebounded and sent his two hundred pounds of bone and muscle hurtling towards the doorway."

That makes Blake's weight 14stone 4 lbs - rather hefty than we usually imagine! Even Howard Baker (in FRIGHTENED LADY, S.B.L. Third Series, 359) only credits Blake with 170 pounds.

The author who always depicted Blake as a big man was ANTHONY SKENE, creator of the famous Zenith the Albino and other associated characters.

The story quoted last month, though written by Skene, did not feature Zenith and, in itself, as far as plot was concerned, was not particularly brilliant - but it was certainly loaded with action! It was called THE HEADMAN and it appeared in UNION JACK dated 31 May, 1930. Front cover was by Eric R. Parker; inside sketches by old-timer Fred Bennett.

Anthony Skene's last published Blake story was

THE MAN WHO LOST HIS MEMORY (see S.B.L. 153 issued October, 1947.)

* * *

DID YOU CHECK THE BEADS?by W. O. G. Lofts

FOREWORD: Mr. H. W. Twyman started his career at the A. Press as a proof reader in the "Magnet" Office.

Having some ability as an artist, from time to time he drew maps for the "Magnet", "Holiday Annual" etc.

One of these - featuring Rookwood - was unfortunately placed in the wrong county; but this was not Mr. Twyman's fault, for the information supplied to him for the drawing was incorrect. (It should be explained that although at that time he was acquainted with Greyfriars, he had no knowledge of Rookwood.)

In those days some of the papers were run in a very slapdash way; but this is not one of Mr. Twyman's characteristics, in fact he is the very opposite - a devotee to detail.

To give an instance of this, here is a case in point, and one that never before has been revealed. I quote from Mr. Twyman's letter to me on this little matter:

"I wrote a story for the U.J. entitled "Cormack's Key". It concerned a message conveyed by a string of coloured beads arranged in the Morse Code. This string of beads I used on the cover. Lest anyone take the trouble to check up, I had the artist (Kenneth Brookes) put in all the beads in their correct colours so as to spell out the message in actual Morse Code - quite an unnecessary thing really, and it could easily have been avoided without detriment to the picture. Ironically not a solitary reader then or since has commented on it, right or wrong. It was a fiddlesome job demanding care and checking too. Maybe, Mr. Lofts, one of these days in one of you detective moods you'll have the impulse of checking it in your turn. I don't suppose any of the Blake-fan collectors have noticed it either, let alone ordinary readers."

NOTE: I did check up on the story (U.J. No. 1073 dated 3rd May, 1924) and right enough the beads were arranged to spell out correctly the message which, deciphered, was:

COMBINATION RAIL. HIBERNIAN DEPOSIT.

* * *

(Having a copy of the Morse Code I got out my copy of the U.J. the other night and worked it out for myself. The design of the necklace as shown on the front cover, working from left to right is, as Bill says, quite correct. Those of you who possess a copy may like to try it for yourselves. J. PACKMAN)

 GOOD PRICES PAID for Magnets all vintages, especially 1926 onwards, (not substitute stories) loose or bound volumes, any reasonable condition. BADLY WANTED: B.F.Ls, 288, 328, 513 featuring Greyfriars. WILL EXCHANGE FOR MAGNETS - several nice Sexton Blake items. Let me know price, condition by airletter please.
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HAMILTONIANA

compiled by HERBERT LECKENBY

Here to start off with is a cherry letter from Frank Richards:

FRANK RICHARDS IS STILL BUSY

9th June, 1958.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for the C.D. I was specially interested in the letter from that good fellow Leslie Ayre of the Evening News. It is curious perhaps, that I never needed to keep any sort of index to the thousand or so characters who appeared on and off during three decades of Magnet and Gem. But they were, and are, indelible in memory's records, with all their little manners and customs.

Lately, in leisure hours, I have been developing my idea of Latin parodies of familiar old songs, of which I hope to publish a volume one of these days. One of them has recently appeared in a scholastic journal; a Latin version of "When I was a lad I served a term", Sir Joseph Porter's song in H.M.S. Pinafore. I thought it might interest you to see it, so I enclose a copy.

With kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,

FRANK RICHARDS

* * *

Here are the 16 names hidden in Gerry Allison's puzzle last month:

Nugent - Fish - Cherry - Brown - Redwing -
 Bull - Wibley - Desmond - Penfoeld - Dutton -
 Mauleverer - Field - Linley - Bunter - Wharton -
 Bolsover

* * *

Which do you prefer?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 6 - Magnet No. 541 or Gems 927 - 928 (S.O.L. No. 264)

A danger which sometimes threatened the Magnet and the Gem - especially in the early days - was the use of an unsuitable plot. The

Gem, for example, went off the rails with "Figgy's Folly" and "The Black House on the Moor"; no fault can be found with either story as such, but they are undeniably strange and fitted badly into the regular pattern that readers had grown to expect. "Harry Wharton and Co's Pantomime" was an example of a misfit in the Magnet, and "William the Good" in No. 541 was another.

The idea that the objectionable fat boy should be compelled to reform by his schoolfellows, and that he should make himself even more objectionable as a reformed character is undoubtedly novel and promising, but the assumption of such slyness and depths of cunning by Billy Bunter was too much out of character to read convincingly. That he should offer to clean Wharton's bike and then leave it in ruins was a happy inspiration, but that he should smugly promise to forgive his tormentors and pray for them as well was perhaps too exaggerated to ring true. Charles Hamilton must have hugely enjoyed writing "William the Good", but it is all so odd in its general effect that the joke bears the appearance of having misfired.

One man's meat is another man's poison, and what was so unsuccessful at Greyfriars turned out to be a huge success at St. Jim's in Gems 927-928. Not only was the theme better for being extended to two numbers (in comparison with one war-time Magnet), but Baggy Trimble was already possessed of the vein of slyness and low cunning which made him the perfect vehicle for staging such a pretended reformation. Whereas the Magnet story is an embarrassment to read, the Gem series is delightful and engrossing from beginning to end.

Charles Hamilton stated some years ago: "Baggy owed his existence to the fact that Bunter was such a "draw" in the other paper but though he was the work of my own hands, I never liked him much; the real truth being that an author should never imitate even himself. He had to be differentiated from Billy Bunter, and all the difference somehow seemed to turn out badly for him." This is perhaps the explanation why Bunter could not feature as a conscious hypocrite, whereas Trimble most certainly could.

At all events, my choice is most emphatically in favour of the St. Jim's version of this theme. Which do you prefer?

* * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

(In this series, Eric Fayne touches on certain matters of interest to students of the Hamilton papers. He gives his own views superficially, If you will write to him, expressing your opinions on the topics he

discusses, he will summarise readers' views in a future issue.)

No. 16. IS IT POSSIBLE TO REGRET THAT CHARLES HAMILTON WROTE SO MANY SERIES APART FROM GREYFRIARS AND ST. JIM'S?

Which is another way of asking "should we be happier had he concentrated all his powers on the Magnet and the Gem?" It is an extremely difficult question to answer, and there are many factors to take into consideration before one arrives at a reluctant decision.

Would it have been fair to Mr. Hamilton had he been compelled to spend all his life with Billy Bunter and Tom Merry? There is the possibility that an author, writing year in, year out, on the same group of characters, with no others to engage his attention for a form of relaxation, might become stale and fall into the pot-boiler rut. I doubt whether Mr. Hamilton would have done so, for he genuinely loves writing of Bunter, Tom Merry and the rest, as he has often told us, and that is why his stories have a charming freshness which one does not find elsewhere.

It is certain that all the many branches of his work have their own large quota of devotees, but the fact emerges undeniably that the Magnet and the Gem were shadowed by so many substitute stories because the star author was engaged in writing other series. Part of the genius of Charles Hamilton is seen in his truly remarkable output over the years, but his claim to everlasting fame would be secure had he never written anything but Greyfriars and St. Jim's.

Were the other series worth the substitute blight which fell on the Gem in particular and the Magnet to a lesser extent? Generally speaking, I think they were not.

Every generalisation has its exception, and I most certainly except the Rio Kid. The Kid was different, I regard him as one of Mr. Hamilton's finest creations, and I found those Wild West stories delightful and charming from the first line to the last. But I am not so sure about the other series which were on similar lines to those of Greyfriars and St. Jim's.

Rookwood is a difficulty. I dearly love Rookwood, and it is almost treacherous not to except it as a matter of course. Yet I am not convinced that the ten years of Rookwood counterbalanced the dreary substitute stories in the Magnet and the Gem.

I rejoiced in Cedar Creek - stories which were first-class without question - but I would willingly change them for first class tales of Harry Wharton and Tom Merry.

Other series I think we could well have spared, if their absence

meant better Magnets and Gems. Ken King, The Benbow, St. Kit's, The School for Slackers, Bunny, Will Hay's Schooldays and others, were well written, it goes without saying, but they could not compare, in general appeal, with Greyfriars and St. Jim's. The Packsaddle Bunch, I have never been moved to read at all, though I possess them, naturally.

The demand today for Magnets, Gems, stories of Billy Bunter and of Tom Merry, shows clearly where the genius of Charles Hamilton lies. I found and find constant delight in Rookwood and Cedar Creek, but I feel that our author had, for too long, too many irons in the fire, and the result was a less attractive Magnet and Gem over long periods of their history.

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

* * *

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 14. ARE THE MASTERS CREDIBLE AT THE HAMILTON SCHOOLS?

ROGER JENKINS writes: "I think you are quite right about the masters at the Hamilton schools. It made a pleasant change to have Mossco or Lascelles taking the Remove once in a while, but most of the form-room scenes would have been nothing without Quelch as the permanent form-master and, as you say, no form-master in fiction ever equalled him as a character drawing.

It is interesting to note that St. Jim's possessed not a single master who might be called a really good study; Selby and Railton were near misses, but all the others were well off the target, compared with Greyfriars and Rookwood. The likeable characters at St. Jim's, both masters and boys, were on a more restrained level than at the other two schools. No doubt this is the reason why the substitute writers found it easier to impersonate Frank Richards than Martin Clifford. It does not follow, however, that because the characterisation at St. Jim's was relatively subdued the stories were inferior to those at the other schools.

I think that Dr. Chisholm was more than a clever piece of character work; he was an essential feature of the Rookwood scene in a way that never obtained with his counterparts at Greyfriars and St. Jim's. Time and time again the Headmaster of Rookwood took a hasty decision which he later regretted but was too proud to revoke, and the result was a magnificent series, whether the subject was masters on strike or Mr. Greely installed as Headmaster of a rival establishment."

BILL LOFTS writes: "I really agree with all you say about the Grey-

friars masters. A master who, to my mind, was a very interesting study - not mentioned by yourself - was Mr. Mobbs of Highcliffe, who, I would say, at times featured as much in the Greyfriars yarns as Dr. Locke. Mr. Mobbs was a finely drawn character whose snobbish ways, and pet Ponsonby, brought a lot of colour to the Magnet tales.

I think that Monsieur Charpentier was a little overdrawn at times."

GEORGE SELLARS writes: "Messrs. Quelch, Prout, Bootles and Chisholm are very good characters and I always like reading about them. I think Messrs. Railton, Ratcliffe and Selby are also very interesting though maybe not so well drawn as the others. Indeed, I regard Mr. Railton as the ideal type of master, as he proved himself in many stories. Mr. Ratcliff is, of course, the exact opposite in character, and Martin Clifford wrote some splendid stories about these rival Housemasters, showing fine characterisation.

There were some excellent tales about Mr. Selby, introducing Gussy and Wally, and his character was well developed in these yarns.

I think the Hamilton masters are very credible compared with masters at public schools, either years ago or at the present time."

GEOFFREY H. WILDE writes: "Speaking as a schoolmaster I find the Hamilton teachers least true-to-life in their unbending formality and academicism, even off duty. Granted that much that is now informal in education would not have been accepted 30 years ago, one feels it was only in their little eccentricities that these formidable gentlemen were human at all. Pupil-teacher relationships are generally portrayed in the stories with considerable understanding, but among themselves the masters remain formal and frigid. Men who had worked together so long would surely have enjoyed a social life at once more relaxed and less superficial than that which generally seemed suggested.

Their pedagogic aspect is, moreover, not simply exaggerated, but also too narrow for complete conviction. Few of them gave an impression of wide culture or any range of general interests. They were immune from the appeal of those specialised pursuits that were so strongly developed in their pupils; nor is there evidence of an interest in modern literature, in music or the other arts, or in such group pastimes as bridge.

The fact is, of course, that they are adults in a boy-centred world, seen for the most part through the eyes of their pupils; and no-one, I think, would question the essential rightness of this kind

of portrayal in the genre to which they belong. There are occasions, however, when the author tackles a theme that really demands a maturer view, and here motivation sometimes seems rather too slender to support the main idea of the story.

I am sure all readers will agree with you in finding the Greyfriars masters in the main superior studies to those of the other schools, and Mr. Quelch the most interesting and mature of the lot."

ERIC FAYNE says: "Monsieur Charpentier is a poor disciplinarian, but that does not make him a less credible character. It is surprising the number of poor disciplinarians who hold posts in real schools of all types everywhere. Mosso, though conscientious, is probably a poor teacher also. Most weak disciplinarians are.

I think we might be a trifle hypercritical in lamenting the absence, in school stories written for popular reading, of detail concerning the social activities of the masters. Mr. Prout, in fact, has travelled widely and has hunted big game, while Mr. Lathom is an antiquarian, but such points are not really very important.

We must remember too, that the unbending formality of the masters was the source of much delicious humour in a great many of the stories.

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FRANK RICHARDS - BEST OF THEM ALL

By W. O. G. Lofts

FOREWORD:

Many of the authors and editors that I have met from time to time have all in the course of conversation spoken in high praise of the writings and merits of Frank Richards - easily the most popular of all boys writers - and probably the best school story writer of all time. This article contains not only my own appreciation, comments and views on this great writer - who has given me countless hours of pleasure by his delightful writings - but the opinions at times expressed by other A.P. writers and editors of repute - though not mentioned by name.

Mr. Charles Hamilton has always expressed the wish that apart from his private affairs - income tax people - and near relatives - he wishes to be known as Frank Richards - so this name will be used throughout this article.

* * *

There have been many excellent articles dealing with the merits of Frank Richards in the "Collectors' Digest" in the past, but what is

really needed is a book to be written and published in Frank Richards' life time, giving a fair critical appreciation of his work - especially of how his work changed through the years. As his work prior to writing for "Pluck" in 1906 is of little interest to readers, I shall not dwell on it here - but from the commencement of his tales in "Pluck" and right up to 1911, his plotting was not so good, and the stories - especially the "Magnet" ones - were often a collection of incidents, amusing in themselves, with most excellent characterisation, but not well knit. This I would say was due to the method of his writing at the time, that he sometimes wrote the first chapters of the story without a clue as to what the plot was to be, and that one developed as the story progressed.

During the next few years or so, his stories became stronger, and more dramatic. At the end of 1912, he wrote one of the most sought -after - and valuable - Greyfriars stories of them all, "Bob Cherry's Barring Out", which was on the lines of "The Winslow Boy", with Bob Cherry in the title role, wrongly expelled, and his father, Major Cherry determined to see justice done. Many times he derived new stories by introducing a new boy whose character founded the story; if he were not a villain due to be expelled, then he stayed on and increased the multiplicity of characters without continuing to supply value, sometimes tending to rob the Famous Five of some of the lime-light. Frank Richards should have had more editorial support and guidance in those early days, and there should have been better planning of the series. Perhaps a sub-editor to suggest new stories and 'angles'. Actually, this should have been the editor's job.

At the start of the First World War, Frank Richards was living in the South of France, and got behind with his work, and substitutes were needed unless he caught up with the schedule. Much had been written about them in the past in my articles in the C.D. and it is not my intention to go into this subject here. It was obviously against his interest to have inferior work published under his pen-names. It would have been better if they had been left out when the stories were written by others. His stories were so well written and phrased that they were never subbed; there was no editorial work of selection, therefore Frank Richards could have taken his work to any publishing firm; and if he had had a real business sense, he could have published them himself!

During the first world war Frank Richards was asked to write a new series of stories for the "Boys Friend" - Jimmy Silver and Co., of Rockwood. Maybe he had slightly more time on his hands because the length of the "Magnet" and "Gem" stories had been cut through

paper shortage, or I expect the true fact that his tremendous 'pull' was needed to boost the flagging circulation of this paper. At anyrate, this output was simply colossal, and it was miraculous how he did keep up the schedule with his work. He was at that time, still writing serial stories, and articles for other papers under other names, apart from this extra work, Greyfriars stories in the comic "Chuckles" and "Greyfriars Herald" pieces, to mention a few.

Now if anyone could believe anything so crazy - he was in 1919, asked to write a new series of stories for the girls' market in the shape of the "School Friend" introducing Bessie Bunter. Frank Richards in his Autobiography says that "He could write a whole chapter on the subject" so could I - but like Frank - my information on this subject must also go into the locked drawer. With this extra writing of 20,000 words a week, no human being could possibly keep this up for long. That is why the A.P. who had founded the "School Friend" on the tremendous 'pull' and writings of Frank Richards, handed the "Hilda Richards" tales over to Horace Philips to write after the first six stories. To readers not familiar with that name - I had better explain that he was better known as "Marjorie Stanton" of Morcove School fame.

The truth of the whole matter is that demands were made on Hamilton and responded to by him far beyond his output capacity; but no one deliberately planned how to fill in some of the gaps.

It must be remembered also that at the time Frank Richards was turning out all these stories for the papers already mentioned. The "Popular" was also reprinting reprints of his stories - cut down fantastically from 20,000 to 6,000 words - and in nearly all cases horribly mutilated. (This was also done earlier in the "Dreadnought" though not to such an extent.)

The A.P. probably had in Frank Richards their best asset, but perhaps they did not realise they were overdoing it - because the new reader, having read the "Popular" might not also be able to afford the "Magnet" and "Gem". Also as most readers know, Frank Richards does not cut well. For what must be cut out is often his best stuff - his humorous incidents, and his realistic dialogue. Naturally, the editorial staff approved of the "Popular"; it made more jobs and the sub-editors were paid for cutting the stories down. Readers are of course, quite aware of the highly successful "Schoolboys Own Library" which came out in 1925 - another case of the A.P. using his brilliant writings for a new venture.

Just think how much Frank Richards' health meant to the Fleetway House? Suppose that he had had several month's illness. Or suppose

that he had died in 1919, say, how long could all those papers have lasted - if substitutes were needed - they should have perhaps been coached or versed by Frank Richards himself - with his full approval. These 'ersatz' stories should have been sent to him for comment, and in nearly all cases for modification and correction. There was no sub-editor inside the Magnet office versed enough in Greyfriars lore to sub imitation Greyfriars yarns. (See Story Paper Collector - October, 1957.)

Later on in the early 1920s Frank Richards' characters aged a little and became more stolid; but also his plotting ability very markedly improved, although at the expense of the boyish inconsequence and gaiety that he had really built up his reputation. He was at his best when he had a true, developing story, through which he could thread a related sub-plot, centring on say Bunter or Vernon-Smith, with typical character revealing school incidents. To do this, he needed a full thirty-thousand words to a story.

A point to be remembered with readers is that although they principally judge Frank Richards by his school incidents and pleasing characters, they have a natural requirement for plot of which they are not conscious. A plot is really essential to a story as a skeleton to Marilyn Monroe - though it is not for her skeleton she is chiefly admired, and few of her admirers would say "what a beautifully proportioned skeleton!" So with Frank Richards; when his plot..... skeleton.....was well shaped the total result was at his best.

One could write pages more on the merits of Frank Richards, but I must refer to my statement at the start of this article, that a book should and could be written on this great writer. In closing I would like to add that his greatest achievement could really be summed up in three words - and the way in which I would phrase them is this:

HIS CHARACTERS LIVED!

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OLD BOYS BOOK CLUB

LONDON SECTION

The aftermath of the bus strike, plus the very inclement weather, severely depleted the attendance at Horace Roberts very hospitable abode at Streatham, on Sunday, June 22nd. However with Roger Jenkins taking the chair, we disposed of a very good and happy agenda. Roger gave us a very humorous reading from "Magnet" No. 1188, "Who Punched Prout". Don Webster gave us two quizzes, "Filling the Blank Squares" and "Treasure Hunt" and Roger conducted nine rounds of the Criss Cross Quiz. A very excellent repast was prepared by Betty Roberts, thoroughly enjoyed by those present, even two of "Mrs. Kebble's cats were present. Horace, ably assisted by Betty, had completed an excellent catalogue of the papers and books in the Hamiltonian Library. Copies of this will be sent to all borrowers and it is thoroughly up to date. A hearty and unanimous vote of thanks was given to Horace for this very fine labour of love. Very interesting conversations and discussions were indulged in and it was well past 'lights out' when we reluctantly wended our way home. Next meeting at 2 Oxford Place, Press Road, Neasden, London, N.W.10., hosts Bob and Laura Blythe, on Sunday, 20th July. Will regular attenders kindly ring DOLLIS Hill 7291 during working hours if unable to be present, thus facilitating catering arrangements.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

* * *

NORTHERN SECTION MEETING - JUNE 14th, 1958.

A lovely day, and all seemed well set for a fine meeting, but my word! I received a shock when I arrived in Leeds. Ringing up Gerry as I always do I learned he was laid up and would not be able to attend the meeting. I was perturbed, for needless to say, it takes a lot to keep Gerry away from Hyde Park Road when there's a meeting on. However it was doctor's orders.

Bill Williamson being away on holiday, I had to take the chair. I had the pleasure of welcoming a member attending for the first time, Harold Busby of York. Ron Hodgson took over Gerry's duties, Treasurer's report, letters, including a very interesting one from Bette Pate, energetic secretary of the Sydney Club, and all the details for the Chesterfield meeting. Then the ladies took over, for it was their night,

a very popular annual event now. First, Mollie Allison read a delightful bit of whimsy as to which of the Greyfriars characters she would have married given the chance. Her choice was a surprise one. I won't reveal it here, for her little piece was so novel and amusing that I propose to use it in a coming C.D.

Following Mollie, Ron Hodgson read Margaret Cook's very interesting "Tinker and Co." and Myra Allison read some very amusing "Answers to Correspondents" taken from some "Girls own Papers" of the 'eighties.

After refreshment came "Twenty Questions". Males comprised the team: Jack Wood, Ron Hodgson, Geoffrey Wilde and Frank Hancock. Mollie was Question Master, Myra kept the score and Dorothy Robinson showed round the cards. Fourteen objects were got through and after much wrinkling of brows the team succeeded in getting all but one of them. They had the advantage of knowing, however, that all the objects were feminine.

A jolly good evening ladies! Next Meeting, July 12th. Top o' the Bill - Ernie Whitehead. He's entertained us before, he'll do so again.

HERBERT LECKENBY

Northern Section Correspondent.

* * *

MIDLAND SECTION - MAY 19th, 1958

Though the attendance was below expectations, this being the Annual General Meeting, much business of a highly satisfactory nature was got through. In the absence of Jack Ingram, who was detained by his scholastic duties, Jack Corbett took the Chair. A very satisfactory report from the Secretary, who commented on the keenness of the members, the continued excellence of the programmes and above all the success in winning the Greyfriars Jubilee Challenge Cup, was followed by an equally good report from our Treasurer. After arrangements for the Chesterfield re-union with the Northern Club had been settled, the election of Officers for the coming year followed. As expected the position of Secretary and Treasurer also Librarian underwent no change. This was a popular decision and equally popular was the election of Tom Porter as Chairman, a well deserved reward for his services to the Club and the Library in particular. A Solo Quiz with Jack Corbett giving the answers was the very enjoyable finale to a highly satisfactory Annual General Meeting.

HARRY BROWSTER

Secretary.

MERSEYSIDE SECTION O.B.B.C. - SUNDAY, 8th JUNE.

The fine weather helped to bring a good gathering of members for the June meeting, and we were able to get away to an early start. After Library and financial business had been disposed of, the Secretary read his version of the return football match between ourselves and Greyfriars, this being the sequel to the match played at Greyfriars. This time we played them at Anfield, and with a little help from the referee we managed to win by the odd goal. The story was well received with much laughter. Then followed something a little more serious, a debate on the motion "That we suffer from too much Bunter". This was proposed by Don Webster and seconded by Bill Windsor. The motion was opposed by Frank Unwin and seconded by Pat Laffey. Convincing arguments were put up by each side and some very interesting points of view were put forward when the debate was thrown open. The motion was carried by the narrow majority of one. Tea followed, and during the interval were fortunate enough to hear Finney's equaliser for England. Then came Frank Unwin's "Criss Cross Quiz" as the second instalment of the Team Contest. Once again, Greyfriars won, the score being Greyfriars 3, St. Jim's 2, St. Frank's 1. Lastly came Bill Windsor's Sporting Quiz, in which we had to pick a cricket and a football eleven with names common to both well known professional players and also to members of the Companion Schools - much brain fagging here. The winner, Don Webster with 23 names and Frank Unwin second with 22.

Next meeting, 6th July at 6.30 p.m. sharp.

NORMAN PRAGNELL

Secretary, Merseyside O.B.B.C.

* * *

GOLDEN HOURS CLUB, SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA MEETING

The fourth meeting took place on May 23rd, having been unavoidably postponed for a fortnight. Eight members were present, Arnold Keena, Vic Colby, Syd Smyth, Ernie Carter, Bruce Fowler, Bill Hall, Stan Nicholls and yours truly. Highlight of the evening was a visit from a representative of a local magazine, "People". This thanks to the efforts of Stan Nicholls. Photographs of papers from our various collections were taken - a splendid display - and we are looking forward to some fine publicity. Needless to say, when copies are available some will soon be on their way to England.

Very friendly letters from the Secretaries of the four English

Clubs were read and very much appreciated. Stan Nicholls came into the picture again with a most interesting talk on the life's work of Talbot Baines Reed, great writer of school stories.

A memorable evening which kept us going well after ten o'clock.

E. J. PATE

Hon. Secretary.

S.B.L. REVIEWS

July 1958

The Naked Blade (No. 409)

Peter Saxon

Martin Bormann was the one high-ranking Nazi whose disappearance following the destruction of Berlin was never satisfactorily accounted for. But since the defeat of Germany in 1945, Bormann had not been idle. What was the connection between his arrival in Mexico, with the entire crew of a German U-Boat, and the murder of a man on a bombed site in London? Why did Firbank - the doomed man - telephone Sexton Blake and entreat him to come to Bloomsbury immediately, as his life was in danger? And why were various members of an archeological expedition to Yucatan in search of a lost city called Toxapetl, deep in the heart of the tropical rain-forest, so deliberately and systematically done to death? London.....Lisbon.....Berlin.....Paris.....Mexico City, all are visited by Blake in his efforts to avenge the man who had sought his aid too late.

It's drama all the way, with the climax taking place in the lost city of the Mayas, deep in the heart of the rain-forest, with Blake smashing a gigantic plot on the part of Bormann and his followers to seize the Panama Canal.

This is the sort of novel that never fails to appeal. It's exciting, topical, adventurous and instructive. Moreover, Peter Saxon's at the top of his form - a sure guarantee of high quality entertainment.

Rating Excellent

Wake up Screaming! (No. 410)

Arthur Kent

Prompted by feelings of friendship, Sexton Blake is persuaded to accompany Splash Kirby to the Norfolk Broads in order that the columnist can in peace finish writing the book he is engaged upon. But the peace is Kirby's only, for to Blake it is but the prelude to another case when he pulls out of the water of the Broads a very attract-

ive girl. Sinister happenings on a houseboat in the near vicinity plunge Blake into another murder case, in which he is set to track down the perpetrator of the blackest of all crimes.

On reaching the age of 25, playboy Gerald Maitland comes into a fortune of a quarter of a million pounds. This providing that he does not commit a crime or become mixed up in some scandal, in which case, as executors of his grandfather's will, his uncles Henry and Stephen, are empowered to cut him off with only a small allowance. Unfortunately, Maitland never lives long enough to enjoy even a penny of it, for far from committing a crime, he becomes the victim of one. Playing practically a lone hand, Blake remorselessly tracks down the culprit, the identity of whom, perhaps, will not come as a great surprise. In small supporting roles Paula Dane and Inspector Coutts are featured, but Tinker is either otherwise engaged or else taking his annual leave.

A well written whodunit, it has its moments of suspense, and builds up to a satisfying and exciting climax.

Rating Very good

WALTER WEBB.

* * *

NOTE: Here are the concluding paragraphs of Margaret Cooke's talk "Tinker and Co." given at the Leeds Meeting, June 14th.

After a false start, due to a mistaken idea of the taste of modern readers, the new writers have given us eighteen months of very excellent literature, beautifully written, packed with incident, and full of quiet humour, allied to a deep and kindly understanding of human nature.

I look forward eagerly to each new issue, and am sorely disappointed. The new authors are worthy successors to the old, proud of their ability, devoted to Blake and striving to please the reader. I wish them every success.

* * *

"THE 64 THOUSAND MURDER" - Victor Gunn

Reviewed by F. Vernon Lay

Once again we meet our old friend Chief-Inspector Bill Cromwell commonly known as "Ironsides" and his wealthy happy-go-lucky assistant Jimmy Lister, and once again Edwy Searles Brooks has presented us with a fast-moving mystery yarn that is right bang up-to-date. E.S.B. has always been renowned for his topicality and this story proves once more that he has lost none of his youthfulness - one wonders how many of his present fans who only know him under his present per-names of Victor

Gunn and Berkeley Gray realise it is well over forty years since he first appeared in print. As the title suggests the story is based on a well-known television quiz programme and also features two other new-comers to the English scene namely supermarkets and Lambretta scooters. It is well up to E.S.Bs reputation and can be warmly recommended. Incidentally, one also wonders when we may have the pleasure of viewing in this country, the television films featuring E.S.Bs other popular characters, Norman Conquest and Pixie that have been showing in Canada and U.S.A. for some time. A treat in store we hope.

* * *

NELSON LEE COLUMN

by JACK WOOD

Nostaw, 328 Stockton Lane, York.

Phone: 25795

* * * * *

Here is Jim Cook's latest monthly gossip from St. Frank's. Very interesting it is too, to old-timers who will relish his glimpses of one or two old favourites.

I have been to see Dr. Brett. The practitioner of Bellton must be known to all of you for he forms an integral part of the St. Frank's scene and is a well known character here. I visited him professionally at his surgery, which stands a little back from the road in the lane leading to Caistowe where his man Williams received me. Like most people at this time of year I caught a Spring cold, and with it came a sore throat which wouldn't clear up. The little Chemist shop in Bellton sold me several proprietary brands of gargles and tablets but I still had the wretched thing, so instead of waiting to see the doctor in the Ancient House sanatorium where he examines the sick I went straight to his house.

Looking something like Nelson Lee in appearance, Dr. Brett has the word Doctor written all over him. He is a typical medical man, and exudes confidence. I tried to recall some of the adventures in which he may have taken part but they escape me. From time to time he may have had a minor role in some of the many stirring times at the school, but I don't think he played any special parts.

We had quite an interesting talk after he found out why I was staying at St. Frank's, and he tells me he is a rich man. El Dorado

made him rich! He brought back a certain amount of gold from that South American lost city when he, together with Lord Dorrimore, Nelson Lee and the boys of St. Frank's went there some years ago. Well, I remember the story, of course, but I didn't know he was in the party. Anyway, he has no desire to leave Bellton in spite of having plenty of money. I suspect it is mainly because he is such a close friend of Nelson Lee that he wishes to remain here.

* * *

Now here are some items of news I have jotted down in my notebook. Mr. Horace Pycraft, the master of the Modern House juniors, and Mr. Crowell, master of the Ancient House had a very heated argument by the fountain in the Triangle. Timothy Tucker had thrown a book into the fountain at the precise moment Mr. Pycraft was passing and the Modern House master got a little wet from a splash. T.T. immediately got a whiplash from Pycraft's tongue, and a very stiff imposition of lines. Whereupon T.T. began to explain in his best "barrack-room lawyer" style how Pycraft could not possess any authority for dishing out lines since T.T. belonged to another house. The thin, weedy master of the Moderns then lost his very short temper and slapped Timothy Tucker on the head. Mr. Crowell, passing by, explained to Pycraft that as T.T. before had pointed out, it was not necessary to exceed the functions of any particular House master if the House master concerned was able to deal with it. Then Mr. Pycraft displayed his wet gown to Crowell which made no effect on the Ancient House master. This made Pycraft flare up and words and descriptions of words were freely exchanged between the two learned gentlemen.

It was very undignified, since several juniors and seniors were looking on, but old Crowell walked so calmly away with head held erect, that when he reached the steps of the Ancient House a few fellows there moved out of his sight so that he would not have to pass them.

* * *

No news has been received from Lord Dorrimore. The last that was heard from him stated he was somewhere in Africa, and Nipper tells me Dorrie and Umlosi were due to leave the Belgium Congo this month for an unknown area in the Kalahari Desert. Incidentally, it is not generally known Lord Dorrimore accepts quite a lot of work from official quarters. I always imagined him as a cheerful playboy type of man but he is really a very hardworked person.

* * *

I have been assessing the turn of events during my six months

stay here and have come to the conclusion that at no time in the history of St. Frank's has there been a quieter period. Except for the brief and sedate happenings, the minor outbursts of scholastic gossip, nothing has intruded to disturb the way of life here.

No Ezra Quirkles or William K. Smiths threaten the peaceful silence of the old school. No prowling marauder haunts the Bellton lane to waylay innocent schoolboys. And the calm that pervades the famous and volatile Remove is distressing and wearisome since one looks for the unusual and brisk activity from that section of the Lower School. We have always thrived on it and it's absence causes comment. Like small children whose idleness creates anxiety to their parents! Because of this lack of mystery St. Frank's didn't seem the same to me. I always associated the old school as teeming with tyrant masters and extraordinary new boys who provided incessant excitement.

So I went and saw Nelson Lee. I wanted to find out why things were so quiet. Where was that rebellion that used to break out among the juniors; where were the harsh Form Masters that descended from time to time on St. Frank's to make history?

"Yes" he admitted, "But you must understand that it is now new time for St. Frank's to be in the doldrums. I can well recall numerous occasions when I was engaged on special work for Government similar peaceful moments were enjoyed by the staff."

"Of course, I didn't realise those periods were welcomed by the Masters, but then, we don't look upon you as a schoolmaster, so we assume you are just as impatient as we to see some development which would merit my presence here?"

Nelson Lee leaned back in his chair and looked thoughtful. "Did you know Dr. Stafford is coming back?" "Dr. Stafford!" I exclaimed. "But I thought he retired owing to ill health, and, anyway, he was getting too old." "You are right about his health being low at the time, but he is now fit and good for a number of years yet." Lee replied. "I suppose he will ask the School governors to be reinstated?"

"No, there is no need for him to do that. His departure was only temporary, and all other Headmasters who reigned in his place did so on the understanding that should Dr. Stafford desire to take up his old position at any time they would accede to his wishes."

The schoolmaster detective rose and walked towards the window. The study had gone very quiet. He looked down into the Triangle where the sun made shadows of the elms and chestnut trees. I did not break in on his thoughts. Somehow one feels humble in his presence. I waited, not knowing if the interview had ended or if I could gather any information for this letter. To be continued next month.