



YOUNG ² BRITAIN

No. 48.

EVERY THURSDAY.

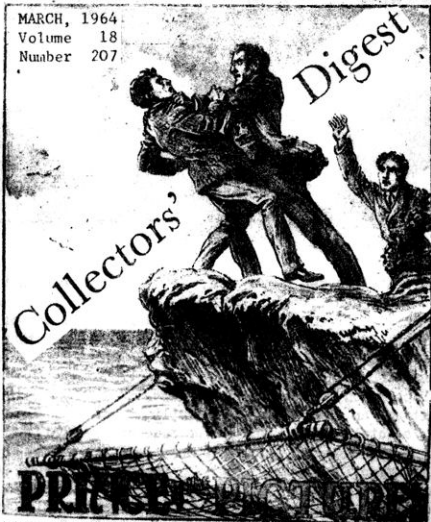
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Digest

Collectors'

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COLLECTORS' DIGEST

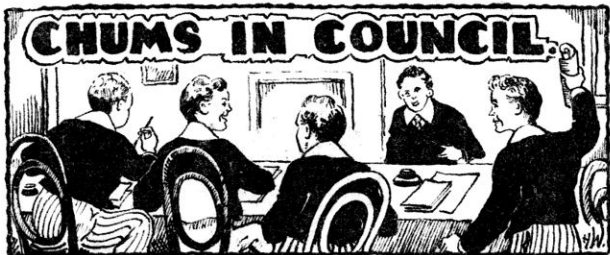
FOUNDED in 1946 by HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 18

No. 207

MARCH, 1964

Price 2s. Od.



ENIGMA:

On our outer jacket this month we bring you a reproduction of the cover of a periodical named **YOUNG BRITAIN**. We know in advance that this picture will strike no nostalgic chord in the breast of the average Digest reader. In fact it is more than likely that most readers will never have heard of it at all. I cannot even say for certain that **YOUNG BRITAIN** has ever been mentioned in the thousands of letters which reach this office every year.

Yet it was an Amalgamated Press publication. It ran from 1919 till 1924, a total of 265 issues. No mean achievement. It is certain that thousands of youngsters supported it. Just why does it get so little mention to-day; just why do so few, if any, collect it?

It consisted of short stories and serials. Two serials in the issue of which we have reproduced the cover were "Off His Own Bat" and "Bold Robin Hood," both reprinted later in the Popular.

In July 1924, **YOUNG BRITAIN** was amalgamated with **THE CHAMPION**. We have been told that the circulation of **CHAMPION** in the late

thirties was higher than that of the MAGNET, and we know that the CHAMPION carried on while the MAGNET became a war casualty. Yet the interest in CHAMPION, among our readers, is very limited.

Anyone to-day would find it easy to amass a collection of Magnets, Gems, Schoolboys' Own Libraries, Lee's, or Union Jacks, within limits, if he had the money to spare. Anyone seeking Young Britain, Dreadnought, Ranger, Empire Library, or the like, would find it cheaper but nearly an impossibility.

In the 1963 Annual we observed that "Jack Blake of St. Jim's" is far more rare than "Tom Merry's Schooldays" or "The Making of Harry Wharton," and the scarcity of the first-named is due to the fact that PLUCK is so rare.

None of us would have our collections now if some unusual people, long ago, had not retained their copies of the old papers in which the main interest centres to-day. We owe those unusual people a debt which we shall never be able to pay.

There is, of course, nothing unusual in people collecting. We know to our cost, in this office, that people collect the most weird and wonderful things. What is inexplicable is why people collected certain papers and not others!

Girls did not collect at all. It is an impossibility to find copies of Girl's Reader or Girl's Friend. I have sought them for years and never succeeded in finding even one.

The Magnet, Gem, and Nelson Lee were probably the most retained. There was obviously something in those papers which appealed to something in certain kinds of boys. Does anyone know what those "some-things" were? Does anyone know what kind of boys those certain kinds of boys were? I can't even begin to guess.

ARE WE ANY THE WISER?

Did we learn anything from the recent experiment of LOOK & LEARN to present their own arrangements of some of the old Greyfriars stories. Did I hear a neigh?

We have been told for years that a paper like the Magnet would not sell to-day. But we don't know, do we? Since the war we have seen an old Tom Merry story transferred to a picture serial in which Harry Manners became George; we have seen some mutilated Rockwood stories offered in serial form in Knockout; we have seen chunks of an old Nelson Lee tale presented with the main character's name altered; we have seen two truncated sub stories and one drastically pruned genuine story in L. & L. None of that is any criterion. We are still none the wiser.

We do know, however, that the Bunter books sell so well at 11/6 a time that the publishers are shortly to issue yet another new story in the series, more than two years after the death of the creator of Greyfriars. That must teach us something. I'm not quite sure what it is.

THE EDITOR

NEXT MONTH:

GRAND ENLARGED SPRING NUMBER OF COLLECTORS' DIGEST
Packed with good things, including a new Slade story:
MR. BUDDLE LAUGHS LAST

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN,
27, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, S.E. 22.

During the past few months I have received a number of very interesting articles, including some from Australia and New Zealand.

I have of course already thanked the writers for their contributions, but I thought it would be rather nice to devote this month's BLAKIANA to the work of our overseas chums.

I can assure Mr. Wadham that the "Union Jack Detective Supplement" is highly prized by collectors who are lucky enough to own either the bound volumes or (like myself) the issues of the U.J. with the Supplements therein.

I am pleased to say that work is going ahead with the S. Blake catalogue. It is hoped that the material will be in the hands of the printers in the very near future.

JOSIE PACKMAN

SEXTON BLAKE SUPPLEMENTS

By O. W. WADHAM

In 1922 the Union Jack began a successful series of Detective Supplements that I consider to be one of the most interesting features the famous weekly ever introduced.

The eight page, easily detachable, Supplement covered a wide scope of world's police and detective force topics, and, at each

year's end, binding cases were supplied, and the series could be handsomely bound for 4s. 9d. The Supplement was well illustrated with photographs and many drawings, and those readers who had copies bound would certainly cherish an interesting and unusual volume.

In No. 1 of volume 4, presented with Union Jack of January 2nd, 1926, part one of "The Story of Australian Gangsters" commenced, written and illustrated by Australian newspaper-man E. F. Hiscocks. A more authentic and complete series of articles on larrikin types of 1860 to the 1890 period I fancy has never been published before.

But those articles were only a small part of the grand collection of factual material the Detective Supplement printed over the years; and, according to the Union Jack's "Round Table" talk, a great many readers sought binding cases for their Supplements.

It would be most interesting to learn if any present day collectors have managed to secure any of those volumes. Surely some of such strongly bound publications must have somewhere survived.

* * * * *

ON THE TRAIL WITH ALLAN BLAIR

By S. GORDON SWAN

WHEN you are weary of sleazy night-clubs, off-beat characters and the sex and sadism which characterise so many modern thrillers, I recommend a dose of Allan Blair, to be repeated at regular intervals. This author, whose real name, William J. Bayfield, is less well-known to us than his nom-de-plume, will provide a real tonic after the corrupt atmosphere of the contemporary novel.

He was guilty of a few pot-boilers, but at his best he could keep you enthralled for hours with a straight-out story of crime and detective work without any frills. A mysterious murder would start Blake, Tinker and Pedro off on a long cross-country chase filled with eventful happenings, in the course of which various clues pointed the way and an occasional body obstructed the pursuit. The trail often led them across three or four counties, during which period an astonishing succession of local inspectors and medicos would make their appearance. So much excitement and so many events were liable to occur that often it required a little effort to remember what the original crime was about.

One of the best examples of his work is the "Twist in the Trail," (S.B.L. 1st Series No. 137), which takes place in Ireland not long after the Great War. This is a fine story with plenty of local

colour - including a band of potheen distillers - the real villain of which does not make his entry until the last part of the story. This was often a feature of Blair's yarns - that you knew little about the villains until the story was well advanced. Sometimes there was a rogue with some distinguishing physical characteristic such as abnormal height or a twisted thumb or six fingers on one hand, whose trail would be picked up at various points of the compass until he was finally tracked down.

Allan Blair is not remembered for his characters; most of his stories were independent tales of mystery and crime. Nevertheless he did create two villains who appeared in more than one story. One was Karl Freytag, who had been a German submarine commander in the Great War. You will find him in:

S. B. L. 1st. Series 220 "Case of the Missing Journalist"

S. B. L. 2nd. Series 3 "Case of the Deported Aliens"

S. B. L. 2nd. Series 24 "Case of the Press Photographer"

Another rogue who appeared in at least two stories was named Moxon Liddisher, the Master Mimic, who was, as his nickname implies, a kind of Leon Kestrel.

There were several other minor recurring characters, such as David Manisty, a press photographer, who made his debut in the last of the Freytag yarns mentioned above. And then, of course, there were the invaluable Barry and Lucas, whose aid Blake frequently called upon to shadow some suspect. I don't think there was ever a description furnished of these two men, but one could surmise that Lucas was a big, fleshy man as he once impersonated a crook of that aspect. Barry and Lucas went through a lot of personal peril on Blake's behalf and took part in a number of cases. I have never noticed any reference to these two in articles on the Blake saga, but I think they deserve a place in the hall of fame.

Allan Blair contributed a lot to the chronicles of S.B. He must have been writing of the detective's adventures over a period of thirty-four years. Like Murray Graydon, he disappeared from the pages of the U.J. and confined himself to the S.B.L. for nearly twenty years. Why this was so I can only guess: he was a little old-fashioned at times, but this was not so evident in his later stories.

In other fields I have traced his stories back to a Boy's Realm serial in 1902, but recently recognised his handiwork in a 1st. Marvel No. 121, "Held for Ransom," published 25.2.1896! How long before that he commenced his career it is impossible to say, but in any case it was a long and meritorious one. Though he (continued on page 14)..

Hamiltoniana

THE WHIPPING BOY OF CEDAR CREEK

By GERRY ALLISON

"This is the last straw!"

Thus Charles Hamilton, one day in the year 1919. The author had been looking through some recent issues of "The Boys' Friend" when something like a cold douche which he received evoked the above remark.

For some time there had been a rift in the lute between Hamilton and the editor of the 'Companion Papers.' The full story of the disagreement has never been told, as Frank Richards deleted most of the account from his autobiography. But see Chapter 6 of that book.

Frank Richards, Martin Clifford and Owen Conquest had protested indignantly but in vain, against stories by other writers being printed under the pen-names which they had made famous. At the time of which we write, over a hundred substitute St. Jim's yarns had appeared in "The Gem," and some ninety about Greyfriars in the pages of "The Magnet." Neither had Rookwood escaped, for, beginning with "Lovell's Luck" in B.F. 823, nine sub-stories of that school had been printed.

But so far, Cedar Creek School in British Columbia had remained immune. Under the pen-name of Martin Clifford in the weekly 'Boys' Friend' Charles Hamilton had been describing the fictional schooldays of Frank Richards - that alter ego of his, into whose personality his own so often emerged. In fact, some details in the Cedar Creek tales are autobiographical.

The School in the Backwoods was the little ewe-lamb of our author. It was his own wish-fulfillment - his own imagined life story he was describing. And now the blow had fallen! A 'sub-story' of a particularly ridiculous kind had been foisted on to his public as the work of Martin Clifford. (See article "Sub. Writer Visits Cedar Creek," Collector's Digest No. 200.)

Hence the ejaculation "This is the last straw!"

What should he do? Protests to the editor would, as he knew from past experience, be useless. He thought deeply. And then an idea struck him. His eyes sparkled. He would let the readers of the 'Green Un' know what he thought of substitute stories! Remember, this was 1919. Not for many years would Charles Hamilton be able to make his protest.

Soon afterwards, a brief series of tales appeared in "The Boys' Friend." They told how Frank Richards won a prize in the "Thompson Press" with a short story, and how Mr. Penrose, the editor, had astonished and delighted him by securing his services for regular contributions. All Cedar Creek School had felt decidedly proud when they read in their local paper:

"FROM A WESTERN WINDOW" - Sketches of Canadian Life
By Frank Richards

However, owing to having been the victim of a rag, and immersed in a deep snow drift, Frank caught a severe cold. To his dismay, he found himself unable to complete his weekly story for the "Thompson Press." His distress was very real. Imagine his consternation therefore when story No. 5 "Jones' Mortgage" by Frank Richards duly appeared. It was a story written in poor English, in fact the feeblest rubbish imaginable. To add to his indignation he was reproved by Miss Meadows for splitting the infinitive. I will let Martin Clifford tell his own tale now. The following extracts are from "The Cedar Creek Author" B.F. 964.

"Frank Richards blinked. For a moment he wondered whether his mind was wandering; whether he had somehow written his weekly story after all, sent it to Mr. Penrose and forgotten about it. But that was not possible. But how was it possible for his story to appear under his name when he had not written it?

"It isn't my story!" stuttered Frank.

"But it's under your name!" Bob gave a roar. "The awful spoofer! That's what he meant when he said he would manage. He's written a blessed yarn himself, and put it in under your name!"

Frank Richards sank back in his chair. Words failed him.

The enterprising editor had 'managed.' Failing to receive Frank Richards' copy in time for press, he had not left a blank. He hadn't even written something under his own name. He had calmly used Frank Richards' name and characters, and put a story in the 'series', incidentally splitting infinitives, and placing them, as it were, to

the credit of Frank Richards.

Frank picked up the paper again, and glanced over Mr. Penrose's precious story. It was utter trash. The characters were mere caricatures of Frank Richards' own property. Frank's characters were drawn from life - the new author's were drawn from Frank's, and carelessly and clumsily drawn at that.

"We'll go and see him!" said Bob. "We'll make him print an explanation in next week's number, and own up!"
(Frank and his two chums go into Thompson to see Mr. Penrose, and a stormy scene ensues.)

"You could have missed the story out for a week," said Frank.

"Not after advertising that it was to appear," said Mr. Penrose. "The 'Thompson Press' has a reputation to consider."

"What good will it do the blessed paper's reputation to have that silly, ungrammatical tosh shoved into it?" demanded Frank. "Do you think anybody will be taken in? It will be as clear as daylight what you've done."

Mr. Penrose laughed.

"Nothing of the kind! I don't say the yarn's quite up to the mark, but it will pass with the rest. Bless your inexperienced heart, readers don't do much thinking!"

(The editor coolly offers Frank two dollars for the use of his name which Frank contemptuously rejects. After refusing to print the demanded explanation, Mr. Penrose tells the schoolboy author that he will go on borrowing his name.)

Frank Richards was speechless.

"You-you-you'll use my name whether I write for you or not?" he gasped at last.

"Correct!"

"We'll jolly well see! Come on, you chaps! We've got to call on the sheriff before we go back to school."

"Hold on!" ejaculated Mr. Penrose in alarm. "What are you calling on the sheriff for?"

"To ask him to chip in, of course - according to law! If we lived in a big town, I could get an injunction to stop you. You know that. The sheriff's the law here, and he will do as well!"

"Don't you do anything of the kind!" howled the alarmed Mr. Penrose. "Why, that would give the whole game away, and spoil the circulation - and - and——"

"Will you stop the series then, and leave my name out?"

"I-I-I guess I shall have to, if you insist," grunted Mr. Penrose.

"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 un sullied. For no other sub-writer seems to have visited the School in the Backwoods.

* * * * *

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 ECHOES

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 Rio 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; Cukebread, 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 Crooke - all quite common names.

I agree with you about Professor Balmcyrumpet, to which I would add the Welshem 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 Mossos.

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

he said in French was usually unnecessary and unnatural. His meaning was obvious, in any case.

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GEMS OF HAMILTONIA (No. 5. New Series)

Bucks is a beautiful county. There is scenery in the Chilterns that simply cannot be beaten anywhere. Any fellow who goes for a ramble in the Chilterns will get the worth of his boot-leather. But the Greyfriars walking party, much as they enjoyed glorious scenery and health-giving air, could not help feeling that it was rather a mistake to bring Methuselah there.

Methuselah was old and seemed tired. He was quite indifferent to scenery, and grumbled audibly and incessantly at the Chilterns. Up every steep rise he made sounds of obvious disapproval. Salisbury Plain, as Johnny Bull remarked, was the place for Methuselah. Bob Cherry observed that when they started down they would see how Methuselah could go. But they were going up now, not down, and what they saw was chiefly how Methuselah couldn't and wouldn't go. Bob had to coax every yard out of him, and Methuselah complained stertorously. The juniors strolled on in a leisurely way, and Bob accompanied them on the trike, as if he were accompanying them on an American orchestra.

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(In next month's Collectors' Digest there will be a special competition in connection with this new series of Gems of Hamiltonia.)

BLAKIANA (ON THE TRAIL WITH ALLAN BLAIR) (continued from page 6...)

never received star billing, in his quiet, straightforward way Allan Blair was one of the mainstays of the Blake tradition. All honour to him!

FOR SALE "BOYS WILL BE BOYS" mint 18/-. SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARIES, 1958-1963, 80 mint copies, 1/- each.

WANTED: To complete Club Library sets S.O.Ls. 306, 381. Nelson Lees 1923-1933. Collectors Digests 1-32, S.O.Ls. (St. Franks only).

NORMAN PRAGNELL, 33 BRAE STREET, LIVERPOOL, 7.

WANTED: Last 3 issues of the Magnet 1940.

R. P. THOMAS, 84, BEAUMONT ROAD, BOURNVILLE, BIRMINGHAM 30.

Nelson Lee Column

CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD

I see in the February C.D. that Bill Thurbon has inquired how Maxwell Scott named his most famous detective, Nelson Lee. It is true, as he reminds us, that a Nelson Lee was a very familiar figure in the world of 19th century pantomime and theatre - as I also recalled in a C.D. Annual article some years ago.

However, this was not the character from whom Scott got his name. As I revealed in a series of articles in C.D. some years ago based on the diaries of Maxwell Scott - diaries from which his son kindly extracted a great deal of information for us - Scott derived the name from an entirely different source.

For the benefit of those who missed those articles, I will repeat the information. With the reminder that Maxwell Scott was the pen name of Dr. John Staniforth, of Sheffield, and later of Hinderwell, near Whitby, where he died in 1926.

Maxwell Scott, his son recalled, was a name derived from his wife's maiden name, Maxwell, and the name of an old friend, a certain Mr. Scott, who had recently died. Maxwell Scott had a fancy that this particular rhythm of syllables - a two-syllable word followed by a monosyllable - was a "mascot" for him, and it is noticeable that he never departed from it for his heroes - Nelson Lee, Martin Dale and Kenyon Ford.

The name of Nelson Lee was invented on the spur of the moment, without any notion of the importance it was going to achieve. The name was a pure accident, but a profitable one, and came from the names of a Mr. Nelson and a Mr. Lee which Maxwell Scott happened to notice among various letters and circulars which had been sent to him. Both were complete strangers to him.

And that is how Nelson Lee was born.

I was also glad to read Ray Hopkins' account of Edwy Searles Brooks' visit to the London Club, and his comments on the developments in the Nelson Lee Library. I have also had the privilege later of

reading Bill Lofts' record of the many questions which E.S.B. answered at that meeting. And very interesting they all were, too.

I was interested to read that E.S.B. apparently named St. Franks after his wife, Frances, because, possibly by a strange coincidence, the Franciscans who founded the monastery which centuries later led to the famous College were, of course, the Grey Friars - and I had always thought that Brooks, being asked by the N.L.L. editor to write school stories, had subtly founded well on the Hamilton school!

Brooks is also slightly offside, I think, in linking the many changes of editor, the national slump and heavy unemployment, and the change in the set-up of St. Franks itself, for the drop in circulation in the years after 1929. Agreed, the first; possibly the second, though I would doubt it except inasmuch as the first had led to a drop in the quality of the stories; but I cannot agree about the third at all.

The increase in the number of houses from two to five (counting the non-resident School House) at St. Frank's took place well before the decline of fortunes in 1929-plus. The new Large Series of the N.L.L. came into being in 1926, while the re-orientation of St. Frank's took place in No. 537 Old Series, in conjunction with the reformation of Ralph Leslie Fullwood.

However, I am glad to see that E.S.B. was evidently as dissatisfied with the system of "sub" writers as Hamilton was, and that it was an editorial decision over which they had no control. Pity - but what a lot of discussion and argument the O.B.B.C. would have missed if it hadn't happened!

Best of luck to Jim Cook and his family on their emigration to the land of Alec Duncan and Tom Brown. No doubt they will be in early touch with Jack Murtagh, to their mutual profit and the profit of the C.D. Looking forward to more letters from St. Frank's, and I'm sure after his recent articles that Jim will be glad to note that the hidden city of the Kalahari Desert has now been officially located.

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ARTICLES URGENTLY WANTED FOR THE NELSON LEE COLUMN

ATMOSPHEREBy R. J. GODSAVE

The power of describing scenery and conveying atmosphere was undoubtedly possessed by the Brontë sisters. The limited Yorkshire moorland society formed the foundation of Emily Brontë's "Wuthering Heights" and the novels of her sister Charlotte.

The gift of conveying an atmosphere is necessary to any writer, although, like all natural gifts, it varies to a great degree.

It is essential that the reader absorbs the atmosphere created by the author, as by that means he or she is enabled to identify themselves as part of the pattern.

Few can read "Wuthering Heights" without sharing the suffering of people caught and racked in torments of love and jealousy.

To come to our own authors - the atmospheres created by the various authors of the Sexton Blake Library must vary considerably, with the central characters being skillfully blended into the stories.

It is most remarkable that the atmospheres which prevailed at Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood should be so unlike each other, and yet be written by the same author. It would seem that Frank Richards had the power to alter his entire personality when writing for the different schools.

With the early detective Nelson Lee Libraries being written by more than one author, the effect was the same as in the Sexton Blake Libraries. When Brooks took over the entire writing of the St. Franks' stories the different atmospheres were reduced to one.

WANTED: Good loose copies or bound volumes containing any of the following: MAGNETS - 52, 131 to 149 inclusive, 195, 205, 237, 238, 239, 277, 318, 319, 353, 400, 417, 422, 435, 469, 706, 719, 751, 752, 753, 762, 763, 809. Most issues between 821 and 890, 900, 921, 924, 925, 936, 938, 940, 942, 943, 946, 951, 965, 967, 988, 996.

GEMS - Many issues between 400 and 500. Many issues between 800 and 879. Also Nos. 925, 935, 953, 954, 956, 975, 980, 984, 985, 989, 990, 992, 993, 998, 1129, 1150. POPULARS: 183, 190, 370, 385, 396, 452, 455, 466, 474. EARLY PENNY POPULARS: Nos. 12, 13, 45, 47, 48.

ERIC FAYNE, "EXCELSIOR HOUSE," GROVE ROAD, SURBITON, SURREY.

URGENTLY WANTED: Gem No. 799. Can anyone help?

TOM PORTER, 1, TIMBERTREE ROAD, OLD HILL, STAFFS.

DANNY'S DIARY

March 1914

There has been a new paper out this month. It is called *The Halfpenny Wonder*, and it is described as a serio-comic. The comic characters are Ragged Reggie and Victor, his Valet; Kicksy and his comic mope; Sammy Sharp, the shopwalker, and Billy Briggs' Bandits. There is a serial entitled "The Ever-Lighted Window," and this is by Edmund Fordwych, who wrote the story "Springheel Jack" in the *Jester* which my Gran gave me at Christmas.

Doug and some of his friends went to the Palladium early in the month to see Bombardier Billy Wells in a boxing bout with Bandsman Blake. It was supposed to be a 20-round contest, but Wells won in the 4th round. He was given £1800 and won the title of Heavyweight Champion of Britain.

I showed Dad an advertisement about the Cunard liner *Laconia* which takes people



The Same Size as COMIC CUTS! Four Pages of Screaming Comic Pictures!
FOUR COMPLETE PAGES OF New and Specially Written Stories!
A RECORD SWEET (4 1/2 ins. across any way) GIVEN AWAY with every Copy of
No. 1 OF "THE HALFPENNY WONDER."

Special New Great Human Story-Drama — BY J. EDMUND FORDWYCH;
 Author of "Buddy"; "Springheel Jack"; "The Ticket-of-Leave Man"; "The Bullwag Princess";



A Magnificent Detective Story-Drama, serial's novel entitled
"HUNTER AND HUNTED; or, KING OF DETECTIVES, versus KING OF CROOKS!"

from Liverpool to Naples for £12 on a luxury trip. I asked Dad if we could all go, and he nearly had a fit. Later on, when I asked Dad for a halfpenny to buy the new Halfpenny Wonder, he said, very loudly: "Do you think I'm a millionaire, Danny?"

A strange thing has happened in the Gem this month. There has been a series about the captaincy of St. Jim's. Kildare had to go home, so a new captain was necessary. In "The New Captain," Monteith was to be appointed, but Cutts saw to it that the Head got to know about Monteith's murky past. Then Tom Merry took a hand, and Tom was elected captain.

The second story was "Captain Tom Merry," and it was a real winner. In this issue, a new cricket serial by A. S. Hardy started, called "Playing the Game."

Then the odd thing happened. The third story of the month was called "The Housemaster's Peril," and this was nothing at all about the captaincy question, and almost seemed by a different writer entirely.

With the fourth story, we went back to the captaincy series in a fine tale called "Under His Thumb," in which Cutts was made captain of St. Jim's. The series will go on into next month, and I am enjoying it very much.

So far, Blackburn is on top of the Football League, and Preston North End is at the bottom. We are getting near the end of the season, and it will be interesting to see what happens.

Doug took me to see the Boat Race on March 28th. I was pleased that Cambridge won, for I am a light-blue supporter, but it wasn't a very good race, for Cambridge was in the lead all the time and Oxford never looked like catching up.

Doug bought me a copy of "The Boy's Journal." This has a new school serial by John Finnemore, who is a famous writer. The story is entitled "The Outlaw of the Shell."

I had one copy of Chuckles. It contained a story by Frank Richards called "Condemned on Suspicion" and it was all about Harry Wharton & Co and the Cliff House girls. The Ferrers Locke tale was "The Stolen Code Book."

There were riotous scenes at Glasgow when Mrs. Pankhurst was arrested while she was addressing a suffragette meeting in St. Andrew's Hall. There was a fight between the women and the police. Flower pots and chairs were thrown about, and one lady drenched a policeman with the decanter of water from the chairman's table. Poor Mrs. Pankhurst was dragged, half-fainting, from the hall.

Mum says that women ought to have the vote, and Dad says they couldn't make a worse fist of things than the men do. He says the only person who ever went to parliament with good intentions was Guy Fawkes.

The Magnet has been patchy this month. "Blundell's Prize" was chiefly about Blundell and Bland. Blundell won £1 in a competition, and he thought he had won £100, so bought a motor-bike. Rather a weird affair.

"The Missing Chinese" was rather good, about the kidnapping of Hop Hi. "Alonzo's Marvellous Mixture" was a bit funny in parts. Alonzo dosed people, without their knowing it, with some medicine which gave them pains. "Easy Terms" was about Fisher T. Fish who started selling goods on the system of you buy now and pay ten times as much later on. It was passably good.

On the whole, it has not been a very good month in the Magnet. There is a new serial, by Sidney Drew, in the Magnet, called "The Blue Orchid," but I don't like Sidney Drew much.

Jessie brought me a copy of Puck one day. Val Fox is still going strong.

The firm of Henderson's has also started a new comic this month called "Sparks." It costs a halfpenny, and is good value for money, providing you've got the halfpenny. It has six pages of funny pictures, three serials, and two complete stories. I don't know how they manage to do it.

WANTED: Magnets Nos. 829, 873, 875, 882, 884, 888. S.O.L. No. 60.

DR. R. WILSON, 100, BROOMFIELD ROAD, GLASGOW, N.1.

News from the Clubs

MIDLAND

Meeting held 28th January, 1964

Eight members plus two new 'chums' assembled in the first meeting of the New Year. We were all sorry to hear of Norman Gregory's family bereavement, his wife's mother having passed away. We were pleased to welcome for the first time and we are certain it will not be the last by any means, Mr. T. Ivan Webster and Ian Parrish, both keen Magnet fans. Also Mr. Webster is an admirer of the Nelson Lee yarns. In the absence of Norman, Jack Bellfield took the chair. As the meeting had started fairly late, a number of items prepared by Tom Porter had to be deleted from the programme. To the delight of our two new members, the first item was an exhibit of Red Magnet - No. 155 - "Spoofing Alonzo" - date 28th January, 1911. More to the interest of Mr. Webster was a bound volume of Boys Friend Libraries, all Brooksiiana. Starting with No. 514 - Nipper at St. Franks and on to No. 713 - The New York Mystery. A game of Breaking the Cipher was followed by Tom reading the Secretary's article in the last C.D.A. "Heart of Oak." This being more Hamiltonian, was more to the liking of the majority. Another game of "Jumbled Names" was the prelude to a quiz of 8 questions - Hamiltonia and Nelson Lee - won jointly by the Secretary and the Vice Chairman. A discussion introduced by Tom Porter was a good item of the programme and as the question he asked was "Does Bunter Spoil the Magnet" - it can be accepted that a debate followed and was much enjoyed by the two newcomers who, of course, joined in. Greyfriars Bingo, now getting very popular, concluded the programme. Next meeting, February 25th, should be a tip top affair.

HARRY BROSTER Secretary.

NORTHERN

Meeting held on Saturday, 8th February, 1964

Our Chairman, Geoffrey Wilde, was back in his usual place on the

rostrum to open our February meeting before another excellent attendance. We were again fortunate in having an exceptionally fine clear night, so that those of our members who come from outside the Leeds area had no fear of travelling conditions.

The minutes and monthly reports having been disposed of, Gerry Allison read us extracts from correspondence received - an exceptionally varied and interesting lot this month.

Jack Wood followed with an interesting account by Bill Lofts of the meeting of the London club attended by Edwy Searles Brooks. The questions put to him, and the answers he gave, were followed with close attention.

"Twenty Questions" came next, a version of the popular radio quiz programme devised by Gerry Allison. Seven items were put to our team of experts, of a varied nature, ranging from 'Juicy' Lemon to Yvonne Cartier. They acquitted themselves well, guessing five of the seven with something in hand. The two that beat them were 'A Modern boy' and Squeak, of Pip, Squeak and Wilfred. This very knowledgeable panel of experts was Jack Wood, Bill Williamson, Harry Barlow and Harry Lavender.

Gerry also supplied the next item, 'A Knight's Tour on a Chess Board,' 64 word squares having to be filled in, in correct sequence, to supply a passage from a Magnet story. Geoffrey Wilde won this, Bill Williamson being second, and Jack Allison third. After all this intellectual exertion a break for refreshments was welcome.

Frank Hancock had a quiz of 20 questions after the interval, which was won by Gerry Allison with 14 correct, Elsie Taylor and Ron Hodgson being next with 13 each.

This week's Hamilton character was Arthur Edward Lovell, the choice of Frank Hancock, and the reading was from a Rookwood story describing Lovell's efforts as secretary of the Fourth Form Cricket Club - an episode which brought out all Lovell's qualities of self-confidence and obstinacy, and the weakness of his arithmetic! Frank having a spot of chest trouble, Jack Wood very kindly deputised and read it for him. This brought a varied and interesting meeting to a close. Next meeting, Saturday, March 14th.

F. HANCOCK Hon. Sec.

AUSTRALIA

Despite the very hot weather there was a good attendance for the February meeting.

Chairman Syd Smyth made the pleasing announcement that the next

issue of "Golden Hours," the club's magazine will be available soon.

Next item was a report given by the Secretary and Victor Colby on the pleasant day spent with Mr. and Mrs. Jim Cook when their ship called at Sydney on Feb. 2nd en route to New Zealand. Perfect weather plus the enthusiasm for the hobby, made a pleasing introduction to an enjoyable day. Jim's letter of thanks was appreciated and we would like to thank them for the pleasure their news of our friends in England brought to us.

Victorian Collector, Tom Dobson of Melbourne was able to entertain Jim and Mrs. Cook at his home where several pleasing hours were spent browsing through Tom's extensive collection.

Thanks to the Merseyside folk for their gift of a scenic calendar to convey their greetings for the New Year. Hanging in our club room this will be a reminder of friends so far away in miles yet so close to us hobby-wise.

Of particular interest to the Merseyside club will be the news that the tape our chaps made some time ago in reply to their greeting is now in the possession of Mr. D. E. Hobbs of Seattle, U.S.A. A most friendly letter from Mr. Hobbs had been received by Victor Colby and this was read out by the secretary - Mr. Hobbs is anxious to bridge the distance by tape or letter and the club's newest member, Don Harkness hopes to be able to correspond with him since they share not only the common interest in the O.B.B.C. but also in photographing the collections for distribution amongst the collectors who are unable to attend the meetings.

Syd Smyth was able to give fellow members a detailed report of Edwy Searles Brooks visit to the London Club's O.B.B.C. thanks to Bill Lofts - this was greatly enjoyed particularly by the Lee enthusiasts.

Jack Hughes sends the good news that he will be heading south from Queensland early next month so club members will have the pleasure of his company on Monday night, March 9th, when a special meeting will be held to coincide with Jack's visit to Sydney.

In the absence of the treasurer, Ernest Carter, now on holiday, the financial statement was given by the secretary. Then members retired to the nearby coffee shop to cool off after a stimulating meeting.

B. PATE Hon. Sec.

LONDON

The sixteenth Annual General Meeting took place on Sunday, February 16th, at Hume House, East Dulwich. The President of the

club, John Wernham was present with some of his Hamiltonian museum exhibits. There was an excellent attendance, this augered well for ballot for the post of chairman for 1964. Candidates were Len Packman, Brian Doyle and Bill Lofts. In the subsequent election they finished in that order, thus Len Packman is the chairman for 1964. All the rest of the officers were re-elected en bloc. Votes of thanks to the retiring chairman, Bob Blythe, were given and all the other officials were thanked for their sterling work during 1963.

Don Webster put Brian Doyle through his solo quiz, subjects "The Captain" and "Chums." Result very good, over two thirds of the questions right.

Laurie Sutton's "Members Names" quiz was greatly enjoyed and was won by Bill Lofts. Second place occupied by Don Webster and the third jointly by Winifred Morse and Brian Doyle.

Bill Lofts then gave a talk on the "First Numbers" and illustrated the talk with some of his specimens, "Magnet," "Gem," "Greyfriars Herald" and the like. Bill will give another of these talks at a future meeting and bring some more first numbers along.

The Sexton Blake Circle will be meeting for the first talks re the Sexton Blake catalogue it was announced.

Hosts Len and Josie Packman provided an excellent study feed and both librarians did very good business.

The next meeting will be held at the residence of Brian Doyle, 14A, Clarendon Drive, Putney, London, S.W.15. Phone PUTney 1086. The date Sunday, March 15th. Kindly inform if intending to be present.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

MERSEYSIDE

Meeting held Sunday, February 9th:

It is pleasant to know that you have friends who remember you and we have constant reminders of this by the correspondence we receive.

January was no exception for in our mail bag were letters from Don Webster, David Hobbs (U.S.A.), Bette Pate (Australia) and Harry Broster.

Harry also sent us a copy of the Midland report which made interesting reading. What a pity that they cannot attend our meetings but it is comforting to know that they are at least with us in spirit. We also received a letter from Mr. W. Lister of Blackpool

who says that he is a member of the London Club. I appreciate, of course, that Blackpool, being about 50 miles from Liverpool it would not be possible for him to attend our meetings regularly, but nevertheless he would be very welcome if he could pay us a visit on occasions. Bette Pate in her letter spoke of colleagues in Adelaide and Perth, many hundreds of miles from Sydney, and it made me feel that our ideas of distance are rather insignificant by comparison.

We had a discussion about some books which were offered for sale, but it was decided not to take any action.

We have received another drawing from Alf Hanson. This one, "Winter at St. Jim's," is about the best.

Norman Pragnell gave a quiz on T.V. and School personalities which was won by Bert Hamblett with John Farrell second.

My contribution was a quiz on the news of the past week, and school characters, Jack Morgan taking 1st place followed by Pat Laffey. Pat was also the lucky man in this month's ballot which gave him the honour of preparing next month's quiz.

Next meeting Sunday, March 8th.

NEW TELEVISION PLAY FROM MAURICE McLOUGHLIN

Maurice McLoughlin has been a keen and loyal supporter of Collectors' Digest for many years. He is best known to readers as the writer of the Billy Bunter plays, the most recent being "Billy Bunter Meets Magic," but he is also deservedly famous in other branches of play-writing. Far from the world of Greyfriars was "A Letter to the General" which was produced at the Edinburgh Festival, and was also widely acclaimed as one of the best TV dramas of all time when it was televised about a year ago.

Mr. McLoughlin's latest play "SHADOW IN THE SUN" is to be televised on the Independent channel on Monday, March 16th, from 9.10 til 10.30. Set in South Africa, it is a story of a girls' school, with Anna Neagle, as the Headmistress, heading a distinguished cast.

It promises to be even more entertaining than "Letter to the General," and that is indeed saying something. We advise our readers to make an appointment with their TV sets for March 16th, at 9.10.

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THEY WROTE THE VERY FIRST GEMSBy W. O. G. LOFTS

One of the very few number one issues that I do not possess is the first 1/2d GEM. Such is the very high value placed on the stories written by 'Martin Clifford' (Charles Hamilton) that number 3, the opening St. Jim's story entitled 'Tom Merry's Schooldays,' is far more valuable even though it is not the very first issue of the paper.

Most readers know that when the GEM commenced in 1907, under the editorship of Percy Griffith, the intention was to have adventure tales by various authors, mingled with the school stories of St. Jim's. But after No. 10 of the paper, it was decided to have regular weekly tales of Tom Merry & Co. Such was the popularity of 'Martin Clifford.'

No. 1 1/2d GEM, an adventure story, was entitled 'Scuttled' and was written by a mysterious 'Lewis Bird,' a new name in boys fiction. Many times I have puzzled over the true identity of this author - and wild theories in my mind of Lewis Higgins one time editor of CHUCKLES and on the Companion papers' staff - and Lewis Carlton - Blake author and editor of the UNION JACK, were in the main highly unsatisfactory without any proof whatsoever. A recent talk with Mr. C. M. Down who was on the staff of the paper as a junior sub-editor failed to provide concrete information, except that the first stories could have been penned by Charles Hamilton, who wrote a considerable amount of adventure tales in that period under numerous nom-de-plumes.

'Lewis Bird' was in fact a pen-name for CECIL HAYTER, who needs no introduction to Sexton Blake readers for his wonderful characters Losely and Lobangu, and the very first time to my knowledge that he ever used a nom-de-plume for writing stories. Hayter of course also wrote GEMS No. 4. 'A secret Quest' and No. 10. 'Treasure Trove.'

No. 2 of the 1/2d GEM entitled 'On the Trail of the Grizzly' written by yet another new name in boys' stories 'NAT BARR' was another pen-name of a famous writer - none other than NORMAN GODDARD, better known to most as 'Mark Darran' creator of Spearing of Scotland Yard. Goddard was killed in the first world war.

No. 6. "A Britishers Pluck" written by 'Brian Kingston' was the pen-name of Percy William Longhurst, not a Blake author to my knowledge. His favourite theme was boxing and he wrote under this name a great deal for 'CHEER BOYS CHEER' and 'MARVEL' (second series) as well as in the 'BOYS FRIEND LIBRARY.'

No. 8 the remaining adventure story 'The Night Rider' written by a mysterious MARK GLOVER, as yet I have been unable to trace, but I am practically certain to glean this information in due course, when I will publish my findings in the C.D.

In all probability the majority of readers couldn't really care less who wrote the very first stories in the ½d GEM, and I couldn't agree more that they were run-of-the-mill type of yarns in those early days, though they may have pleased many young readers.

All the same, the GEM will go down in history as one of the finest papers for boys, due of course to the work of the late Charles Hamilton, and it is nice to know the actual names of the writers who launched the GEM way back in 1907.

I felt quite flattered, when recently disclosing the very first writer of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, at the interest shown by collectors. In some ways the GEM had the same beginning, though the authors were named in this instance. I may have given myself a free advertisement in stating that I do not have the very first ½d GEM, but as already stated, although it may not have a great deal of interest to the majority of collectors, at least to myself who collects these number one issues, 'Scuttled' by 'Lewis Bird' has a more than usual interest!

O F F E R E D

10/- each for Rookwood Schoolboy Owns 170, 174, 182, 198, 202, 206, 220, 284, 308, 341. 6/6d. for St. Frank's 285, 288, 300, 303, 306, 309, 312, 318, 336, 345, 366, 369, 372, 375, 405, 408. Few Lees, Gems, Schoolboys Owns inc. No. 3 for exchange.

THOMPSON, 53, WALLASEY PARK, BELFAST 14.

B O O K B I N D I N G

ALL TYPES OF BINDINGS UNDERTAKEN: BOOKS REBOUND OR REPAIRED:

Q U A L I T Y W O R K M A N S H I P

L. WARD, 3 HEATHERDENE CLOSE, MITCHAM, SURREY. Tel: MIT. 3837

SALE: 4 Nelson Lees, 2 S.O.L's., 3 Tom Merry books 16/- the lot.
For sale and wanted: books by V. Gunn and Berkeley Gray.

65, BENTHAM ST., BELFAST.

The POSTMAN CALLED

Interesting Items from
the Editor's Letter-Bag.

J. TWELLS (Rugby): Although Brian Doyle states twice in his article that A. B. Payne drew every one of the Pip, Squeak, and Wilfred cartoons, he is in error. "Poth" drew these strips on numerous occasions.

HARRY BROSTER (Kinver): It is obvious that the main enthusiasm of Digest readers is for Hamilton, Brooks, and the "proper" Blake, but variety is welcome, and you cater for it. I think that C.D. proportions the main "wants" very fairly. If others want more, let them write and submit the material.

ALEX PARSONS (Tranmere): I like Mr. Webb's cover work on C.D., and think it an excellent job with plenty of atmosphere. I see Maurice Kutner of Clapton is also a Warwick Reynolds admirer. Congratulations to Maurice on his fine taste.

E. N. LAMBERT (Chessington): The praises due to the C.D. Annual are legion. It gets better every year. Most literary publications seem to diminish in both quantity and quality and like many commodities these days we continually get less value for our money. Not so with the Annual. I am glad to see that Slade has become a regular feature. I should like to see more of the Slade stories in the monthly Digest.

(A new Slade story: MR. BUDDLE LAUGHS LAST is due next month. - ED.)

JOHN STEELE (Nigeria): Any chance of an article on the D.C. Thomson papers - Wizard, Skipper, Hotspur (old type)? I am sure other readers would also find this interesting. The latest Annual is easily one of the best yet.

CHARLES DAY (Keighley): I was delighted with the Annual, the first one I have had. What a wealth of information and pleasure it contains! I was especially interested in the Catalogue of Comic Papers. Reference to it gives one an immense advantage over friends

who are interested but not so well informed.

JACK OVERHILL (Cambridge): Of course, you are right when you say A VERY GALLANT GENTLEMAN was out of place in the MAGNET. In one simple sentence you say it all. It wasn't the dark shadow of one story, it was the dark shadow that story cast over the others. I used to read the DIAMOND LIBRARY when I was a boy; I liked very much the school tales about Tufty and Co., and Kettle and Co.; but writers in the D.L. used to drag in death - I am sure to the undoing of the D.L. I remember one story opening about a school with a sinister name that said 'One boy, so bright and bonny, had gone to that school and had come out in a wooden box.' I was filled with horror, just didn't want to read on. As you mentioned Pentelow I looked down the list and couldn't find a single story of his that I could remember: Samways - quite a lot.

JOHN UPTON (Southend): In the Annual, those beautiful evocative pictures by Alfred Hanson are turned to again and again. And what an exhaustive list of the children's comics, packed with information. These are the highlights of what is an amazing book to me, with its lovely headings and illustrations of the old papers.



OUR FAMOUS
CONTRIBUTOR,
ROGER JENKINS,
photographed
at our
London Club's
meeting at
Maidstone
a few
months ago.

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REVIEW"BUNTER, THE STOWAWAY"Frank Richards
(Cassells. 11/6)

It was stated recently at a meeting of the London Club that this latest Bunter story was written up from a genuine TV script. There is little doubt that the story is linked with the last of the television series, though whether the story is an extension of the scripts or the scripts were episodes taken from the story is something which matters little.

"Bunter the Stowaway" should appeal to youngsters, and that, after all, is its object. Action is fast, though in the earlier chapter there is a little too much of the author putting various people's thoughts into words. The story opens at Greyfriars where the Famous Five and Lord Mauleverer are planning a trip to Hong Kong, accompanied by Mr. Quelch, on Sir Reginald Brooke's yacht. Eventually Billy Bunter accompanies them, starting the voyage as a stowaway.

There are adventures in Kent, followed by adventures in Nice, Malta, Egypt, India, and Hong Kong. Events are rather too obviously contrived. In Nice, Bunter is instrumental in the recovery of a necklace which - wonder of wonders - proves to have been stolen from Miss Beryl Brooke, Mauleverer's cousin.

Most adults will find the story rather an indigestible mixture, and may be relieved to turn to the old China series for a picke-me-up. There is plenty of humour which is rather laboured. Subtlety is conspicuously absent, except, possibly, for the comment of Bunter in Cairo: "There's one special place in Cairo I want to see. My cousin, George, was here in the war, and said it shouldn't be missed. It's Groppi's, sir. My cousin said it was the best cafe in Cairo. All the troops loved it."

Geographical details are convincing, and the writer would seem to have more than a nodding acquaintance with the places of which he writes. There is nothing to cause offence to any rabid Greyfriars fan, and Mr. Prout's references to his days in the Rockies will carry some of us a long, long way back in memory.

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TELEVISION? IT'S JUST ANOTHER SUBSTITUTE...Says Brian Doyle

Now that the halcyon days of the fine old boys' papers have long-since disappeared, people must sometimes ask themselves: what has taken their place in the hearts of present-day young readers?

As the vast majority of modern publications for boys (and girls) are in the form of puerile picture-strips, readers are not given the opportunity of being able to really 'lose themselves' in the adventures they are following. Publishers of these juvenile papers are dangerously encouraging 'picture-book' standards up to the age of 15 or 16, instead of persuading their readers to actually read. I do not, of course, refer to the children's comic-papers, which are a class apart, but to the "New Hotspurs," "Valiants," "Boy-Friends" and so on, of this world.

The average 4-page picture-strip story can be assimilated in about 4 minutes and doesn't, one imagines, linger for much longer in the imagination. A complete modern boys' paper can be 'read' cover-to-cover in less than 15 minutes. And that is hardly value for money, let alone food for the young, imaginative mind.

How different it was when the luckier boys of years ago could look forward to such papers as the "Magnet," "Gem," "Boys' Friend," "Union Jack," "Nelson Lee," "Chums," "Captain," "BOP" and so on. A copy of any one of these papers would take hours to read. And what excellent, stirring reading it was! Many stories would remain in the memory for a life-time; most would be recalled affectionately for months afterwards.

And what an incredibly wide range the stories covered in those days too. Tales of school, sport, mystery, detection, adventure, pirates, explorers, humour, science-fiction, and many more varieties spring to mind. On glancing through a few present-day boys' papers, one notices that almost every story is concerned with the last world war, with an occasional Western, sporting or mystery yarn thrown in now and again. As for school stories, they seem to be a lost art, as rare as a sovereign in a bus conductor's bag.

But all this is no doubt labouring a point I probably don't have to make anyway to readers of the "C.D."

The point I really want to raise is this: What has taken the place of those wonderful old story-papers and their action-packed

serials with every episode ending on a note of high suspense?

My own answer (and possibly an obvious one) is simply - television.

In the place of the adventures of Sexton Blake, Nelson Lee and Ferrers Locke in printed form, modern youngsters (and their fathers) turn on the exploits of Perry Mason, George Dixon, Laurence Preston and police-car 'Z-Victor-One' on their home screens.

Instead of waiting impatiently for the weekly arrival of the "Union Jack," "Chums" or "Magnet," the lads of today await equally impatiently the starting-time of their favourite TV series, whether it be "Z-Cars," "Robin Hood," "The Defenders," "Dixon of Dock Green" or "Taxi!"

Addicts of pre-war humorous yarns now have their chuckling counterparts in telly-fans of such shows as "Here's Harry," "Sykes," "Hancock" or "The Charlie Drake Show."

Instead of "House of Thrills," they have "Our House," for "Street of Mystery" the substitute is "Coronation Street," for "Space Voyage to the Stars" it's "Thank Your Lucky Stars," for the "Rio Kid," it's "Laramie." They thrill not to cliff-hangers, but to Cliff Richard; instead of the "Magnet," they have "Dragnet," and in place of the "Gem" they have "The Seven Faces of Jim."

The unfortunate school-story enthusiast has no TV substitute, sad to say. The inferior Billy Bunter TV series (with the exception of the talented Gerald Champion) was disappointing and has, in any case, finished its run. An outstanding TV serial was "The Fifth Form at St. Dominic's," but where are its successors? And Mr. Jimmy Edwards' "Whacko!" series, though set in a public school, should really be classified under 'comedy,' perhaps...!

I feel more than a little like Mr. Prout for saying it, but all this surely goes towards breeding a new generation which will tend towards laziness. It's all done for the modern youth; he doesn't have to take the trouble to read magazines or books; he just has to sit down and pick his way through a picture strip (appallingly drawn, as likely as not), or loll in front of the flickering TV screen.

The real disadvantage about the process of television series, replacing boys' papers, of course, is that you can't collect them.

And yet, perhaps it's not beyond the bounds of possibility that, say around the year 2000, we might be seeing ads. in the "New C.D.," offering (to all those fortunate readers who possess the necessary

film projector):

"For Sale: Complete run of "Perry Mason" series, mint condition. Also Episodes 1-10 of "Z-Cars"; the rare No. 1 of "Robin Hood"; and several odd nos. of "Billy Bunter," "Sir Francis Drake," "Ivanhoe," etc. What offers?"

You never know, do you?

But, personally speaking, give me a stack of old boys' papers anytime.

After all, you can't curl up in front of a roaring fire on a cold winter's evening, with a can of film negative, can you.....!

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