

The Bulkyeye

ATTENTION! BUY THIS

No. 16. Vol. 1.

Week ending May 9th, 1931.

TWOPENCE

THE NIGHT PATROL.



Nick Kennedy reached the window just a fraction of a second too late. He saw the hurtling forms of the Chinaman and his burden—he saw the nets spreading between barges and the upturned faces of grinning Chinamen at the long, ugly snarl. (See page 11)

Collectors' Digest

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by

W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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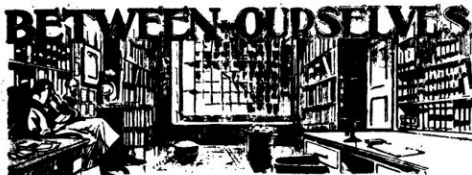
HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 21.

No. 249

SEPTEMBER 1967

Price 2s. Od.



A JOLLY HARD JOB!

"Writing," said John Betjeman recently, in a TV programme, "is a jolly hard job."

I don't think I would agree with him entirely. At least, not without some qualification. Obviously, it depends a good deal on the writer, and on his circumstances.

I have often felt that Charles Hamilton's lot - and the lot of plenty of other writers like him - was appalling. To have to write about 60,000 words every week, and to be obliged to meet a deadline, strikes me as a terrible burden, and one which would drive me up the wall completely. Even if I could have done it, it would have been slavery of the worst type. But clearly Charles Hamilton did not feel that way about it. He enjoyed it; he always had remarkably good health; and he lived to a ripe old age in spite of it. To him it was the reverse of a jolly hard job.

For myself, I feel that writing is very much like cricket. There are times when words flow in a stream from my typewriter, under my gnarled fingers, just as, when a cricketer is in form, the runs flow from his bat. There are also times when the words will not come at all, or if they come they are not the right ones, just like an out-of-form batsman who prods and pads and finishes up with the derision of the spectators.

But then, of course, though I do a great amount of writing every month, I am not a writer. If writing were my profession, I should starve. To add to my troubles, I am lazy, and always have been. The old brainbox works sluggishly. Often the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.

The deadline - the fact that the Digest must be on the way to the printers by the 18th of the month or earlier - sends shivers down the area where I ought to have a spine. But I'm lucky. Something always turns up to be written about. An idea or two for the editorial; a theme for the Let's Be Controversial series; a thought or two to make an article to fill the space left vacant by a club report which, without notice, fails to turn up. Fate is usually kind. And, according to whether the cricketer is in form or not, the runs flow like wine or like treacle. Which is a dreadful simile.

If, as sometimes happens in my nightmares, the Digest reaches you one month with a number of large vacant spaces, you will perhaps comment: "The lazy so-and-so, his apology for a brainbox has conked out at last." Or if you feel kindly for the man who has made a duck, you may murmur, like John Betjeman: "Writing is a jolly hard job!"

OUR 21st BIRTHDAY

Next month, with our October issue, we reach a milestone. We clock up our 250th number, and we celebrate our 21st birthday. At the risk of being accused of a lack of modesty, I cannot help suggesting that it is a remarkable achievement, not only for an amateur magazine, but for any magazine.

It seems appropriate that we should let our hair down for the occasion and have a party, and it is pleasant to think that our readers, all over the world, can join the party.

As you know, for some months we have toyed with the idea of running a special Double Number. It has not been an easy decision to make, for there have been many obstacles, and I have mentioned these previously. A Double Number eats into available material just at a time when the 1967 Annual is in active preparation; also, October is a time when our printers are working almost to the limit of their capacity; there is the extra midnight oil to be burned towards the preparation of the number; and there is the question as to whether finding the double price for the month might prove a hardship to some readers.

It is our readers themselves who solved the problem. In the heaviest postbags I have ever experienced, readers all over the world have written in, with overwhelming emphasis, to express their views that a Double Number to mark our 21st Birthday is a "MUST."

So, for better or worse, the next issue of Collectors' Digest will be a GRAND DOUBLE NUMBER in honour of our 21st Birthday. After all, we are only 21 once in a lifetime.

It is over four years since we had our last Double Number. Even now we often get requests for it from readers who missed it for some reason or other - requests which we are unable to grant from this office. Even now we get more requests from readers seeking that issue of C.D. than for any in the whole history of the magazine. So we anticipate a big demand for this 21st Birthday Special.

As on the previous occasion, we shall cope with the matter of the one-month increase in price, in the case of our regular subscribers, by counting this forthcoming issue as two instead of one. Of course, any reader who does not wish to receive the "special" should just drop us a line to that effect.

Even now, birthday greetings and messages are starting to come in. We hope to devote a page or so to printing some of these messages next month. If you have any special message or comment to send to C.D. on the occasion of its 21st birthday, send it along to reach this office by the 16th September. We may be able to print it, or, at least, to quote from it.

COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL

This year, the Annual will also reach its 21st edition. This month we send you the order form for the Annual, in order that you may make certain of securing a copy. Already we have in hand some exceptionally fine articles from our star band of contributors, and others are at work on some more for this 21st edition. Next month we shall give you an insight into some of the treats in store in the 1967 Annual.

We invite our readers, who may have some "wants" or something to sell, to advertise in the Annual. It is also an excellent medium for sending Christmas greetings to your hobby friends. Advertisements in the Annual still cost 2d per word, exactly the same as they did 21 years ago when the first Annual appeared. The preparation of the Annual is always a bit of a financial worry. You can help this side of the matter with your advertisements.

THAT "BEST" BOOK

Scores of letters have come in from readers who have secured "The Best of Magnet & Gem." These letters, with only two exceptions, have been full of praise for the publication. Two of our readers didn't like it - but, as we ourselves know, it is impossible to please everybody. On this occasion, Fleetway certainly have pleased most people

DANNY'S DIARY

September 1917

No zepp raids for quite a time. We have really been spoiled. But now the Huns have started aeroplane raids at night. Funny. The zepps always came on very dark nights. The aeroplanes come on bright moonlight nights. We had the very first night aeroplane raid on September 4th.

The Boys' Friend has been just great again this month. The first Rookwood yarn was "A Terrible Temptation." Mornington has learned that the waif, 'Erbert, is the real heir to the entailed Mornington estates. And Mornington almost pushes 'Erbert over a cliff. But finally Mornington tells 'Erbert the secret. A beautifully written tale.

Next week came "Mornington's Vengeance." Morny makes real fools of the nuts and spongers who only wanted to be his friends while they thought he had money.

Then the last of the Mornington series for the time being, though there will surely be more. In "The Downward Path," Morny, now short of money, went to a pawnbroker and also held an auction sale of everything in his study. And as each lot was put up for offer, Erroll bought it. And in the end, Erroll saved Morny from the clutches of the bookmaker.

In the fourth week, "Raising the Wind" was about Tubby Muffin. He pretended to have a brother at the front, and the chums got up a fund, till they found out the truth by telephoning Muffin's pa. Final story of the month was called "A Discredit to the School." An escaped convict named Gunner was an old Rookwood boy, and Van Ryn, by his ventriloquism, made Tommy Dodd & Co think that the convict was in hiding in the ruined crypt. Funny, for I remember that Dr. Chisholm once had a nephew named Gunner. This is, of course, a different character, and I suppose the author had forgotten he had used the name before.

The Frank Richards' Schooldays series has been tip-top. First story "The School in the Backwoods" in which Bob Lawless tricked his cousin Frank into going to school in Etons and a top hat - and Frank Richards had a fight with a bully named Eben Hacke.

Then "For Life or Death" in which a grizzly bear caused fright round Cedar Creek. Then "The Remittance Man" in which a new boy named Vere Beauclerc came to live near the school. He was unpopular, but Frank thought there might be some good in him.

In "Loyal to his Enemy," Frank Richards saved Beauclerc from a brutal Mexican rustler, and in the final tale of the month, "Rounding Up The Rustler," the Mexican was caught by the Mounties, aided by the Cedar Creek chums.

The Union Jack really has very tiny print indeed these days, but I suppose it is necessary unless they cut the stories. This month I had "The Case of the Crimson Terror" which was about Prince Menes, and was quite good. The following week I had "The Valley of Craggs" which was another one in the Tinker's Casebook series and was told by Tinker himself. This also was very good, and it was so long that the serial instalment had to be left out.

The Magnet has been much of a mixed bag this month - partly awful and partly splendid. The first tale "On The Make" was rather a dry and silly story in which the boys asked to have money instead of books for prizes so that the money could go to a war cause.

Much more silly, if that was possible, was "The Schoolboy Inventor" next week. Harry Wharton & Co were in quarantine in a house they visited where someone had measles. The "inventor," of all people, was Bob Cherry who invented a kind of a telephone for use at the front. Too silly for words.

But after this came a really terrific new series, and I have never read anything better in the Magnet. The Head goes away for a time, and his place is taken by a brutal new headmaster named Jeffreys. The first story was called "Judge Jeffreys."

"Getting Out of Hand" came next, with Mr. Quelch leaving Greyfriars on account of the unspeakable Jeffreys.

Then a great yarn "The Greyfriars Inquisition" in which a new master, Mr. Schwartz, was appointed in place of Mr. Quelch. The boys formed a secret society to deal with Jeffreys and his click. This was really exciting. A marvellous series. I hope it goes on for a long time.

This month there has been a big trial going on in Old Bailey's court. A Lieut. Malcolm seems to have won a lot of simperthy in the newspapers. I believe it's something about what they call the Unwritten Law.

At the pictures we have seen Ethel Clayton in "The Stolen Paradise;" (I am very much in love with Ethel Clayton); Annette Kellerman in "A Daughter of the Gods;" Jack Pickford and Louise Huff in "What Money Can't Buy;" House Peters in "The Happiness of Three Women;" and Owen Nares and Fay Compton in "The Labour Leader."

There is also a new serial called "The Secret Kingdom" featuring Marguerite Courtot and George B. Seitz. Pathe serials are always good.

In spite of that lovely series about Manners and his minor which was in the Gem a little while ago, I can't help thinking that the paper is slipping all the time. This month's crop of stories has been a weak harvest.

The first tale of the month was good. It was called "Walker," and it was rather funny though the plot was a bit much-used. Kerr pretended to be a new boy in the School House, and japed Tom Merry & Co. But the rest of the month was feeble. A new serial "The Twins from Tasmania" has started, but that seems a bit feeble, too.

In "A Queer Bargain," Tom Merry & Co want to raise money for a good deed. Cardew provides the money, on the understanding that he shall edit "Tom Merry's Weekly" for one issue. He writes a lot of libelous things.

"Trouble in the Third" was about Wally getting in a muddle through Piggott and two others named Kent and Watson who seem to have been invented specially for this story.

"Levison's Sister" followed. Her name is Doris, and she is very very sweet. Racke and Crooke, pretending to be Tom Merry and Lowther, meet her and are about to take her to that low music-hall, the Friv. Luckily, the real Tom Merry turns up before so terrible a thing happens.

Last of the month - "The Tribulations of Trimble" in which Trimble fell in love with Doris Levison, and reformed. He even helped to pull a drowning fag out of the river. Then he became his old self again.

Sir Arthur Lee has given a house to the government. It is a nice mansion, and it is to be a residence of the Prime Minister. Mr. Lloyd George is a lucky man: It is called 'Chequers.'

MORE RICHARDS' BOOKS DUE

The following titles are being put out in paperback form at 2/6 each by Merlin Books on September 1st: "Billy Bunter and the Man From South America;" "Billy Bunter and the School Rebellion;" "Billy Bunter and the Secret Enemy," "Billy Bunter's Big Top." All are "by Frank Richards."

We hoped to have a little more information for you about them, but all we can say at the moment is that they would seem to be "specially prepared reprints from the Magnet."

In October, under the same imprint, will appear "Bessie Bunter's Gold Robbers" and "Bessie Bunter Joins the Circus," both by Hilda Richards, plus two "William" books.

HAMILTONIANA

SAWDUST AND SPANGLESBy Frank Lay

"The circus had pitched its tents - or, to be more exact, its tent and caravans - on the wide, heathy expanse of Rylcombe Common. Away in the distance, over the tree-tops, rose the grey old tower of a well-known public school - St. James' School, more familiarly known to the inmates thereof as St. Jim's. Night was falling upon Rylcombe and its wide common and deep woods, and the naphtha lamps of the circus were blazing, and the strains of a wheezy band were calling to the inhabitants of Rylcombe the announcement that Tomsonio's was open, and that all were welcome."

The above extract from "A Circus Hero" published in Pluck No. 255 New Series dated 18th Sept. 1909 takes us straight back to those far-off days when the coming of the circus was an event, the hey-day of the cinema lay just ahead and radio and television were fantasies of the future. Well can I remember, even in the nineteen-twenties the eager anticipation with which I awaited my annual visits to the gathering of the "World's Fair" at the Royal Agricultural Hall, Islington.

To-day the glamour of the circus has gone. True the fairground, 'Appy 'Ampstead is still with us but we have grown blasé. Many of the circus turns are kept alive by television appearances, but we see so many, so often, that even the splendid shows of the Russian State Circus fail to move us as much as the old sawdust and spangles.

In his early days Charles St. John Hamilton wrote stories of all types including several of the circus - one that comes to mind was called The Star of the Ring featuring Bensonio's Circus camped upon Netherby Common and the hero was Curly Kit, the boy rider. The author's name is given as Cecil Herbert and the story appeared in No. 5 of the ½d Vanguard but there is no doubt it was written by Hamilton. Curly Kit's origin was unknown and the mystery was probably cleared up in Vanguard No. 12. Comrades of the Circus. Fifty years later Hamilton returned to the same theme with his unfinished series "Jack of the Circus."

And in late 1909 we have the series in Pluck from which the above extract was taken. By then he had found his metier as a writer of school stories and this was perhaps the reason why this particular series was published under the pen-name of Harry Dorrian, or as one story only had it Harry Dorrain. In the main the stories are light-

weight Hamilton, the characters are either heroes or villains and no attempt is made at any real characterisation and now and again several irritating references to Bunter as "Bunty" and D'Arcy as "Gus" crop up. It would seem that the circus does not lend itself very readily to variations of plot and we have the boys of Greyfriars and St. Jim's introduced into several of the stories to widen the scope. The Circus Ventriloquist being an example of Bunter using his talents in this direction for the benefit of the circus. One character, the villain, is known as the Handsome Man, for his good looks and is the circus's star act on the trapeze. The same character is used in exactly the same manner in Jack of the Circus. Jack Talbot the hero is, as may be expected, an expert with horses and with a face handsome and manly which seldom wore anything but a cheerful smile!

It is interesting to read the advertisement on page 111 of the cover of Pluck 269 which runs The Magnet Library $\frac{1}{2}$ d contains a grand long, complete story of Harry Wharton & Co. by Martin Clifford! One wonders if anyone queried it at the time!

Two years later in the Magnet Christmas Double Number 200 dated 9th December 1911 appeared a story by Martin Clifford entitled The Stars of the Circus, introducing Tom Merry & Co and Tomsonio's Circus and a new mysterious hero named Darrell who eventually turns out to be Gore's missing Uncle Dick. There is a reference in this story to an incident in The Circus Hero of two years before when Gore insulted the circus heroine Clotilde. In the meantime Gore has reformed and as his reformation is alluded to in the story it would seem that either Hamilton had a very good memory or that he had the previous story before him when he wrote this one.

It is more than possible that other stories of Tomsonio's circus exist as in the above stories there are possible loose ends that were plainly intended for future development but which to my knowledge so far were not proceeded with. If any reader has knowledge of stories other than those I list in my appendix I would be grateful for the information.

Circus Comrades	Harry Dorrian	Pluck	21.8.1909	
The Tiger Tamer	"	"	28.8.1909	
Jungle Jack	Harry <u>Dorrian</u>	"	4.9.1909	(see foot p.8)
Jack Talbot's Birthday	"	Dorrian	"	11.9.1909
The Circus Hero	"	"	18.9.1909	St. Jim's
Circus Rivals	"	"	2.10.1909	
The Circus Riders	"	"	6.11.1909	Greyfriars
The Circus Ventriloquist	"	"	13.11.1909	"

The Circus Riding Master	Harry Dorrian	20.11.1909	Greyfriars
Queen of the Ring	"	27.11.1909	" & Cliff House
The Circus Pupil	"	4.12.1909	Greyfriars
The Showman's Enemy	"	11.12.1909	
The Bogus Ringmaster	"	18.12.1909	
The Reformation of Bibby	"	25.12.1909	
The Stars of the Circus	" Magnet	9.12.1911	St. Jim's

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DO YOU REMEMBER?By Roger M. JenkinsNo. 66 - Schoolboys' Own Library No. 104 - "Dropped from the Team"

It is astonishing to note how many of the dramatic Rookwood stories revolved around Valentine Mornington. Although there were a number of other unscrupulous characters on the stage, like Peele and Lattrey, none of them could be used very often, because they were to some extent predictable in their actions. Mornington, on the other hand, was so volatile, and such a curious mixture of good and bad, that he soon became the sole pivot on which nearly all the exciting Rookwood stories depended. As Charles Hamilton said, "Rookwood, somehow, did not seem quite the same without Morny, with all his faults and exasperating failings."

Schoolboys' Own Library No. 104 was very appropriately named, as all the events did indeed flow from the fact that Mornington was dropped from the team. He had neglected cricket practice in order to study for the Head's Latin prize and although we heard no more about the Latin we were given a great deal more information about the cricket. Mornington treated his exclusion from the team as a personal insult and began a series of plots against Jimmy Silver, at first with the intention of regaining his place in the team, but later with the sole idea of revenge, rather after the fashion of Iago. The fascination of Mornington's character undoubtedly lay in its unpredictability, but his changes of mood were never merely idle whims or fancies - there were always convincing circumstances which enabled the reader to understand the complex workings of Mornington's unusual mind.

The final success of Mornington's plot against Jimmy Silver ought to have afforded him great satisfaction, but Charles Hamilton had too penetrating a knowledge of human character to depict such as being the case. In two telling descriptions of Mornington's feelings, revenge was stated to be "like Dead Sea fruit, bitter in the mouth" and "as it

was written of old, what had tasted as sweet as honey had turned as bitter as gall."

The end of this Schoolboys' Own indicates a curious quirk in the Amalgamated Press's policy of reprinting. For some inexplicable reason, they were never keen to reprint Rookwood stories in two successive months, which meant that very seldom indeed did any Rookwood story run over into a second volume of the library. If, therefore, the original Boys' Friend series could not be compressed into a single number of the Schoolboys' Own Library, it would be left unfinished, and this in fact was what happened with this intriguing story. Mornington was expelled, and in a pleasant epilogue, when all rancour was forgotten, he helped the Rookwood team to win a cricket match at Highcliffe. But how he contrived to return to Rookwood was a treat that the curious reader of the Schoolboys' Own Library had to forego.

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 115. FIRST BLOOM

The first two chapters of "The Autobiography of Frank Richards" - and very pleasantly-written and heart-touching chapters they are - tell of how he received, at the age of seventeen, his first cheque for his writing, after which there was a constant demand for his work. This, undoubtedly, suggests that he was something of a boy prodigy.

If actually he was a youthful prodigy - and it seems certain that he was - it is somewhat remarkable and certainly regrettable that so very little of his earliest work remains extant.

As most of us realised long ago, the Autobiography, pleasant though it is to read, is a curiously unbalanced and unsatisfactory piece of work. So much is left unsaid, and it concentrates, in the sections of main interest, on just a very few periods here and there.

The author wrote: "Judging by fan-mail, readers are more likely to take interest in the Gem and Magnet period than in earlier years. So we will pass lightly over the nineties and the first years of the present century..... The briefest sketch will suffice."

There is, of course, truth in the first sentence. Readers were more interested in the Gem and Magnet. Nevertheless, he left a strange gap. The Gem did not start till 1907 when he had turned 30 years of age. If he was indeed a boy prodigy at the age of 17, then "the briefest sketch" of the period from 1890 till 1907 really did not "suffice."

It could be argued that he had a long lifetime of which to write,

and, in consequence, many periods had to be omitted. Such an argument is not tenable, for he still found space to devote to a number of slightly tedious adventures on the continent which had little or nothing to do with his main writing life. Probably the Autobiography is as notable for what it left out as for what it included.

It is fairly obvious that Hamilton's genius was dormant, or, at least, unrecognised, until after his first bloom was passed. It cannot be questioned that he wrote, possibly prolifically, for some of the smaller firms, including Brett and Trapps Holmes, during the last years of Queen Victoria's reign and during the first decade of this century. Clearly, however, he wrote nothing noteworthy or lasting during those years which carried him from his teens to his early thirties. If he had done so, he would have quoted chapter and verse in his autobiography, and, more important still, plenty of those stories would have been in our hands today.

He told us he was writing as a young man, and that his stories were in constant demand by publishers - but he does not tell us what he wrote. We have seen a few adventure tales which he wrote in the original Union Jack. We have heard the titles of a few school stories he wrote for Trapps Holmes, but few if any of us have ever come across them.

The century seems to have been a few years old before he started writing anything for the firm which was soon to be known as the Amalgamated Press. There is little evidence that he made a very great hit with them to start with. As late as early 1907, a story from his pen was published without any author's name in the Boys' Friend. For some time, there was none of the fanfares to herald his stories as occurred in the case of established authors like Henry St. John, Maxwell Scott, and Sidney Drew.

It may well be that the author was never outstandingly popular for the stories published under the name of Charles Hamilton. If this is so, there was some irony in the matter. The discriminating reader would have appreciated his yarns as competently written and well-constructed, but those yarns had appeared in journals devoted more to slapstick or full-blooded adventure which would appeal to a rather different type of reader from those which, later on, were to be so enthusiastic over his school stories with their attention to characterisation.

Such authors as I have previously mentioned - Drew, Scott, and St. John - were probably far more popular during the first decade of the century, yet they never had papers specially devoted to their

writings. Yet Hamilton, who I feel certain was less popular in 1907, was given a paper of his own - the Gem.

I think there were possibly two reasons for this. First, Hamilton was a younger man than the others. Still in his early thirties, he could be expected to carry on for many years if it became necessary. I doubt whether he was any more prolific at that time than St. John, but he had far greater range and potential in his writing. Also, in 1906, Hamilton wrote what in my view was his first school story of well above average quality. This story was entitled "King Cricket." It was featured throughout the summer of 1907 in the Boys' Realm, and its success was well above average for its day.

"King Cricket" is very far from well-known today. I doubt whether more than a handful of C.D. readers have ever seen it. I believe it was reprinted in the Boys' Friend Library, but it is extremely rare. It was, of course, a "Charles Hamilton" story, and, as such, it was not much retained by the readers of the era.

I think it probable that, after reading "King Cricket" in manuscript form, the idea of a special paper for Hamilton came to the publishers, and so they tried him out with a new school series to be featured every fortnight in Pluck. This new series featured the early St. Jim's, and these tales probably clicked from the start.

Once again, these were "Charles Hamilton" tales, and, apart from a few rare copies, they are non-existent now. Very few readers bothered to preserve them for posterity. How different was the case with the Gem!

It is, of course, true that the Gem was initially intended to be a paper of adventure stories. But, weeks before the first issue was on sale in the shops, Charles Hamilton, as Martin Clifford, had contributed "Tom Merry's Schooldays," and a new era was born. Within a few weeks, the Gem became Martin Clifford's own paper.

From then on, Charles Hamilton albeit not under his own name, became the most popular boys' school story writer in the world. Small wonder that he always had a special affection for the Gem, which started him on the most amazing part of his long career. Small wonder that, for a goodly number of years, he poured the cream of his gifts into that paper. He owed so much to the Gem, and knew it. One might feel, perhaps, that his long neglect of the Gem after 1924 was a poor return for the debt he owed. But no doubt there is much of the story which we do not know.

I hope that one of these days, the Hamilton Museum, which won such acclaim for "A Strange Secret," will set about reprinting "King Cricket," the story which, I am certain, proved to the Amalgamated

Press, that a star was born for them. Few of our clan have ever laid eyes on "King Cricket." All, surely, would welcome the opportunity of reading and possessing the famous author's first really outstanding story.

* * * * *

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

GERRY ALLISON: Having just re-read the complete Saga of Cedar Creek in the original Boys' Friend, I agree that they were charming, and one of Charles Hamilton's most successful writings. I recently read an autobiography by a woman who had been a school-mistress in the Thompson Valley, and was amazed at the similarity of her story with that of 'Martin Clifford.'

Mr. Penrose - the editor of The Thompson Press, was Hamilton's whipping boy for all the ire which he felt for sub-writers - and editors. Remember the story when Mr. Penrose was compelled to burn his issues of the Thompson Press, which contained sub-stories, supposed to have been written by Frank Richards?

In a later series, Mr. Penrose has to leave Thompson Valley 'on a borrowed horse, which the owner was destined never to see again. The editorial career of Mr. Penrose in the Thompson Valley had come to a sudden end.'

Then, for a time Frank Richards himself becomes the proprietor and editor of The Thompson Press, and writes a story 'BULLIVANT'S SCHOOLDAYS,' about his old school in England St. Kit's. (See Boys' Friend Nos. 1022-to 1026.)

GEORGE SELLARS: It was a very long time before I realised and could swallow the fact that Charles Hamilton had never been to Canada at all. Even now when I have read some of his school days at Cedar Creek over again, I find myself still in doubt, a little, about it all. Even as I am writing, that doubt is still with me. Which of course proves that these very charming tales of his adventures at Cedar Creek were told in a very natural manner, not known in any of his other school stories, or any kind of tale in his work. Also I believe anyone who read them for a time at least must have thought the same as myself. However, anyone has got to face the fact that C.H. said himself he had not been in Canada, and makes my lingering doubt more strange than ever.

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BLAKIANA

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THE MAN FROM PERSIA

By W. O. G. Lofts

I was greatly interested in the articles appearing earlier in the year in BLAKIANA concerning the very last story that "Lewis Jackson" (real name Jack Lewis) wrote for the Sexton Blake Library: "The Man From Persia" - No. 244, published in July 1951.

I, too, have been an admirer of this writer's tales through the years. Personally, I put the poorness of this particular yarn down to his deterioration in story-writing due to age. I do know that he was a very sick man during the last years of his life, and under these circumstances there would obviously be a vast difference between this story and, say, a brilliant Kestrel yarn written in his prime.

On investigation, I can say with authority stemming from an official source that "Lewis Jackson" most certainly wrote this story; at least, he received the cheque for doing so, and must therefore be credited as having written it. Without appearing dogmatic in attitude, I cannot possibly see how more conclusive proof can be given in documentary evidence than this.

Whilst on the subject, I can perhaps explain how some types of stories differ from those of the recognised style of a reader's favourite author.

Firstly, S. Gordon Swan is quite correct. This particular story was a rehash of an old "Paul Urquhart" (real name Ladbrooke Black) story published some 18 years previously. I do not think that the author 'pinched' this but that it was done with the editor's permission. Quite a great deal of rehashing was done in Amalgamated Press periodicals. For example, FILM FUN had old Laurel and Hardy comic strips and stories reprinted wholesale.

It must be remembered that Blake authors are only human, and in the main they are colourful characters. Many things were done - especially before the war - in story writing which leave even the so called 'modern' methods of today far behind. However much we may deplore the word, "juvenile" fiction was considered the lowest form of writing and the least paid of any literary work. This even includes the MAGNET and GEM. "Hack market writing" was the term used in Fleet Street. It was the ambition of every writer - and artist - to go on to better class magazines such as the STRAND.

In my contact with editors and writers through the years, I have encountered no less than six 'ghost' writers who have penned stories for well known and established Blake authors. I have no doubt that they were telling the truth, for they described characters and incidents in stories which they could never have made up on the spur of the moment. Why they 'ghosted' could be for a number of reasons - the author being 'indisposed' and behind deadline schedule is one. Again, it could be that he was helping a struggling author get work accepted in a market which was strictly reserved for the 'established' few favourite writers. As is now well known, "Gilbert Chester" and G. H. Teed both started their careers in this fashion.

Only recently, a former editor of the DETECTIVE WEEKLY told me that in the mid-1930's he wrote practically the whole of one Sexton Blake Library, the author named for the story only writing the first chapter! As the author in question was paid in advance for the whole story he is credited with having written it. The reader can see what complications and puzzlement a keen enthusiast will encounter when he tries to correctly identify the author of a particular story by the style in which it is written. Another factor which has to be taken into consideration is editorial subbing and rewriting. This is done far more than readers imagine. It is a fact that quite a few UNION JACK yarns were 'pinched' stories lengthened and put into the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY, and the other way round. There was no connection or editorial collaboration between the U. J. and the S.B.L.; both were poles apart regarding policy and other matters.

I well remember one of my visits to H. W. Twyman, former editor of the UNION JACK, before I knew the officially accredited authors of many U.J. stories. I took with me a pile of U.Js and asked him if he would tell me who wrote them. (For many years the author's name was not given to the story). After a perusal of quite a few, Mr. Twyman said that it was a sheer impossibility to tell by style alone, with so many factors as explained above coming into it; but he had an official list somewhere by which he could tell me correctly. (He later found the list.)

It was Mr. Twyman who told me that there was only one logical view to take regarding the authorship of certain stories: the person who was paid for writing a story, and whose name appears on the official receipt, must be assumed to be the author. If ever any legal rights came into the matter, the law would without question give favour to the signature on the official receipt.

Reverting back to the original theme of "Lewis Jackson's" last story, there is always the possibility that someone else wrote the

story under his instructions, but as Jack Lewis died some years ago the truth will never be known, unless the 'ghost' writer appears on the scene at some future date.

Readers are, of course, fully entitled to their own opinion and to disagree with names given in official records. In the thousands of names and statistics recorded only a fool would claim that they are 100% correct. Clerks and accountants are prone to errors like anyone else. But I, personally, accept these records as binding. No-one would ever get anywhere in compiling data if they didn't!

In closing, I can reveal that in the preparation of some stories for the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY no less than four different writers were involved before the finished product appeared on the bookstalls; and to name an author long since dead, the great Gwyn Evans, he had at least two 'ghost' writers for his Sexton Blake stories.

Finally, Messrs. S. Gordon Swan, Walter Webb and Gerry Allison are appreciated for having raised such interesting points about a story.

* * * * *

EXTRACT OF LETTER RECENTLY RECEIVED BY LEN PACKMAN FROM HIS FRIEND MR. D. S. C. KURUPPU OF CEYLON.

....."In September, when you will be celebrating your 62nd birthday I will be celebrating the birth of my first novel. It is a Sexton Blake story and will appear in No. 42 under the title "Crash and Carry." I have written it under my nom-de-plume of Stephen Christie. It features Blake, Tinker, Paula and Marion in Ceylon and is, I believe, the first Ceylon-setting SBL for quite a long time..... Unfortunately, though the plot and action passed muster, the script was about 15,000 words short. I agreed to let the mythical Desmond Reid do the padding and the re-writing.....

....."I've just completed my second SBL - "Slaughter in the Sun." Unlike "Crash and Carry," which is a straight mystery-thriller, this is a who-dun-it with four murders and seven suspects. Features Blake and Paula in Ceylon, and this time I have taken care to see that it runs full-length....."

* * * * *

S.B.L. REVIEW

CRASH AND CARRY (No. 39)

STEPHEN CHRISTIE

This is a record of one of Sexton Blake's rare assignments in Ceylon. But it is something very much more than that; for the story was actually written on the island, and is the work of a Ceylonese

journalist who works on the TIMES OF CEYLON. Although Sexton Blake stories have found their way to London from France when G. H. Teed, W. M. Graydon, and the Anglo-Frenchman, Captain Duncan Storm, were writing them many years ago, this is the first Blake story ever written by a non-European, and, although a certain amount of re-writing has been necessary, the novel, basically, is his, and the finished product will undoubtedly please all those readers whose particular forte is political intrigue abroad in an exotic setting.

An unco-operative electorate, having placed in power a Government unsympathetic to their aims, certain yellow-skinned gentry in Peking are moved to topple it by flooding the island with counterfeit, so reducing it to bankruptcy. In the ensuing chaos a swift taking over of the island by the Reds, the swoop on India, and dominance over all Asia. The sort of assignment that only men like James Bond, or Sexton Blake, could be expected to tackle successfully. Blake is the man chosen by Craille, and the Organization pair off to meet the threat of the counterfeiters, with the result that, for a change, Tinker and Marion show up rather better than their seniors. As a matter of fact, not since Buck Ryan and Zola went out of business has an investigator's blonde assistant suffered such a series of nightmarish moments. Paula Dane, who has such strong aversions to being seen by Blake other than when at her peak of sartorial elegance, figures in what, to my mind, is the highlight of the story. Chapter 12 is devoted entirely to Paula's fight to the death with a beautiful Eurasian, with both combatants using the most unladylike tactics in order to gain the mastery. In a principal garment of lubricating oil and perspiration as almost her sole undergarment, Blake's secretary is likely to gain quite a few admirers by virtue of a victory it seemed beyond her power to achieve.

This is unashamedly modern blood-and-thunder, quite well put over and not without its values. It's authentic; it's educational; spectacular, too, if you disregard the dialogue, which lacks the crispness of a Baker, or a Maclean, to give added effect. Personally, I found the journey into Colombo, the capital, a most enjoyable romp, and await further stories by "Stephen Christie" with keen anticipation.

Walter Webb

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NELSON LEE COLUMN

CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD

A LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S

By Jim Cook

This really isn't a letter about St. Frank's at all for the River House School occupies all my space allotted to me.

Since the River House School forms part of the St. Frank's scene and being a very near neighbour fate took me to Dr. Hogge's establishment through a paragraph which appeared in the Bannington Gazette.

The Gazette stated that it understood the River House School was being sold and the new owners were planning to alter the school into one of those health farms that have lately sprung up all over the country. So I immediately left the Japanese cafe where I had wandered with Mr. Fielding, the Caistowe motor boat owner, and hurried back to St. Frank's.

Naturally when I showed the report to the juniors a great show of interest - and sadness - ran throughout the Lower School. Even cads like Forrrest & Co., Gore-Pearce, Marriott and Merrell were noticeably affected by the news and it wasn't very long before we decided to form a deputation to Hal Brewster and see if the report was correct. Somehow, one always likes to get confirmation of bad news.

Accordingly, about twenty fellows formed themselves into a party and made for the River House School. But before half way there, in fact at the end of Bellton Lane, Nipper had taken charge of the deputation and assumed command as the good skipper he is.

The River House is about two miles by road but considerably shorter if you go across the meadows but as it had been raining heavily for the past two days we decided to go by road.

Dr. Hogge's Academy, as the River House was formerly called, has a very interesting history which has often included St. Frank's since both schools are friendly rivals. I've been looking up the records and find that the present school is very much bigger than the original which consisted of only one House. Incidentally, the Moat Hollow House which was to feature in many strange adventures with the St. Frank's juniors was built on the site of the old River House School.

Disliking change by nature I am very conservative and I much prefer the old days when the River House was just one building; but it is interesting to tell of the necessity for the change both of site and the number of Houses.

One day, Hal Brewster, the leader of the set known as the Commoners, came across Fullwood & Co., gambling with Wellbourne & Co., in the latter's study and Hal at once summoned help and threw the lot out. Wellbourne's study was in an awful mess and fate in the shape of Mr. Wragg came along attracted by the noise ordered the juniors to tea which was then being served. During the melee a gas ring had become detached from the wall and a cigarette lighter was left burning steadily after the Honourables - Wellbourne & Co., - had closed the study door.

The resulting explosion blew up that part of the school and so badly damaged the rest of the building that the River House School became uninhabitable.

In fact, it was highly dangerous for the whole building was in a precarious state; it was rocked to its foundations. And it was only natural that Dr. Hogge should hasten to St. Frank's and seek out Dr. Malcolm Stafford.

I can't think of any other period in the history of St. Frank's when accommodation was offered to another school, but consultation with Nelson Lee brought about this unusual event. Sixteen Remove fellows were absent from St. Frank's at that particular time and there were only thirty three River House boys to accommodate, this meant accommodating seventeen - for there was already room for sixteen. (The sixteen juniors who were fortunately absent has already been told in narrative form.)

Well, it's a long time since that explosion, and today, the River House School has three Houses, a big development since Dr. Molyneux Hogge first started! It is now a miniature edition of St. Frank's, with heaps of Fourth Formers, prefects, and a little army of masters. So you can imagine the consternation caused by the newspaper report.

But the report was unfounded. Like St. Frank's, there are a few cads at the River House and two in particular were responsible for the fake Gazette report that the River House was being sold. And the two cads, Gordon Wallace and Willmore who instigated the rumour by conversing in an undertone knowing full well that a Gazette reporter was in their vicinity openly admitted that they were discussing the possibility of the school being sold and if a fool reporter misconstrued their little talk it was his look out.

I remember these two bright sparks well. Gordon Wallace was once transferred from the River House to St. Frank's but it wasn't long before St. Frank's found him out and sent him back. Willmore is a prefect and another edition of Simon Kenmore of St. Frank's.

So after that, we all returned to St. Frank's after giving Wallace

and Willmore the benefit of the doubt. We later found out it was a young cub reporter responsible for the false report; it will be a long time before he makes another for he has been relegated to office boy until he learns not to listen to hearsay alone for copy.

And to celebrate the good news that the River House School was in situ as it were Hal Brewster and all his friends were invited to St. Frank's for tea. How we squeezed them all in the various studies is a puzzle but we did it.

The affair was soon forgotten however, and the next day Lord Dorrimore arrived to see Nelson Lee. Speculation is rife for when Dorrie comes down to St. Frank's just before the summer holidays it can mean a trip in the Wanderer.

Oh there's one point which hasn't been cleared up about the Gazette report. At least, as far as Archie Glenthorpe is concerned. He hasn't been able to find out the meaning of a Health Farm!

* * * * *

I RATHER LIKED HANDY, BUT.....

By Len Wormull

Whenever I look back on the declining years of St. Frank's I get the feeling that things might have gone better for the old school had it not been for the over-exposure of Edward Oswald Handforth. That he was much over-rated as an attraction there can be little doubt. Let's face the sober truth, Lee fans. Here was a character untouched by brilliance dominating the scene at THE most critical period in the School's history! Why was Handy its chosen architect for survival? Why the V.I.P. treatment at all? Let's put the focus on him once more - under a microscope.

The Nelson Lee writes of him thus: 'Big, burly and clumsy. Very aggressive, and ever ready to punch anybody on the nose. Yet for all that one of the best, and generous to a fault. A great sportsman, if not very brilliant in other spheres.' The list of adjectives is of course extendable. One could, with justification, append the following: Bombastic, self-opinionated, lacking warmth, somewhat arrogant, often grotesque, and just plain barmy. Add up the lot and what have you got? A rather unwholesome mixture of ingredients, I would say, for a popular hero and top celebrity.

With greatness thrust upon him the testing time had come. The stage was set. Could this would-be spellbinder save the day for St. Frank's? Could this super-fistical dynamo punch his way out of this one? Sok! Pow! Calamity!! The searching lens revealed with

brutal clarity, the gaping holes in Handy's armour. The play was enacted, the curtain came down. The tragic finale we all know. As an analyst, I offer these findings: The drama was notable for three things - poor script, indifferent direction, and mediocrity of performance. The leading player, hopelessly mis-cast, fell a victim to his own defects in make-up.

Let me say now that I rather liked Handy - in moderation. He made an excellent light relief, although his unconscious humour was not uproariously funny. The mistake, I think, was trying to project him as a sort of phenomenon in the Bunter style, capable of holding the interest for long periods. He was essentially a "stooge" type, a foil for others. As a star attraction he was only half a success - a demigod. It has been said that he resembled Horace Coker, of Greyfriars. A likeness existed, it's true, but there was a subtle difference in the writing of the Fifth-Former. Even a clump can be made attractive, and Coker emerged a strong and appealing - even lovable - character. It is sad this cannot be said of Handy, who seemingly lacked the chemistry to engender a real warmth of relationship. When all is said and done, he left us so little by which to cherish his memory. And yet...and yet... what would St. Frank's have done without him?

For me, a more interesting, successful, and compelling personality was the real genius of the family - brother Willy. Now here WAS a character! Cool, calm, and collected, with a sense of humour and sunny disposition. Handy with his fists (no pun intended), with a leadership unquestioned. He strode the wide canvas like a colossus, yet retaining a boyish charm. Endowed with supernatural powers of reasoning, he might conceivably have been the reincarnation of Confucius. As an extra-sensory perceptionist he touched psychiatric heights. And he hadn't yet reached the Remove Form! One couldn't help liking young Willy, even if he did reduce poor old Ted to a mere nonentity. But it was his uncanny know-how with animals which intrigued me most of all. What animal magic! What an inspiration! Any circus, zoo, or safari would have vied for his services. Shades of the younger Tarzan?

Clearly, Handforth minor was a major, irresistible force, and merited a higher place in the scheme of things. He enlivened, enriched, and illuminated the whole St. Frank's horizon. He was a professional to his fingertips. To have made this amazing and talented youngster - probably the best-drawn of the St. Frank's characters - subordinate to big brother, was a blunder of the first

dimension. It prompts me to ask this question: In a popularity contest - Ted versus Willy - who would have won? Well, you know who gets my vote.

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WANTED: Good loose copies or volumes containing any one or more of the following: GEMS: Some issues between 801 and 832; 953, 954, 959, 960, 967, 970, 974, 975, 981, 984, 985, 986, 987, 989, 990, 992, 993, 995. POPULARS: 401, 403, 407, 409, 413, 415, 421, 422, 427, 433, 441, 442, 466, 467, 474.

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the postman called

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

ROGER JENKINS (Havant): I wrote to Fleetway Publications concerning "The Best of the Magnet and Gem," and after congratulating them on the production I did express my regrets that they had chosen a substitute story. I mentioned that some seven thousand Magnets and Gems were borrowed each year from the London Club's Hamiltonian Library, and that each borrower insisted upon genuine stories: so I was not just expressing a personal opinion, and I added that as Charles Hamilton wrote 85% of the Magnet stories, and as they referred to him by his real name on the back of the booklet, it was unfortunate that they had chosen a Greyfriars story he did not write.

I had a very pleasant reply from Leonard Matthews. He explained that he had chosen "The Barring of Bolsover" because he remembered reading it as a boy, and asked me to excuse him for indulging in a little personal nostalgia. As, however, he went on to say that any further reprints depend upon the reception that this one receives from the public, it seems a pity that future reprints depend so much on the "patchy" choice of stories in the first experimental number.

JACK COOK (Newcastle-on-Tyne): "Confessions of a Convert" in August issue calls for a reply - namely, that one, Jack Cook has been practising this system for years - with additional variations, namely: From St. Frank's to Greyfriars; then on to Cliff House, the school ship Benbow, thence to Sexton Blake, followed by science fiction. Then - ah, yes, Norman Conquest: The trail leads to Rookwood, on to St. Jim's - then suddenly we're back at St. Frank's.

A slightly broader canvas than friend Acraman follows. Advise him to ride trail with the Rio Kid; smile with Invisible Dick - and perhaps we'll meet back at St. Frank's.

STAN KNIGHT (Cheltenham): Thanks for another grand issue. How nice to see another of Henry Webb's cover drawings. He's a masterpiece in his own right.

And the ingredients are just as good as ever. The Editorials are always pungent, Danny's Diary full of nostalgia, and the various sections - Blakiana, Hamiltoniana and the Lee Columns also stir the heart strings month by month.

J. YORKE ROBINSON (Herne Bay): I found "The Best of Magnet & Gem" tucked away on a top display shelf in the Canterbury branch of

W. H. Smith. It was well above eye-level and it was only by the outside chance that I saw it. The whole of the shelf was given over to it, about ten copies - side-by-side. One generally finds the outside display windows of such booksellers filled with folio editions of Shakespeare and books on petit-point and croquet, which one can hardly imagine the public flock in to buy! The book is undoubtedly good value for money and the contents well-chosen.

LEO P. HYNES (Newfoundland): I cannot tell in words how much I enjoy Collectors' Digest. I never thought, at this stage of my life, that so much pleasure could be derived of reading of St. Jim's and Greyfriars. Such pleasure is a recapturing of that joy which was mine way back in 1920.

K. J. McWILLIAMS (Nursling): Collectors' Digest readers ought to know that this month sees the final issue of a fine boys magazine that has virtually been ignored in your illustrious pages, despite the fact that it has had an unbroken run since 1916.

Of course, you will say, the Meccano Magazine. And I would like to add my own modest tribute to a magazine which unlike many, kept up its high quality right to the last issue.

Except for this last issue, I have not bought a copy for some years but I have happy memories of haunting my dealers at the beginning of each month to collect my copy of the slim pocket edition of the wartime years.

In its heyday, around 1930-1939 it was a thick glossy magnificent production for a modest sixpence.

The boys of to-day are the poorer for its passing.

CLIFF WEBB (Wigan): Re "The Best of Magnet & Gem" one realises that collectors of Hamiltonia become irritated that a "sub" yarn is used in an all-too-rare reprint, when such a wealth of genuine material is available.

Yet if the majority of the "sub" tales were single stories, a compiler, less sensitive perhaps than an experienced collector, might find the odd one convenient to use, bearing in mind that Charles Hamilton's best work was done in the great series of the Twenties and Thirties.

We may not like the odd "sub" yarn, but I'm sure many of us don't mind swallowing the pips with the fruit to see some of Charles Hamilton's work published again. Especially if it filters through and catches on with a new generation of readers. To me, that would be the most wonderful thing of all.

LAURIE SUTTON (Orpington): It was good to get the full stories in "The Best of Magnet and Gem," though the desire to give three complete stories restricted the selection to a period when the Greyfriars and St. Jim's offerings were rather short.

The review makes reference to "The Barring of Bolsover" as being far from a bad substitute story. Putting aside a natural prejudice against substitute stories, I would say that this is an excellent story, possibly the best sub that ever appeared in the Magnet, and superior to many of Charles Hamilton's own single stories of the period. It bears the superior stamp of Stanley Austin's work, and was certainly not written by that atrocious author, F. G. Cook, as listed in the 1964 C.D. Annual list.

THE JESTER'S EARLY DAYS

by COMICUS

In the July DIGEST Raymond Taylor of Wolverhampton asked for an article on the early days of The Jester, which he says are a complete blank to him.

It is always a pleasure to me to write about Comic Papers, but I should point out that many details have already been given about the Jester in earlier issues of Collectors' Digest, the C.D. Annual, and the S.P.C., by Len Packman, John Medcraft, Arthur Harris, and of course by Bill Lofts.

Back numbers of the hobby magazines are a mine of information, and new readers often ask for details already given after much research by our writers. Roger Jenkins provided indexes for volumes 1, 2 and 3 of the Digest, and enthusiasts like Derek Adley have prepared their own index, and can turn up any article at a moment's notice.

However it is natural that newcomers should want to find out about papers which interest them - hence the club libraries. Copies of Jester for instance can be borrowed from the Northern Club library. But here is some data for Mr. Taylor which adds a little to that given by previous writers.

As both Len Packman in C.D. Annual 1954, and O. W. Wadham in S.P.C. No. 93 have pointed out, the Jester was more of a story paper than a comic. The title first appeared in 1902, and in the issue for October 25th of that year the Editorial Chat contained a letter

from a reader which was described as 'remarkable and far-spreading.' "I think not one of you," said the editor, "will blame me for expressing a mild surprise at its tone."

The letter suggested that the comic picture pages should be abolished, and the space filled with further stories and articles. The editor commented: "Really, 'A. Reader,' if that is the paper you want, I cannot understand how you come to be so satisfied with the Jester, a paper which owes its premier position today to the very funny, and admirably-drawn pictures that appear in its pages every week."

At that time there were 16 pages a week in the Jester; twelve of these were filled with fiction, and four only with comic pictures. The front cover gave the adventures of Happy Ike and the Bunsey Boys, a picture of these characters appeared on page 31 of Collectors' Digest No. 220. I think I am right in saying that the Bunsey Boys were a syndicated or pirated version of the famous Katzenjammer Kids from American comics. (Correct me if I am wrong, please, Bill Lofts.)

Other comic pictures portrayed Mr. Hubbub, Cholly and Gawge, Aubrey Fitzlemon - motorist, and Billy Bottles. There was also a weekly page of Storyettes submitted by readers. The funniest won half-a-guinea, the others 1/- each.

The main serial in the Jester at this time was "The Land of the Boomah" (To hear it spells death! At the shrill awful cry of the Boomah brave men pale and fall stricken to earth!)

Next came "Stranglers of the East" by Alec G. Pearson, a complete story which filled three pages. Other complete tales were "The Wonder Club at Home" and "Mystery of White Lilac Farm," whilst two other serial yarns were "London Life" by Colin Collins, and "Twice Round the Globe" by Sydney Drew. This last item was reprinted in the Magnet in 1912, and featured Ferrers Lord and Ching-lung.

The comic was printed on white paper, and had a variety of titles - as shown in Catalogue of Comic Papers by W. O. G. Lofts and D. J. Adley - C.D. Annual for 1963. The 2,010 issues between November 1901 and May, 1940 were titled as follows:-

Nos. 1 - 25	The Wonder (1d)
26 - 27	The Wonder & Jester (1d)
28 - 533	The Jester & Wonder (1d)
534 - 856	The Jester (1d)
857 - 998	The Jester (1½d)
999 - 1090	The Jolly Jester (1½d)

Nos. 1091 - 1163
1164 - 2010

The Jolly Jester (1d)
The Jester (1d)

To give a full account of all the many characters and stories in the Jester would fill a complete issue of Collectors' Digest. My favourite comic characters were Racketty Row, Constable Cuddlecook, and Moonlight Moggie; whilst I enjoyed the detective stories about Hawkshaw, and later about Dr. Duval. As Len Packman says "it was a rattling good paper - I only wish it was published today."

WANTED: RAINBOW ANNUAL. Any year before 1930. £2 offered for a good copy. CHIPS ANNUAL and FUNNY WONDER ANNUAL. Any year £2 each offered for good copies. Also WANTED: ~~FIVE~~ FUN ANNUALS for any year - in good condition. Your price paid.

L. PACKMAN, 27, ARCHDALE ROAD, LONDON, S.E.22.

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

MIDLAND

Meeting held July 25th, 1967

Our July meeting was the occasion of a real gathering of the clans, 14 members attended including Roger Jenkins of the London Club who was 'persona grata' for the evening. It was all the more gratifying because July and August are poor months usually for attendance.

As is our usual custom with guests, we invited Roger to address the meeting and he gave an interesting talk on his early days as a Magnet reader and also referred to the recent publication, 'The Best of The Magnet and Gem' by Fleetway Pub. He said he had written to the editor complaining of the use of a substitute story, "The Barring of Bolsover," and had received the explanation that the story was one well known to the editor himself - hence its inclusion. We were very pleased to hear from Roger that John Wernham is likely to publish another book for Christmas. All our members were delighted with the last one "A Strange Secret."

There was a reading by the acting secretary from Magnet No. 1390 showing Smithy presenting lines to Prout taken from Shakespeare, the famous passage beginning "Man vain man drest in a little brief authority." These lines describe Prout with deadly accuracy in his

role of temporary headmaster, but Smithy gets flogged for his insolence.

A game called "Take a Number" was then played under the guidance of Roger Jenkins. The solutions were titles of famous Magnet stories. The winners were Norman Gregory, Tom Porter and Ian Parish.

The Collector's Piece and Anniversary Number were this month: Anniversary No. Nelson Lee Library (2nd New Series) No. 79 dated 25th July, 1931 and Collector's piece No. 1 of the London Club Newsletter. Tom Porter said he had included this item as a token of appreciation of all that the London Club had done for the hobby.

There was a very artistically drawn poster with the letters Welcome to the Midland O.B.B.C. for Roger Jenkins' benefit drawn by our lady member Win Partridge. Roger returned the compliment by signing it for us.

The final item was a tape recording prepared by our new chairman, George Chatham. This described an imaginary trip to Greyfriars with dialogue by George himself and carefully chosen pieces of music to illustrate the characters and places. It was splendidly produced and we all hastened to congratulate George on his good work.

There was an interval when the raffle was drawn Ian Parish and Win Brown being the winners and we also found time to enjoy coffee and biscuits.

Altogether it was one of the best meetings we have had for some time and we look forward to the next one on August 22nd at the Birmingham Theatre Centre.

J. F. BELLFIELD

Correspondent.

NORTHERN

Meeting held Saturday, 12 August 1967

After a day with sun and shower alternating it was raining heavily at 6 to 6.30 p.m. when members were arriving. It did not, however, dampen the spirits of the eighteen who were soon cheerfully chatting and choosing library material. When the Chairman, Geoffrey Wilde, opened the meeting he said it was good to see so many in August, the main holiday month. He welcomed especially London member Roger Jenkins, who had made the long trip from the 'deep south,' and new member John Roberts who was attending for the first time.

After the formal items of minutes and financial statement, we listened to selections from Gerry Allison's post bag. These included

speculation on the age of Dr. Locke (!), and comments on the serial now being compiled (without pre-arranged plot) by seven Northern members in turn. Gerry also produced "Boy's Friend" No. 845 dated 18 August 1917 - another Golden Jubilee celebration, this month marking fifty years since the story of Frank Richards' Schooldays at Cedar Creek started.

A letter from Jack Bellfield of Midland was read about the proposed joint gathering in Chesterfield. Of the dates suggested the 15th October was first choice of most able to attend, and the Secretary was to write to Jack so that accommodation might be fixed at the Portland Hotel if possible - definite details to be given later.

Now the Chairman called on Roger Jenkins to start the evening's programme, and we settled down to listen eagerly to this distinguished Hamiltonian. Roger's theme was the establishing of Harry Wharton's character in the very early "Magnets." Charles Hamilton had told him that Wharton was drawn from life, and Roger revealed how all the facets of the character were depicted before thirty "Magnets" had been written. Other boys developed (Bunter, for example) but Wharton, with his virtues and talents, his faults and failings, was life-size and realistic from the start. Extracts from "Magnets" not familiar to many of us showed how carefully Frank Richards had drawn Wharton; and how glad he had done so he must have been afterwards, Roger thought. as in the rolling years so many vivid series were written round this strong and varied character. Hearty applause greeted the end of this talk.

Now Gerry Allison gave us a quiz - orally. Sentences with hidden names in and the answers to be called out. Quickest ears and quickest wits combined to make Tom Roach and Geoffrey joint winners with Roger next.

The fourth instalment of our Greyfriars serial, by Geoffrey Wilde, now followed and very engrossing it was. Bunter has disappeared, and other mysterious incidents involving a man with a radio transmitter, and Wibley in the Priory Ruins, occur, making us eager for the next chapters. Now we broke off for refreshments.

A rhyming quiz with St. Jim's answers by Cliff Webb (once more) was read out by Jack Wood. The winner was Geoffrey, second, Gerry and Elsie Taylor and Mollie Allison joint thirds.

Finally, another "guest" Sexton Blake looked in (at the invitation of Cyril Rowe of Norwich), and most delightfully he entertained us with an account of his early boyhood and student days. Thanks to the "Man from Baker Street," and Cyril, (and Geoffrey, who lent his

voice!)

Next meeting, Saturday the 9th September, 1967.

M. L. ALLISON
Hon. Sec.

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LONDON

To Friardale in the Middlesex village of Ruislip, alias Rylcombe, came a goodly number of members to have the August meeting. Bob and Mrs. Acraman were the hosts of this new venue and a great success it turned out to be. It was another in- or out-of-doors meeting; the green lush of the lawn in the garden was a delight for all.

A very excellent report was given by Bob Blythe re his Nelson Lee library, more books having been bought and more borrowing.

Matters relating to the Maidstone luncheon party were discussed and arrangements finalised.

An excellent repast was enjoyed by all; great credit to the hosts.

Josie Packman read a chapter or two from S.B.L. number 229 of the first series, the story being entitled "The Spirit Smugglers," the author, G. H. Teed. A very interesting Sexton Blake reading and thoroughly enjoyed by all present.

A quiz sent by David Hobbs of Seattle and conducted by Ray Hopkins resulted in a clear-cut victory for the Packmans, Len being first and Josie being second. Reuben Godsave was in the third place.

"Boys reading girls' books" and vice versa provoked a long and interesting discussion. Most of those present aired their own personal views and some of these were very unique.

Bill Lofts, Brian Doyle, Len Packman and Ben Whiter, plus others, gave out the latest news re publications to come, the Sexton Blake radio broadcasts to come, the Penguin paper back about the comic paper characters due out 1st of November. Laughter was caused when a piece in the current day's "Sunday Times" gave "Squeak," the famous "Daily Mirror penguin, as a 'he.' Amazing the mistakes the pundits make when dealing with the hobby characters.

The Maidstone coach will leave Vauxhall Bridge Road, Victoria, on Sunday, September 3rd, at 11 a.m. Those participating are asked to be punctual.

A beautiful day as regards the weather, a jolly meeting and a hearty farewell from the church bell-ringers nearby. Thanks to the

hosts were given and numerous cars were handy to convey members to the station.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

5/- each offered for copies of Puck dated 1933 or 1934.
HEARN, 191 ARBURY ROAD, CAMBRIDGE

BATSOWL WAS BITSY

By O. W. Wadham

Horror fiction in small doses was the policy of Chips in the first four or five months of 1919.

The popular pink comic had running at that period a most unusual serial called, "Batsowl," or "I Will Atone." It seems Batsowl was a wierd and wonderful being, flying about the country by means of enormous bat-like wings, so fashioned that they could be draped about his body like a cloak. His eyes gave out a powerful beam, headlight style.

While almost every other serial story to appear in Chips was given full-page instalments, and often a page and a half, "Batsowl" often had less than half a page. In fact in one 1919 issue, April 19, the wierd yarn had only half a column! And it was not as well illustrated as other serials. Maybe the author wanted it that way to keep readers' imagination working overtime. It would be interesting to learn how long the story lasted with such short "servings." It was appearing in a two months run of copies I have, with no mention of any conclusion.

COLLECTORS' DIGEST WHO'S WHO

Readers who have ordered the Who's Who are reminded that it is not due for publication till the autumn - probably in late October or early November.

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