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No. 141. ENTHRALLING SCHOOL AND DETECTIVE NOVEL!

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Or, SKILL AGAINST CUNNING!

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February 19th, 1914.

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Collectors' Digest

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A CHAT WITH MY CHUMS

Conducted by
THE ADMIRAL

WHY DON'T THEY GO FARTHER BACK?

Two comments by contributors this month are worth attention. Roger Jenkins writes: "The Red Magnet was at its best about this time (1911)." And our Let's Be Controversial columnist writes: "Charles Hamilton's best stories in the Gem appeared in the period 1911 - 1912."

Very few people will disagree with those statements which are obviously true. Why, then, do not the firms who re-issue Hamilton stories use single tales which featured in the Red Magnet and Blue Gem in 1911 - 1912? Those stories, one would think, were of ideal length for presentation in such format as the Merlin books. Most of them date very little, and even any dating could easily be avoided. The plots were good. The writing was first-class. Surely a reprinted Red Magnet story would be immensely preferable to issuing a heavily-pruned chunk from some very long series of later years.

It seems that the stories selected for reprinting come from the Schoolboys' Own Library, many of which were considerably pruned from the originals. Why dither about with the S.O.L.?

Is it just possible that the more suitable Red Magnets and Blue Gems are not selected for the simple reason that they are no longer in existence in the archives at the Fleetway House? One cannot help wondering.

THE VIRGINIAN, THE RIO KID, and THE TERRIBLE THREE

I am no television fanatic. I usually enjoy switching off. But

my favourite programme I never missed if I could help it. That programme was "The Virginian." It has been running for a good many years now - since the start of BBC 2, in fact. As is the case with anything which lasts for a long time - TV programmes in particular - deterioration always seems to occur with the passing of the years. "The Virginian" was no exception, though it maintained a high standard throughout.

I think I was attracted to "The Virginian" because the stories and settings reminded me so vividly of the Rio Kid tales. One got to feel at home in those settings in the same way that Friardale, with its environs, lived in our imagination. Visiting Shiloh Ranch, Medicine Bow town and railway station, each week, was like going home.

The three cowboy chums - The Virginian, Trampas, and Steve - somehow reminded one of the Terrible Three of blue Gem days. Judge Garth and Betsy provided a cosy family atmosphere.

There were at least two series after the start in which all the characters featured in every story. But, as the years crept by, though the story-line remained strong, the endearing characterisation slipped, and somehow one began to think of "what used to be." There would now be only one or perhaps two of the main characters in each story. Then, after the second or third series, Steve dropped out entirely. Like the Terrible Three losing Manners.

Then, after another series, Betsy dropped out - and finally the Judge. When the last series appeared on BBC 2, only the Virginian and Trampas remained. Like the Gem stories of the late twenties, they were only a shadow of what they once had been.

The series was a little unlucky. Following the departure of Judge Garth and Betsy - and, later, the ward who replaced Betsy - there were a number of slow, heavy-going stories, and one felt that the delight of "The Virginian" had gone for ever.

Then someone had an inspiration. An old man, Mr. Grainger, with his two grandchildren, took over Shiloh, and, for a while, the series regained a good deal of its old charm. Then fate stepped in. Charles Bickford, who played Grandpa Grainger, died - and the final effort had failed. It was no surprise when the series ended its long run at the end of November.

But now, once more reminiscent of the Gem, the BBC have gone right back to the beginning, and are repeating the entire series, this time on BBC1. Seeing the Virginian, Trampas, and Steve together again - not unnaturally looking youthful - reminds me of the pleasure I experienced when Tom Merry appeared once again in the Gem as a new boy. And, as in the case of the Rio Kid tales, the early ones were so vastly superior to the later ones.

Is it odd that television should provide a parallel with the old papers?

THE FUTURE OF SEXTON BLAKE

"Exciting things in store for Sexton Blake," announced our contributor, Brian Doyle, in last month's Digest. Certainly it seems clear that Blake is destined to gain plenty of publicity in 1968, but some readers, like myself may have felt less excited than depressed, for it all seems rather a mixed-up affair. The normal series of new Sexton Blake stories is to continue in due course, which is good news, and The Sexton Blake Annual will be assured of a hearty welcome, providing it is produced in a worth-while manner.

More puzzling, however, is the news that Blake is to feature as an advertising medium for bubble-gum, and that he is to be presented in picture strips. Also, a children's publisher is to bring out Blake stories for the juvenile market.

Most of us know that, in the past, Sexton Blake never catered for children. Even long ago it is doubtful whether Blake found his readers among young people of less than about thirteen years. In recent time, plenty of the modern Blake yarns have verged on the X-certificate category. Yet now an attempt is to be made, for the first time, to publish Blake for the tinies.

Not for the first time, Sexton Blake doesn't seem to know in which direction he is heading.

THOSE DELIGHTFUL ADS.

Ben Whiter, the livewire secretary of our London Club (he addresses me as "Dear Admiral;" excuse me while I count the rings on my sleeve!) sends along some heartwarming little memories of old ads, to add to those which I quoted last month.

He writes: "'The Ghost of Tabby' was Nestle's. My father used to quote Pickwick, Owl and Waverley Pen, and during my residence in Frank Richards' country (1930-1941) the Pears advert appeared very prominently high up on the wall of the old Royal Hotel, Ramsgate. Recently, the failure of the Pan Yan company brought back memories of the ad with the little dog sitting in the midst of a broken bottle of Pan Yan: 'You're in a fine pickle!'

"Pride of place must be given to Bovril - 'Prevents that sinking feeling,' and that delightful one of the doctor prevented from entering a garden by a cow - 'A little Bovril keeps the doctor away.' Finally, the Reid's stout ad - a couple of draught horses pulling a load up a hill - 'A stout pull up for Reid's.'"

Lieutenant Whiter adds: "The utter piffle that one has to endure

NELSON LEE COLUMN

CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD

MY MEMORIES

By J. Conroy

I have been reading the Nelson Lee column in the last few editions of the C.D. and I have been really interested in the re-kindling of enthusiasm for St. Frank's in various readers' articles.

I always used to get the three books, the Magnet, the Gem and the Nelson Lee every week without fail. They were on order at the news-agents. I thus had a good grounding in the Hamilton and Brooks' schools. For a time the St. Frank's yarns became my favourites. Somehow the St. Frank's juniors were real schoolmates of mine. The characters alive (I preferred Nipper in the third person and not as the author of the stories - controversially I suppose) and I used to fancy myself at school with them. A sign, I think, of good story writing. The stories I can remember best were the series when the juniors went to Australia and New Zealand and the Test Matches were mentioned. I remember also in another story when Handforth received a brand new Morris Minor. I could imagine myself in it with Handy, Church and McClure. Another enjoyable series when Waldo the wonder boy arrived.

In this particular phase I must say I disagree with Gerry Allison. Handforth to me was no different from Horace Coker of Greyfriars and I liked both of them.

However, slowly but inevitably I began to favour Greyfriars and St. Jim's. I don't know what went wrong with the Nelson Lee but the stories to me were not quite the same. I think that the detective-adventure element began to predominate with the actual school stories of St. Frank's pushed into the background.

This was a pity and may have had something to do with the sudden demise of the Nelson Lee. I had become a Frank Richards fan and I still am.

But I still remember that era of the Nelson Lee when St. Frank's and Edwy Searles Brooks were tops.

ALL EXCEPT ONE!

By W. O. G. Lofts

I couldn't agree more with Bob Blythe when in the latest C.D. Annual article he stated "that the permanent loan of all those Edwy Searles Brooks' manuscripts to the London Old Boys Book Club was one

of the greatest finds in the history of our hobby." Being privileged to go round to Bob's house one evening, and to peruse all the material in question, my mind simply boggled at the amount of research Bob will have to do, to trace all these hitherto unknown stories and papers.

In my own opinion there were two very highly interesting documents found. One of them I will not deal with in this article except to say that when I wrote about the subject a few years ago, it brought me more correspondence than any other article I had written. The other without question, was the sheet of paper with E.S.B.'s list of Nelson Lee Library wants, and the note by the side of the story No. 43 Saints v. Friars (2nd New Series) to the effect that he had not written it. This as Bob says quite rightly seems to prove conclusively that he had not written this yarn.

I must confess that this story throughout the years, has given me more headaches than any other story of which I have had to try and prove the correct authorship. Apart from Bob who has always maintained that E.S.B. did not write it, quite a large number of other St. Frank's enthusiasts have also maintained the same view. Mrs. Ross Story for instance could not believe that this yarn was written by the same hand that had penned such brilliant stories a few years previous.

E.S.B. also in his life-time did not help matters, by claiming to have written every story in the Nelson Lee Library featuring St. Frank's, even when the above story had been sent to him for perusal. Even though one appreciates that an author cannot be expected to remember all his stories, one would have thought that such an exception as this, particularly as he had marked it as 'not by E.S.B.' would have stuck in his mind.

Some years ago, when I had just done a great favour for an A.P. former editor of some repute, I asked him to find out for me if E.S.B. had written every story of St. Frank's in the N.L.L. This was no simple task, believe me, and would take several hours of his own (and the firm's) time. After a while he replied to the effect that as far as he could discover E.S.B. had written them all. Other writers had written stories such as Fred Gordon Cook/Balfour Ritchie/ and Andrew Murray, but they had never been used, being kept in reserve in case copy from E.S.B. had failed to turn up. As none of the above tales had been used, it was logic to assume that E.S.B. had written them all, and this was published in the form of an article about four years ago in C.D.

In view of Bob's find, and now having a great deal more authority in official circles at the present time, I decided to make a personal

search. Whilst my previous informant was correct in saying that as far as he could discover E.S.B. had written them all, I was astonished to find that for some reason No. 43 Saints v. Friars was missing from an old stock book. A further search in other channels brought to light that the story was published at very short notice, and was written by a person called E.S. HOLMAN! What is remarkable about this writer, is that despite having thousands of authors names in records, this is the very first time I have heard of him, nor has extensive enquiry amongst old A.P. staff brought any one who knew him.

I have so far discovered that the writer probably came from Leytonstone.

The sharp reader may wonder why the stories (story) by the other writers were not used, and my answer to this is simply that there is a record of the stories being 'lost' and written off as a loss. This was no doubt due to the moving about of the Nelson Lee Library office during the last few years of its life.

In case some readers may still have some doubts about the other poor stories in this period such as No. 37, Glutton and Goalkeeper, I can confirm beyond all doubt that E.S.B. did write them. In closing, whilst I endorse what Bob said about the wonderful co-operation of Mrs. Francis Brooks which I have experienced myself, I also feel that all Nelson Lee fans also owe a great deal to Bob for his enthusiasm and research.

"FIFTH FORM RIVALS OF ST. FRANK'S" ... by Ray Hopkins

In the Fresh Air Fiends series beginning in May 1927, there is an amusing interlude to the main plot in which William Napoleon Browne becomes smitten with the charm of one of the fair sex. The object of Brown's affection is Dora Manners, cousin to Irene of Moor View School. It is unfortunate that the eye of his great friend and study-mate, Horace Stevens, falls on Dora at the same time.

The two friends are heading away from St. Frank's on a grand holiday motor tour to include Wales, Yorkshire and East Anglia, but one look at Dora and they change their holiday plans.

"Who the dickens wants to go to Wales, anyhow?" says Stevens.

"I will admit it seems absurd," agrees Browne. "And what, after all, is there to attract us on the Yorkshire moors? What beauties are there in the wilds of Norfolk to drag us there? I am beginning to fear, brother, that our enthusiasm for the motor tour was somewhat misplaced."

"By Jove! I was just thinking the same thing," says Stevens

eagerly, "in fact, why go on this tour at all?"

And so they join the other members of the St. Frank's Open Air Society to be near Dora. She is staying with Irene and Co across the River Stowe at the Moor View Open Air Camp.

When the camps are destroyed by a violent storm, Dora goes to St. Frank's as Under-nurse in the school sanatorium. And here the atmosphere becomes very delicate indeed between Browne and Stevens. Both want to entertain Dora, but not with the other tagging along. So they construct elaborate verbal edifices in order to put the other off the scent and of course come face to face with one another, their brilliant verbal subterfuges crashing about their ears. Though unable to appear heroic singly to Dora, who looks upon them both with amused kindness, they are able to combine forces and save her from a nasty situation when she is menaced by some London hooligans who have been forced to spend some time in the school sanitarium. The roughnecks leave Browne and Stevens spreadeagled for dead on the sanitarium floor, but all their aches and pains become worth the getting to the two heroes for Dora becomes their nurse. So Dora finds she has two bruised but happy patients on her hands.

WILD WEST WASH-OUT

By O. W. Wadham

The old Wild West is not popular in New Zealand, it would seem.

About two years ago collectors' paper-back editions of Buffalo Bill stories and other Wild West yarns from America began to appear on the bookstalls.

They were selling at 3/- each, and had bright coloured covers and "contained every word of the original edition."

About six months ago hundreds of copies of these books began to appear on the counters of the big nation-wide chain stores, Woolworth's and McKenzie's. Their price had been reduced to 1/6 or 15 cents.

At the end of 1967 they are still being sold, but the price has now come down to 6d, or five cents.

Meanwhile "The Best of The Magnet and Gem," well displayed in most N.Z. bookshops, seems to be selling well; but, of course, has not been dumped here in such vast numbers as the American Western yarns.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Note for those who correspond by post, or to keep your Who's Who up-to-date (page 17).

William Lister, 137 Cunliffe Rd., Blackpool, Lancs.

DANNY'S DIARY

February 1918

It is pleasant, for a change, to be able to say something nice about the Gem. It seems to have been a bit of an "also ran" lately. This month, however, has been pretty good, even though I am not all that keen on tales about the new set-up among the fags of St. Jim's.

There have been more tales about Roylance, who first featured in "Manners' Vendetta" last month. The first story this month was "Foes of the School House." The foes were Manners and Roylance. The fags had organised a paper-chase and Reggie Manners was one of the hares. Roylance rescued him from a bull, and he was taken into the Cottage Hospital. Somehow the rumour got round that it was Gussy who had done the rescue. Racke schemed so that Manners Major believed that Roylance had insulted him. Manners and Roylance fought, and Manners was beaten.

Next week in "From Foe to Friend," Manners goaded Tom Merry into carrying on the quarrel with Roylance. This time Tom and Roylance fought, and Tom only just won. At the end, it came out that Roylance had rescued Reggie from the bull, so all ended happily. Not a great series, but a readable one. I liked the writing but not the plot.

Then came "The Fourth Form Detectives," and though Roylance came into it, it couldn't be by the same writer. Pretty awful tale which was a sequel to "Racke's Revenge" of last month.

The last tale of the month promised to be awful but was actually quite good. It seems that a famous real-life German spy - or pro-German - was named "Bolo," and so spies and pro-Germans are called "Bolos." The last tale of the month in the Gem was "The St. Jim's Bolo-Hunters." Trimble had a pound note and everybody wondered where he had got it. It turned out that he had been distributing pro-German leaflets for a "Bolo" named Klootz, a tobacconist, who paid him for the job. I thought it a good yarn. Roylance was in this one again. New boys are like some people's noses. They turn up at every meal. Authors and editors don't know that snuff's as good as a feast.

Quite an exciting event in the Boys' Friend 3d Library. This month it contained a new long Rookwood yarn entitled "The Feud at Rookwood." The first time that Rookwood has ever been in the B.F.L.

There have been a great many air raids this month, and there has also been a murder. Mum doesn't like me reading about murders in the newspaper, and Doug says I'm a gruesome smut. As a tram was running down from Eltham Church to Well Hall, the driver saw a body on the

edge of Eltham Common. It turned out that it was the body of Nellie True who had been murdered. A man named David Greenwood has been arrested, and he will be tried for the murder.

I had a Nelson Lee Library this month entitled "A Terrible Lesson," or "Skill Against Cunning." De Valerie, nicknamed 'The Rotter,' thought that he had caused the death of a boy named Binns. Being blackmailed by some crooks, De Valerie robbed the Head, trying to make it look as though the study had been entered from outside. Then Lee took a hand, the blackmailers were caught, and De Valerie seems to be reforming. There was plenty of action in this story.

John L. Sullivan, the boxer, has died in the States.

We have seen some good pictures this month. One was called "Rasputin - the Power Behind the Throne," and was supposed to be the true story which led to Russia backing out of the war. It was fairly good. Another time we saw Mary Pickford in "Mistress Nell." Clara Kimball Young was in "Camille." Doug said he liked it but he could quite understand that small boys like me wouldn't think much of it. He's fearfully toffee-nosed sometimes. I liked Henry Edwards and Florence Turner in "Grim Justice." Florence Turner is my mum's favourite star. Alma Taylor was lovely in "Molly Bawn." You really can't beat these English Hepworth films, even though there's no knockabout stuff in them.

The Clavering series ended in the month's first two Magnets. In "Danger Ahead," Clavering's old tutor, the Rev. Shepherd, visited Greyfriars from Cotswood. But the Bounder very cleverly managed things so that Clavering was kept out of the way while Mr. Shepherd was at Greyfriars. The final story of the series was "Tom Redwing's Resolve." The real Clavering and the real Redwing met on the island, and Sir Hilton Popper turned up. Clavering used a whip on Sir Hilton, and the whole story of the change of identities came out. So Redwing left Greyfriars to go to sea, and the Bounder hopes that one day he may meet Redwing again.

There wasn't anything more worth while in the Magnet this month. "Hunting for Treasure" was too silly for words. A periodical ran a competition in which its editor was supposed to have hidden a treasure somewhere in Britain, and, for no reason at all, everybody started searching round Greyfriars. Awful drivel.

"Loyal Sir Jimmy" wasn't much better. It starred Delarey and Sylvester, the fag who is a millionaire's son. I think they run tales like this so that you should appreciate all the more the series like the Clavering one. You go on buying the papers with hope in your heart.

The Lattrey series in the Boys' Friend is turning out to be a very long one with a barring-out. "Rebellion at Rookwood" was the first one. It started off with plans for the barring-out, and a Tribunal sits to sort out the "Conscientious Objectors." Good fun. Finally they all dig trenches on the school allotments, and prepare for the barring-out. Next week in "Sticking it Out," various people, including the prefects and Mr. Manders, try, without success, to break the barring-out.

In "The Fourth Against the Head," Mornington, who has heard of the barring-out, asks Erroll to fetch him, so that he can join in. Mornington has gone home, blinded by Lattrey. Erroll does as Morny asks, but on the way to the rebel camp, Erroll gets captured by the prefects. However, Jimmy and Co manage to free him, so he is able to rejoin them.

Last of the month was "The Rebel's Raid" in which the rebels managed to get food to their garrison, and captured Sergeant Kettle into the bargain. At the end of the tale, Mr. Lattrey, who is at the root of all the trouble, tells the Head that he, Mr. Lattrey, will take over and break the rebellion in no time. Fearfully exciting all the way through.

The Cedar Creek tales, as always, have been tip-top. The first was "Chunky's Gold-Mine" in which Frank Richards & Co were persuaded to advance the money for a gold-mine which Chunky Todgers wanted to buy. They found out that all is not gold which glitters.

In "Three on a Trail" they set off to find Frisco Joe, the rascal who swindled Chunky over the gold-mine, and when they caught him they made him suffer for his misdeeds.

In "Striking a Bargain," the Cedar Creek chums came on Poker Pete being cruel to his horse. They set the horse loose, and later on Mr. Lawless pays for the animal.

Finally "The Horse Hunters" in which the chums found the horse, a real demon. It is Vere Beauclerc who tames The Demon - and Mr. Lawless give Beauclerc the horse. Grand tale.

W A N T E D : MAGNET, THRILLER, DETECTIVE WEEKLY, BULLSEYE, pre-1940
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BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

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

My grateful thanks to all those who have "rallied round" with articles for BLAKIANA during the past year.

Josie Packman.

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INTRODUCING SEXTON BLAKE

By Deryck Harvey

I suppose there must be countless Sexton Blake followers who cannot remember their introduction to the great detective. My own could hardly have been less auspicious; I met Blake in a tiny village shop on the nether borders of Bedfordshire.

There, in the makeshift window of a quaint shop - it was really only a room set aside - nestled two volumes of a publication I had never seen before, the Sexton Blake Library. I knew for certain I had to have them. I must have been all of 12 years old at the time.

The titles, I have rediscovered, were "Living In Fear," by Anthony Parsons, and "The Evil Spell," by Walter Tyrer (Sexton Blake Library, 3d series, Nos. 215 and 216). To my surprise, a benevolent aunt forked out the necessary 1s. 2d. She never knew what she started.

The benevolent aunt seemed as delighted as I was with the Sexton Blake Library (perhaps because it kept an exuberantly healthy nephew quiet for hours at a stretch!). Whatever the reason, she volunteered to buy me the two new issues every month, and I've been enveloped in Blake lore ever since.

How I came to love those books! Who could resist such promising titles, "The Secret of the Sixty Steps" (No. 213) and "Hated By All" (240), both by John Drummond, or "The Mystery of the Rio Star" (230), by Walter Tyrer? Even the names of the authors had glamour for me.

I'd very soon acquired the comparatively-recent back numbers in the local shops, and it didn't take long to become acquainted with the various authors. Parsons and Tyrer (I've longed for articles about them to appear in "C.D." recently) became old faithfuls, and there were many others.

John Drummond always seemed to write a good mystery, while Rex Hardinge had a bent for African stories. John Hunter could turn his hand to a sea story, Hugh Clevely (I found out later) wrote hardback books as well, while certain authors hardly seemed to recur at all.

Then I discovered the market stalls. If you had comics to swap,

or pocket money to spend, you could add second-hand Blakes to your collection at a much greater rate. What a thrill I had in buying a much earlier issue, "The Stowaway of the 'S.S. Wanderer,'" by Anthony Parsons (No. 24)!

As if this was not enough, by rare good chance I bought a Boys' Friend Library, "Chums of the Bombay Castle," by Duncan Storm (No. 668, 6-4-1939). This advertised pre-war Blakes - one of them a John Creasey - and gave me first evidence of nearly 700 SBLs in a previous series.

Coming a little more up-to-date, I was there for the rejuvenation of the Sexton Blake Library, the taking-over of the series by W. Howard Baker. These were exciting times, Blake taking on a secretary, Paula Dane, a receptionist, Marion Lang, and a vast new organisation.

Blake seemed to suit the modern age. I delighted in the earlier 5th series Jack Trevor Story novels (regretting it when they became overloaded with sex). Peter Saxon (Mr. Baker) virtually wrote Blake's war memoirs; and authors rushed the detective to every world trouble spot.

Particularly fascinating was the Magazine Section in the 5th series, attracting shoals of letters from longer-standing Blake enthusiasts. I always felt this was not merely a bright new feature in its own right, but that it was designed to prolong the life of the series.

Somehow or other, I was no longer a subscriber when Fleetway brought the 5th series to an end in the early 1960s, but I remember reading about their decision with pangs of regret. How could they? To kill off the great detective after more than sixty years!

Well, we all know that Blake is back, we hope to stay. Even if some of us have doubts about the quality of the current Sexton Blake Library, our hero has never been so popular: he is appearing on television and radio in a comeback no-one could have visualised five years ago.

Whatever the future, there is tremendous comfort, and a feeling of security, in the knowledge that Blake will live indefinitely in "Collectors' Digest." However long his new lease of life may or may not last, he will never lose those folklorists devoted to his cause.

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REFLECTIONS

By Alex Parsons

I hope the Blake experts will excuse any misquotes I might make in this article. I have no collection or lists to which I can refer: as the illusionist would say, it's all done by mirrors. The mirrors

in this case being my memory which I know too well can distort the truth as well as reflect it.

I've read the Blake saga on-and-off, off-and-on for many years.

I've also read many other detective stories in that period, including those in which the famous Mr. Holmes played the leading part. But I have the warmest spot for Blake, Tinker and Pedro, not forgetting that dear old lady with her bombasine and Malapropian gems - Mrs. Bardell, who is as much a part of the Blake saga as Blake himself. I'm delighted to see that some of the modern-Blake authors think on the same lines. Martin Thomas in his excellent "Laird of Evil" gave her a very good part, though a small one, which she played with her customary skill and entertainment. Incidentally, I think this the best Blake I've read this side of the war, with Blake, Tinker and Pedro working in close unity and bringing off the final coup together. The story was rich in atmosphere also. I found myself wanting to take a sneak-peep at the final page. My hat off to Martin Thomas! Please give us more.

I don't know which I read first, the U.J. or the S.B.L., but it was the good old U.J. which appealed to me most. A book then without illustrations was like a flower without scent. The excellent cover drawings captured my interest, particularly the Christmas numbers which left one in no doubt as to the period of the year. Off hand I can remember The Masked Carollers, The Mistletoe Milk Mystery, and, I think, The Crime of the Christmas Tree in which, if my memory serves me right, someone gets himself killed by bow and arrow. All these had very fine covers, but who the artists were is a blank to me. I remember the stories faintly; so faintly that I wouldn't care to write a synopsis on any. But I do know that they were rich in the atmosphere of Christmas. There was also a Christmas number in which the famous four of Baker Street and some friends dressed as Dickens' characters and travelled to an old house in the country by coach and horses. I think Ruff Hanson held the "ribbons." There was a mystery, of course, but what it was has gone from my memory completely. I'm hoping some kind Blake fan will enlighten me on these points when he or she has a few moments to spare. Another U.J. which stands out in my memory contained the Siping Vampire story. This was a real weirdy, and as a reader I just couldn't fathom out how it could be anything else but the supernatural. Along came Blake to do it for me. I don't think it was a Christmas number, but, at least, it was a snowy one. This yarn has left the impression on my mind that it was a very good one indeed. It would make excellent reading today.

The first post-war Blake I read came as a bit of a shock, and seemed like a bad dream. Baker Street was just a name and in its place was a swank chrome and plate-glass emporium literally "crawlin' wid dames." Now, I have no objection to the ladies (bless their little cotton socks) but, I mean to say -- in Blake's place? There was no Tinker but a fellow named Carter with an eye for redheads even in business hours. I know that Tinker had a crush on the lovely Nirvana in the old days. But this was a boyish affair and conducted with propriety. What I mean to say is, that sex was spelt with a small ess, and wasn't a headline. I thought this Carter fellow a bit of a roughneck, and wouldn't have been surprised to hear the pitter-patter of little feet and a woman's voice calling out, "Breakfast's ready, Ted. Come and get it!"

Blake was a changed man in several small ways, but still retained that something which endeared him to so many readers for so many years. At least, he hadn't got himself tangled up with some of the "dames," although I often had the feeling that some of the authors were itching to do just that. Pedro was dead or banished, I'm not sure which. And yet dogs are playing a bigger part in crime detection today than ever before. Whoever decided to banish him or write R.I.P. on his headstone slipped up badly, and then some, as Ruff Hanson would have said. There was hardly a cover illustration without a scantily clad girl; while the motto seemed to be Sex! Sex! Sex! The Lord knows why! Most readers of detective stories didn't care if there was a love interest or not. And if there was it would usually be regarded as incidental. I feel sure that even our Lady Blake fans couldn't care less whether Marion or Paula are in the stories or not. A woman criminal is a different kettle of fish. There have been many of these in Blake's life, and they are all acceptable as part of the scheme of things. To be quite frank, Blake's female staff grated on my nerves. That was at first. Later on I kind of got used to the idea, but was pleased when none of them took an active part in the story. I knew that a book must sell, and if illustrating the outer covers with sex symbols, or introducing a love interest into the tale kept the Blake image alive, then 'twere well done!' Better a Blake with a sex interest than no Blake at all. It was a case of the proverbial half loaf, and a basic truth. Lots of the tales were very good; some weren't: but one couldn't blame the writers altogether. If an editor, or whoever it is who decides the trend of the paper, sets a general pattern I should think it rather cramps an author's style.

How glad I am that Pedro has been resurrected, and must say that the latest Blake series are almost in the classic mould. I haven't read a poor one yet. The authors seemed to have made a combined effort to blend the new style with the old with the most pleasing results - as far as I'm concerned, anyway. Edward Carter is more like the old Tinker - not so brash or blatant. He still has a flair for redheads, but I suppose we can forgive him for that. After all, you're only young once. Blake seems more like his original self and less like James Bond; and there is a definite leaning towards deduction and not so much fang and claw. But I still stand on my rights and sigh now and again for the golden days. As Fisher T. Fish would say, "You gotta mosey along with the times, pardner." Do I hear some Blake fan saying, "Hey, chum, just you keep Greyfriars out of this column!" Yes! I think I had better mosey along.

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IDLE THOUGHTS OF AN IDLE FELLOW

By Raymond Curé.

I suppose idleness can be a besetting sin; that is if you have sufficient spare time to indulge in it. There are occasions when even the busiest people should be idle - if only to remain human.

Christmas Day can be one of these occasions, particularly in the afternoon, after the feast. If you are in your late fifties the party line is out (more or less). There is the T.V., and a jolly good festive programme can be seen, if you are in the mood. But what if you are not in the mood? This is how Xmas Day caught me out. A cold had developed to such an extent I would fain have retired to bed, had it not been the Great Day itself.

If possible, it has always been my custom to have on hand a little seasonable reading, though I find this is becoming a scarce commodity - so much so that only a few days before Xmas I was longing to be able to go to the newsagent and purchase those delightful Christmas Numbers of the "Magnet," "Nelson Lee" and "Union Jack." (Only a pipe dream of course!)

However, I did have the good fortune to obtain a copy of "The Snowman Cometh," by Desmond Reid, featuring Sexton Blake (it must be admitted over twelve months late), and this I carefully salted away until I should feel the need of a Christmas tonic, not realising that by 2.30 p.m. on the Great Day itself a tonic would be sadly needed. T.V. pantomime and circus could not charm away those aching bones, the dull headache, the persistent cough, and above all not being able to tackle the Xmas dinner nor the Xmas pudding.

And this is how I came to have a copy of "The Snowman Cometh" in my hand on the late afternoon of Christmas Day. I don't know what I expected it to do for me - but 'do it' it did.

From joining Sexton Blake's Xmas party on page one until the great detective rushed to 'phone the season's greetings to Mrs. Bardell when Christmas Day was nearly over (page 140), I was transported back to the great Blake Xmas's of the days of Gwyn Evans and Edwy Searles Brooks. With its mixture of snowmen, parties and Father Xmases, to say nothing of murder and mystery, I managed to regain something of what is called the Christmas Spirit in the company of Sexton Blake and Tinker, Mrs. Bardell and Pedro.

And now for a few descriptive shots that injected that Xmas feeling. "Santa Claus lay dead on the bed, and away in the distance a choir sang 'Holy Night' with a sweet intensity." "Mrs. Bardell was a believer in a real old-fashioned Xmas. A Xmas without mistletoe would have been unthinkable." "It looked, with its first faint powder of snow dusting the thatched roofs, a place of infinite peace and contentment."

Shades of Gwyn Evans and E. S. Brooks, both popular Sexton Blake festive writers; thank you, Desmond Reid!

It seems a long time since I shared my first Xmas with Sexton Blake and Tinker, Mrs. Bardell and Pedro; but, given the opportunity and stories like "The Snowman Cometh," I shall be able to share many more with them.

Somehow I do not regret being an idle fellow on Christmas Day; I had plenty of Xmas fun and thrills - albeit the armchair type. But then, a good fire and a good armchair is an excellent way to be really idle.

W A N T E D: 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.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE RD., SURBITON, SURREY.

W A N T E D: GEM 805; MAGNETS 779, 782.

TOM PORTER, 1 TIMBERTREE ROAD, CRADLEY HEATH, WARLEY, WORCS.

HAMILTONIANA

Do You Remember?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 68 - Magnet No. 189 - "Sent to Coventry"

Most of the new masters at the Hamilton schools were either men of mystery or tyrants who were often the mainspring of many fascinating tales of mutiny and rebellion. Occasionally, however, a different kind of portrait was drawn, a character study of a master who was out of the ordinary, and certainly Hubert Lang who took over the Remove for a short time in the autumn of 1911 was of an unusual cast of character. The red Magnet was at its best about this time, and this story certainly possesses a very mature air.

Mr. Lang was an inexperienced young man who instructed the prefects to leave the form to him, and he snubbed the older members of staff when they were about to offer advice. He was of a scholarly turn of mind, and he regarded all games as foolish - an opinion which he intimated not only to the Remove, but also to Wingate and Courtney. Accordingly he was not prepared to rescind a detention given to the whole form on the afternoon of the Highcliffe match, and matters went from bad to worse until the whole form decided to send him to Coventry.

Most school stories are written solely from the point of view of the boys themselves, but this Greyfriars tale achieved another dimension, since Mr. Lang's predicament was at the centre of the story, and not the Remove's re-action to him. We were clearly shown how reluctant he was to call in Dr. Locke because he hoped to obtain a permanent post elsewhere on Dr. Locke's recommendation. We were also made aware of his genuine desire to be on better terms with his form, but every concession he made was treated by them as a victory for their militancy.

This Magnet story was in fact a treatise for the young schoolmaster, and contains many shrewd hints on how to manage lively and spirited forms. It was, in short, a story for adults, a most astonishing piece to find in a paper for boys, but none the less rewarding for that.

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 120. TOLL OF THE YEARS

It was, I believe, Somerset Maugham who stated, possibly with tongue in cheek, that a playwright should cease writing plays when he

reaches the age of fifty. Generalisations of that sort do not really make much sense, for there is such a wide range in the abilities of individuals and general health must play a large part with the final product.

On the face of it, one would expect any author's work to go on improving with age and experience, providing his health remains sound. So far as general writing competence plus a command of words goes, that is usually the case. Often it is over plot construction that a writer's work sometimes deteriorates as he leaves middle-age behind him. I can bring to mind one or two writers of detective fiction who have written less attractive stories as old age caught up with them. On the other hand, plenty of writers get one good story out of their system, after which nothing very striking emerges.

Our main concern in this article is to see how far age affected Charles Hamilton who was writing immensely popular tales from the beginning to the end of his marathon career.

His best stories in the Gem appeared in the period 1911-1912 when he was in his middle thirties. He had then been writing professionally for nearly twenty years, so there was no lack of experience. These were probably his longest individual stories, equalling in length the cover-to-cover stories which featured in the later years of the Magnet. By the time the very long tales appeared in the later Magnet, the author was approaching sixty years of age. In fact, he was about sixty when the Bertie Vernon series was written.

Technically, the long Magnet stories when he was sixty should have been superior to the long Gem stories written when he was thirty-five, and it is possible that they were. Nevertheless, for those well-acquainted with all the phases of both papers, the Gem stories of 1911 are more attractive than the Magnet tales of, say, 1938.

The Gem stories were fresh and joyous, sparkling with youth. Some of the later Magnet tales were padded and long-drawn-out. Charles Hamilton always insisted that he was never guilty of padding, and that, in fact, there was no such thing as padding for an experienced author who set out with a certain length in view. We know, of course, that he was either deluding himself or pulling our legs. There was a considerable amount of padding, in the form of irrelevant sequences and facetious dialogue, in the stories of the later Magnet.

It has been suggested that the extra-length given to the stories of the later Magnet was their handicap - that the author used that extra length with padding. That is true, but the padding was not merely the result of the extra length. The stories of the Golden Age of the Gem were every bit as long, yet there was no obvious padding,

although there was at times plenty of inconsequential dialogue which charmed rather than bored.

The plot wastage, in blue Gem days, was enormous. Plenty of single stories of that period could, with advantage, have been extended to two or three. If the author had any problem then, it was to tell his story in the length available. In the late Magnet days, the reverse was the case. A single plot was spread, gossamer thin, over a long series, and padding was unavoidable.

Roger Jenkins wrote a splendid article in the December issue of C.D. Though his theme was different from the one I am considering here, he made several striking points which I propose to quote. Concerning a series which Charles Hamilton wrote when he was sixty, Roger Jenkins had this to say: "... had the story ended before term began instead of being allowed to collapse into a series of repetitive incidents, the reputation of the Lamb series might well stand higher today."

And that, in a nutshell, is that. When he was in his early sixties, Charles Hamilton may well have been writing as well as, or better than, ever before, but he now lacked the ability to construct new plots.

During the period 1921 - 1923, the Gem enjoyed a splendid revival, and some of the stories at that time were a joy. The author was then forty-five years old, and coming near to his peak. At this time, the Gem tales were handicapped by their shortness. To some extent, the author was faced with the problem which a shortage of space puts on any writer - the problem, in fact, of Rookwood. Always, in the Rookwood tales, the shortness placed a discount on characterisation.

The Golden Age of the Magnet, roughly the period 1927 - 1933, was the time when the author was at his very best both in plot construction and in story-telling. Charles Hamilton, in the Magnet's Golden Age, passed from fifty to fifty-six years of age. Let me quote Roger Jenkins again, writing of one of the series of this period: "Perhaps the most telling factor was the number of purely descriptive passages, where gloom, mystery, and terror were depicted in paragraph after paragraph without any conversation at all .."

The underlining is mine. How very true are those perceptive comments from Roger Jenkins! As the author drew to the end of his fifties, and entered his sixties, those purely descriptive passages which had always been such unadulterated joy grew less and less. Paragraph after paragraph without any conversation at all became something of a wistful memory. Conversation became the be-all and end-all of padding as the years slid by.

Probably we could extend the Golden Age to include the year 1935 (the author was then about 58) for that year gave us the Stacey series, one of the greatest of all, and the Polpelly series, though the latter is far from being my favourite Christmas story. But the Polpelly series was well told, and Roger Jenkins wrote of this: "The long descriptive passages concerning the appearance of the ghost must surely rank as one of the author's finest word pictures." So there we have it again, - and every word is true - that Charles Hamilton was at his peak of descriptive writing when he was in his fifties.

The question obviously arises: Was age the only reason for the deterioration which most perceptive readers would agree took place at Greyfriars?

My own view is that age had but very little to do with it. Charles Hamilton's first post-war Bunter story was "Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School," written when he was about seventy-one. His last full-length Bunter story was "Big Chief Bunter," written when he was about eighty-five. Was the last-named story any less good than the first one? Did it show any deterioration in that gift of story-writing? I am sure that it did not. If anything, it was the better of the two.

Charles Hamilton possibly made mild mistakes with his post-war Bunters. His using of his old plots did not matter much, for the majority of his post-war readers were expected to be unacquainted with the Magnet. But he had to spread those plots over a much smaller canvas, while still wasting space with too much dialogue and the occasional irrelevant comedy episode which sometimes prevented the plots from being developed as much as they might have been.

For a while he tried to modernise his schoolboy slang, and this jarred. In the later Tom Merry and Bunter tales, the juniors addressed one another as "old boy," a mannerism which grated. He gave the later Bunter an addiction for spoonerisms. A gentle spoonerism can be funny, as in the case of the clergyman who announced the next hymn as "Kinkering kongs their tatles tike." But Bunter's spoonerisms were invariably unlikely.

Before the war Hamilton wrote naturally and with great charm, introducing the occasional classical allusion. When fame came to him after the war, newspaper columnists made much of those classical allusions. As a result of this, he tended to introduce just a trifle too many classical references into some post-war Bunters, with the result that the natural charm was in danger of becoming an overworked mannerism.

It is a question whether these were the mistakes of old age. I

do not really believe that the competence of Charles Hamilton's writing ever deteriorated from the time of the later Magnets till his swan song with "Big Chief Bunter."

Such slipping as occurred in the Magnet was due to plot shortage. One plot was made to last as long as possible, and the result was the series of over-great length with inevitable padding and repetition. Plus, possibly, some gnawing worry of what form the next plot was to take.

In the case of the post-war Bunter books there was probably no worry, for there were plenty of plots available while the author was content to use his old ones. It was not old age that was any drawback, but the fact that the author was a recluse was in itself a handicap. He needed the services of an adviser who would have avoided his sending the boys to France on a day-trip at a time when day-trips were entirely suspended and when there were severe currency restrictions; an adviser would have seen that it was something of a farce to have a bank-robber use a horse and trap for a getaway vehicle after a hold-up; an adviser who knew his job would have avoided turning into yet another South Seas story a plot which had promised to be a trip to New Zealand.

But tucked away as he was, in the calm and quiet of Rose Lawn, there was nobody to make suggestions to him or to advise him on his writing.

Probably he would not have listened in any case.

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YOU DIDN'T PUBLISH MY OPINIONS

(accuses Larry Morley)

I entirely agree with Alex Parsons' article on the foreign series of stories which ran in the Magnet and Gem.

If I remember rightly I put forth my opinions a year or two ago, but you didn't publish them.

Like Mr. Parsons, I always felt uncomfortable when the chums of St. Jim's or Greyfriars left for foreign parts; the only exceptions were the Hollywood series in the Magnet (1930's) and the early "blue Gem" American series; the first because of the presence of Coker and the second because of Hamilton's almost documentary account of social conditions in the stock yards.

As far as your Egypt, China, South Seas series are concerned they just leave me cold; I believe (dare I say it?) Chas. Hamilton was out of his depths. They hadn't a true ring to them. Mind you,

I viewed them from adult eyes; maybe if I had read them as a child I might have enjoyed them.

Well that's just my opinion; I suppose hundreds of other readers will disagree. As I said before, leave the Hamilton schools in England and let Jack, Sam & Pete do the foreign travelling.

THE POSTMAN CALLED

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

ROGER JENKINS (Havant): George Sellars seems to have misread my remarks about the Christmas stories in the December C.D. I said that the Gem Double Numbers were unsurpassed, and of course I include among these "The Mystery of the Painted Room" and all the other old favourites. So really George and I are in agreement here. I then went on to say that the Gem Christmas stories that formed part of a long series were disappointing. So I think that the Gem wins where single Christmas stories are concerned, and the Magnet wins where Christmas series are concerned.

BASIL ADAM (Newcastle): This year's Collectors' Digest Annual, to me was the most interesting for some years. "The Making of Harry Wharton" by Roger Jenkins I found the most interesting of the articles. However I must disagree with him about Wharton being almost a preview of the modern anti-hero. Such a thought makes me shudder! Wharton is the soul of honour, chivalry and nobility, qualities unknown to the modern anti-hero type. Well I am pleased to get that off my chest! Next I found "Mr. Buddle's Christmas Case" the best of all the Buddle stories to date. I must admit at first I wasn't too keen on them, but I guess they must have grown on me, because I now look keenly forward to them, and their nice cosy atmosphere.

W. LISTER (Blackpool): Just heard on TV (University Challenge): Bamber Gascoigne: "In what relation do you place Tinker?" St. Hilda's, Oxford (after long pause): "Tinker is a cat, I think."
Gascoigne: "Sorry no. Tinker is Sexton Blake's assistant."

Perhaps a few back numbers of Collectors' Digest at the above educational establishments might have resulted in a few extra points for a lucky winner.

H. MACHIN (Preston): I have been a constant reader of Magnet and Gem since the Spring of 1915. That is why Danny's Diary appeals so much to me. Yet I heartily disagree with Danny's assumption of the superiority of the early Gems over the corresponding Magnets of the

same period. I have read very many early Gems and Magnets and to me the Magnet stories were always more enjoyable and far better written than the early Gems.

(Our reader may be right, but it seems to us that it's a long time since Danny had anything very nice to say about the Gem. - ED.)

E. N. LAMBERT (Chessington): Congratulations on yet another wonderful Annual. We all eagerly await this Gem of the festive season which sparkles brighter and brighter as each year passes.

The articles and stories were superbly written and I found it difficult deciding which to read first, not being a very systematic reader and rather inclined to start anywhere but at the beginning according to the attraction of the article.

In this instance I started near the end with "Mr. Buddle's Christmas Case." I am sure that the stories of Mr. Buddle and Slade School are rapidly becoming as famous as Mr. Quelch and Greyfriars to all enthusiasts of Hamiltoniana.

I hope we shall hear more of his adventures (not forgetting Meredith) before next Christmas.

W. T. THURBON (Cambridge): Warmest congratulations on the Annual. Excellent, as always! I found the article on "Imagination Unlimited" particularly fascinating. It recalls so many of those tales. Reginald Wray invented a character Professor Kendrick Klux (an amalgam of Doyle's Professor Challenger and Rider Haggard's Professor Ptolemy Higgs, and set him first in a lost world setting in the Boys' Friend and then in a fine Chuckles serial "Phantom Gold." Chuckles followed this up with a good space-travel serial "A Trip to the Stars," which was, I believe, a Fenton Ash story. This was followed by the great serial "Adventure Island."

I think it was the Marvel that some time in the early 1920's ran a serial "The Silence," which was in the H. G. Wells vein. A Chinese air fleet almost conquers the world by means of magnetic power. The same idea of magnetic power, but this time used by a submarine to sink the British fleet, was used in a short serial in the Champion (a "Captain" type of monthly published in 1912).

I think it was about 1914 that one of the comics published a serial on the 'Lost World' theme - "When Time Stood Still." - Do any of you older readers recall this? I have vague memories of another space travel serial in which the inhabitants of Mars were gigantic beavers.

Sidney Drew wrote a Boys' Friend serial "Wings of Gold" which

told of a lost world beyond the antarctic ice. "Ferrers Lords' submarine The Lord of the Deep" was also in the Jules Verne vein. Chums just after the 1914-18 war had two space travel serials.

Articles like this raise very nostalgic memories for we older members of the fraternity.

(A serial "The Silence" appeared in the Magnet. - ED.)

FRANK LAY (Whetstone): With reference to the Annual article mentioning the two Boys Friend Libraries, the problem as stated did not really exist. In my article on the Dreadnought (C.D. Annual 1957) I list both these stories as being by E. S. Brooks and a list of ten Sexton Blake serials. The Brooks information is also contained in the London Club's bibliography of Brooks as follows:

Scorned by the School	R.W. Comrade	Dreadnought Nos.	25-37
The Cad of the School	"	"	37-48

However the matter is not quite as straight-forward as it seems. On the cover of Boys Friend Lib. 403 is stated in bold white lettering 'by the author of "The Stowaway's Quest" ' and this information was repeated in B.F.L. 405 "The Cad of the School." The peculiar point being that, according to the information in my records, B.F.L. 398 "The Stowaway's Quest" was written by L. J. Beeston.

In addition to the Cliveden stories (which were reprinted from the Boys Herald) stories by Hamilton of St. Ethelburts were also published. There were 24 reprints of Greyfriars stories all told from No. 136 to the final issue No. 159.

REVIEW

THE PENGUIN BOOK OF COMICS

Penguin. 25/-

Like some films and TV series, turned out with an eye on both the British and the American markets, this book might be termed a "mid-Atlantic" production. In fact, from the amount of space devoted to American characters, the book is probably rather west of mid-Atlantic. For the British enthusiast, this latest work on the comics may slip between two stools.

The authors, George Perry and Alan Aldridge, have shown imagination, though it is a question whether seeing the Bayeux Tapestry as the birth of the comic strip is not rather widening the scope too drastically.

The section devoted to reproductions from English comic papers is quite delightful, and the book is well worth a place in any enthusiast's library. Even though, from our viewpoint, too much space is devoted to American strips, this Penguin Book is a winner on points. It will undoubtedly command large sales.

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

MIDLAND

Meeting held 19th December, 1967

The attendance at the Annual Christmas Party was the best for the whole of 1967, fifteen members being present. It might have been better but a Tuesday prevented at least two members coming.

As is usual it took the form of a study feed. The table, suitably decorated by Win Partridge, was loaded with good things to eat. Place of honour as usual was occupied by Ivan Webster's magnificent pork pie. Having refrained from eating since midday the members were able to do full justice to the spread. This was an improvement on last year when so much food was left over.

As this was the Christmas party, the formal business, such as it was, was hurried over. A nice thought on the part of Ivan Webster was to provide suitable music with a record player

Raffle prizes were won by Ivan Webster and Bert Fleming, Bill Morgan and Master John Price.

The Anniversary Number was Nelson Lee Library (Old Series) No. 550 "The Uninvited Guests" which was published on December 19th, 1925 - 42 years old. The Collector's Item was a bound volume of Nelson Lees (Old Series) No. 501-512 "The Moat Hollow Series."

A talk by John Mann was received by Tom Porter just too late to be given to the meeting, but will be read at next month's meeting which will be held as usual on the last Tuesday of the month.

J. F. BELLFIELD

Correspondent.

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MERSEYSIDE

Jan. 14th, 1968

As our membership totals seven, excluding exiles, the fact that all seven turned up promptly, and full of enthusiasm, speaks well for the loyalty of the tight little circle of friends that now comprises this section. Our friends elsewhere can take heart in the knowledge that the future of the section seems assured, and this was made abundantly clear by the very enthusiastic tone and admirable spirit prevailing at this New Year meeting. In fact, one member has proposed that we meet every fortnight instead of every month, and this will be discussed at the next meeting.

Several members had received letters from Frank Case - ever a staunch supporter of the Merseyside club, and it seems certain that we shall have the pleasure of Frank's company in the very near future. Evidence of the friendly concern for the welfare of this section was a most kind and generous offer from Bob Blythe to make the long trip from London in order to display the Edwy Searles Brooks collection, and by so doing to stimulate fresh interest, and encourage ex-members to return to the fold. This very warm-hearted gesture was discussed at length by the seven. Alas - most of our ex-members reside well away from Merseyside, and although the decision was taken with the utmost reluctance, the members were unanimous that we should decline Bob's offer, albeit with our heartfelt thanks, on the grounds that we could not possibly put Bob to all the time and trouble when the maximum attendance we could hope for could only be a mere eight or nine. Yet, how wonderful to know we have such good and valued friends.

For this meeting, the "round table" at "Windsor Castle" was dispensed with, and we all sat cosily round a blazing coal fire. There was not one single lull in the conversation, and I doubt whether in the last five years we have enjoyed a more animated or entertaining get-together. Topics ranged far and wide, including suggestions for another publicity campaign, such as another exhibition of the Magnet, Gem and Nelson Lee, etc., at another of the public libraries. Bert Hamblett provided a very interesting talk on the Thomson periodicals, with emphasis on the excellent sports yarns written for the Wizard and kindred papers.

A letter was read, which had appeared in the "Liverpool Echo" from a correspondent, one of many, who was writing about nostalgic memories of "Old Liverpool," and mentioning "pea-wack," and "Wet nellers" and "the back of the market," etc., and probably his fondest memory - his purchase of the Magnet and Gem every week. As we judged the old chap to be about 85, we dismissed the idea of inviting him as a possible new member. Although, come to think of it, why not?

Our next meeting will be Sunday, 11th February, 7 o'clock.

FRANK UNWIN

NORTHERN

Meeting held Saturday, 13th January, 1968

The first meeting of the year usually has a small attendance, due to family parties and other social engagements, (not we hope to the 'flu now prevalent) and January 1968 with eleven was one less

than its predecessor. Chairman Geoffrey Wilde in his welcome remarked though the band was "small and select" he felt it was going to be a jolly meeting - and it was!

Gerry got out his letters from postal members, and we had an exciting half hour listening to and discussing the news therein. First, Cliff Webb had had, among other items, our Greyfriars Serial to read over Christmas, and he reported "he was amazed and delighted to find such an array of literary talent in our ranks." Not all the writers were there, but those who were felt the same emotions at this praise from a professional, and were very pleased Cliff had enjoyed their efforts.

Now Gerry read letters from members who had had finds of old boys' papers in second hand shops. First, Cliff Smith (two volumes of "Chums" at a modest price); second Tony Hallman (some Greyfriars Holiday Annuals); third, in far away Canada, Bud Rudd (a haul of over 100 mint "Magnets" vintage period, and Boys' Friend Libraries). By now the meeting was gasping with excitement and rejoicing at our friends' good luck. Who said the mine was worked out? But, Gerry, with true showmanship, had saved the most unbelievable find to the last. A 'phone call from Alfred Hanson who had had to summon a taxi to bring away the parcels of books (Magnets, Gems, S.O.L's, and S.B.L's, etc.,) he had by chance come across in a second hand shop! Such news was a wonderful tonic for 1968, and the talk ran on (as it does whenever collectors gather) on finds, near-misses, and hopes for the future, and we all joined in congratulating the lucky four.

The programme was now taken over by Ron Hodgson, who had a quiz of 52 questions for us. The range was St. Jim's, Greyfriars, and Cliff House, the questions nicely varied as regards ease or otherwise. Ron is widely read and obviously his memory is excellent. When we had finished writing down (or leaving blank) the tea arrived, and we broke off for refreshments. Then Ron gave the answers and the winner was Bill Williamson, 28½; second Geoffrey 27½, and third Gerry 23½. Now it was Bill's turn, and he gave an interesting talk on how he started reading the "Gem" and then the "Magnet," the latter becoming his favourite. He told the reasons for this, and led a general discussion on this evergreen topic. The many times that Bill comes out top in our Quizzes is evidence of his knowledge of the old papers.

M. L. ALLISON

Hon. Sec.

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LONDON

Our second visit to Friardale, Ruislip on Sunday, January 21st, was a qualified success. The attendance was excellent and must have been very pleasing to Bob and Mrs. Acraman, who were perfect hosts. One very welcome member was Tom Porter, who had made the journey from Cradley Heath, Worcs.

Nelson Lee librarian, Bob Blythe, stated that 1,980 Nelson Lee's had been borrowed during 1967 and Roger Jenkins told of very good borrowing in his Hamiltonian section.

A discussion to see if the club's old Sexton Blake section of the library could be restarted ended in the matter being deferred until next month. Whilst on the subject of Blake, Len Packman read an article from the "Sunday Times," of January 7th and a correction that appeared the following week. After reading these two items, Len read long extracts from club newsletter number 5, the date October 1952. Both readings were greatly acclaimed by all present.

Don Webster read an amusing quote about Billy Bunter by the M.P. for Flintshire on the occasion of the recent economic debate. This from an issue of the "Daily Telegraph."

Don Webster conducted a "Papers" quiz. Result was a win for Laurie Sutton, second Roger Jenkins, and third spot occupied by Ben Whiter.

Advance copies of the two new Greyfriars Armada books were on display. Members were asked to donate letters and other material for John Wernham's Hamilton Museum, that is, if suitable.

Uncle Clegg's shop is in the village of Ruislip but there was no need to go there as the Acraman family, about seven of them, saw to it that there was truly a Friardale feed.

After tea there were other jolly happenings but as I had to leave early, travelling back to town and Euston station with Tom Porter, these will be reported in the next newsletter. With the next meeting being the A.G.M. and election of officials for 1968, kindly let Len Packman know if attending Hume House, East Dulwich, on Sunday, February 17th.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

REVIEWS

"BILLY BUNTER OF GREYFRIARS SCHOOL" Frank Richards
"BILLY BUNTER'S POSTAL ORDER" (Armada 2/6 each)

"Mary, I am much obliged to you," said the Head.

The Head was too courteous to add that, had Mary produced the postal order from the pocket of her apron at the start, it would have saved a lot of time.'

That is an extract from the original edition of "Billy Bunter's Postal Order." (It is pruned away in the Armada reprinting.) In fact, it isn't only Mary who seems to waste a lot of time in these two early post-war Bunters. There are quite a number of occasions when a short cut might, with advantage, have speeded up the pedestrian gait of the yarns.

Both stories are, of course, pleasant reading. "Bunter of Greyfriars School" was the first of the post-war Bunter books, and it was obvious to all that Charles Hamilton carried on very much from where he had left off in the Magnet of 1940. It is much on the same lines as the lighter tales of the late Magnet, even down to the tramp who, ineffectively, keeps popping on and off the scene.

In "Billy Bunter's Postal Order," the Owl snaffles an order belonging to Mr. Quelch, believing it to be his own - and then loses it. It would seem that mild shrinkage has been applied to the original stories, and both may have emerged unharmed from it.

Some Macdonald illustrations are reprinted (not over well) from the first editions. The cover illustrations are adequate, if not strikingly good. At the price, these books are excellent value for money.

FOR SALE: Magnets: Summer Double Number 1914 "Harry Wharton & Co's Holiday" £1. Red Magnets Nos. 306, 386 (complete but a little rough) 12/6 each. Also, without covers: 121, 135, 311, 367, 433, 7/6 each. White 1d Magnets 401, 402, 12/6 each. Blue Gem 388 complete but on the rough side 7/6. Blue Gem "Grundy of the Shell" 379 10/-. A very few Modern Boys, year about 1933: 2/6 each. Prairie Library (1920) 1/6. Aldine O'er Land & Sea Library No. 200 2/6. Postage extra on all items. S.a.e. first, to

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE RD., SURBITON.

EXPERTS AT SPORTS BUT NOT IN WRITING!

By W. O. G. Lofts

Despite the fact that our editor and myself have expressed the firm conviction that stories written by famous cricketers and footballers were really written by 'ghost writers' it seems that there are still many people who doubt this.

In a recent letter, a collector told me that 'He could not imagine that a sports idol of millions could stoop so low as to get someone else to write his stories.' Such is the innocence of people outside the realms of the publishing world!

As stated previous the stories presumed to have been written by Wally Hammond were in fact penned by one J. T. Bolton, a writer whom I must confess I did not know anything about. Thanks now to a member of the Press Club I can give more details about this author. Jimmy Bolton was indeed Chairman of the Press Club, and a very popular man. He was secretary of BRIGHTY the paper for the forces during the war, and was also a well known sporting journalist. It is common knowledge down Fleet Street that he wrote practically all the articles and stories presumed to have been penned by famous sports stars. Indeed there is a popular story still told in the taverns of the street of ink that J. T. Bolton had written an excellent story which he had submitted to the cricket star in question for approval. This star wrote back to him expressing the opinion that it was the best story he (the star) had ever written.

I don't want to create the impression that men who are skilled in the field of sports can never be writers. Some do make the grade usually after retiring from their sport in question, but very few I'm afraid really pen the stories they are presumed to have written.

WANTED FOR EXHIBITION: Single copies of RAINBOW, TIGER TIM'S WEEKLY, GOLDEN, PLAYBOX, HOTSPUR 1930-42. 15/- offered for each specimen in good condition.

J. B. THORNTON, 41 CHURCH ROAD, UPPERMILL, OLDHAM, Lancs.

IN EXCHANGE FOR PRE-WAR MAGAZINES OR ANNUALS: 34 Magnets 1936 - 1940

FOR SALE - 80 Sexton Blakes 1947/56 - sixpence each plus postage.

WANTED - Magnets 1661, 1662 and 1675.

B. HAMBLET, 136 DODDS LANE, MACHULL, LIVERPOOL.

FOR SALE. Collectors Digest 117 - 246 September 1956 to June 1967. 130 copies all in mint condition. £3.5s.0d. the lot.

H. OGDEN, 11 BRAYSIDE ROAD, MANCHESTER 19.

SALE - BOL's 307, 310, 313, 316 (Lancaster Series) 40/- . H.A. 1932, 20/- . C.D. ANNUALS 1964, 1965, 1966, 10/- each. Strands vols. 2, 6, 11, 21 - 3/- vol.

GRAHAM WRIGHT, 9 MILL FARM CLOSE, PINNER, MIDDLESEX.

WANTED "THE JACKET" (Jack London) - four "YOUNG FOLK'S TALES," ("MABEL" stories ONLY) or can swap for pre-1914 "TALES FOR LITTLE PEOPLE."

40 FOWEY AVENUE
ILFORD
ESSEX.