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COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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W. H. GANDER

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Founded in 1946 by

HERBERT LECKENBY

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SEPTEMBER 1971

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A WORD FROM THE SKIPPER

THOUGHTS OF LATE SUMMER

A contributor to our columns last month quoted Mr. Howard Baker as saying: "Sexton Blake must not be dated, as Sherlock Holmes is." But surely the great charm of the Sherlock Holmes stories is their "dating" - their era of gaslight and hansom cabs. Sexton Blake, during his long, long lifetime has always moved with the times, but, so far as I can see, his heyday was in the twenties, when, for a time, there were five new S.B.L.'s monthly, a new novel in the Union Jack

weekly, plus numerous serials featuring him in addition to a number of reprints of earlier successes. The post-war plan was to maintain the name but abandon the traditions to some extent. I am rather glad that it was never attempted with Sherlock Holmes.

In an American collection of short stories which I read recently, there were two examples of what the editor of the book called "Parodies." Neither seemed to be my personal interpretation of the word "parody," but was actually a new writer telling a story featuring another writer's creations. What we, over here, would call substitute stories. As I was unacquainted with the originals, I was able to form no useful opinion concerning the "parodies."

"Parodies," as I interpret the word, are usually a cheap and not very clever means of raising a laugh. I have seen several parodies of "East Lynne" and "The Three Musketeers" on the stage, and each has struck me as boring and unfunny.

There were two outstanding series of Parodies in our own particular sphere of the old papers. The Herlock Sholmes stories which Charles Hamilton wrote for the first Greyfriars Herald are unusually good for this type of thing. Most remarkable of all parodies were the St. Sam's tales in the Magnet, for they were guying and ridiculing the very stories which were the life's blood of the paper in which they appeared. Some of the St. Sam's tales were witty and amusing; some were crude. But the overall impression of all parodies is of someone trying desperately hard to be funny at someone else's expense, and chirping "See how clever I am!"

How numbers seem to dominate the powers-that-be to-day! Even now, after having suffered my new telephone number of 10 figures for six months, I am unable to remember it. Nothing will change my view that postal codes are bureaucracy run riot. In at least 60% of the letters I receive the postal-codes are indecipherable or of dubious clarity. Can it really help the post-office if incorrect or indecipherable postal-codes are written on envelopes, as, from my experience, they must be?

Yet, in spite of this number mania - presumably copied from America, for we are always copying America or Europe as we abandon our own traditions - most of the modern periodicals and newspapers

have ceased to give serial numbers. It doesn't make sense.

READING

In August, the Daily Telegraph Magazine published an excellent article by Patrick Cosgrave entitled "Is Good Reading Dead, Boys?" He compares the reading matter available for boys in the twenties with the "pap" (his own word) available for boys to-day. He comes to the conclusion that "progress has levelled down, not up."

He says, in probably much better English, what C.D. has been saying for many years. He comments: "As for the boys of today - well, there is little of intellectual or moral sustenance on offer. For one thing the papers are in pictures, so there is no reading of consequence. What passes understanding is how any modern parent or educationalist could fail to take this difference, this decline, seriously. It must be a matter of great moment that boys today are not, in any serious sense, expected to be able to read."

There is not a word in Mr. Cosgrave's article with which many of us would disagree. What also should concern parents and educationalists is that certain books, utterly disgusting in content, are available as paperbacks at a few shillings each, in plenty of bookshops and news-agents. And that means they are available to youngsters. I am always at a loss to understand what the country has gained by the abandonment of censorship on this type of evil propaganda.

Perhaps it is not necessary to add that, though I may be in a minority, I shed no tears at writers and distributors of disgusting magazines being taken to court and given stiff sentences.

THE ANNUAL

This month we send you the order form for the Silver Jubilee edition of Collectors' Digest Annual. Next month we shall hope to give you a preview of some of the fine articles which the Annual will contain. It is early days yet for ordering, of course, but don't delay too long. With production costs what they are these days, it will not be possible to print many copies beyond the numbers booked in advance.

On the order form is space for any small advertisement you may wish to insert in the Annual, or for your seasonal greetings to your friends. Announcements in the Annual are only 1p per word. Your ads

DANNY'S DIARY

SEPTEMBER 1921

There has been a very unpleasant shock for those of us who love going to the pictures. For as long as I can remember, Fatty Arbuckle has been my favourite comedian. But a dreadful thing has happened. Fatty gave a drinking party in an hotel, and, while it was on, a girl named Virginia Rappe was somehow killed. Fatty Arbuckle has been arrested in America.

The School Friend has now been enlarged in size, and the price has gone up to 2d.

Rookwood has been simply great in the Boys' Friend. The stories are so short that I call them sweet little morsels. Jimmy Silver & Co. have come back from their holiday on the continent, and are now on a cycling and camping tour in England. In "The Fistical Four's Foe," they are in Hampshire, and at a place named Plymtree they come across Carthew and Joey Hook who are busy at the local races.

Next week "A Visit to Trimble Hall" was delicious. Now in Sussex, they visit Lexham, where Baggy Trimble lives. He borrows money from them, and invites them to a lovely house which he calls Trimble Hall. But when they arrive they find the owner has never heard of Trimble or Trimble Hall, and they are unwelcome visitors. A very funny story.

In "The Rookwood Rescuers" they are in Berkshire (don't they get around?) and they help Albert Strangeways to escape from the place where he was kept prisoner. It was a lunatic asylum - and they have helped a lunatic who thinks he is made of glass.

Finally "Lord Bob at Rookwood" is the start of a new series. They are near the end of their cycling tour, and meet and become friendly with Lord Bob Egerton, and he shows them over his lovely stately home. They also see Dick Morcom, the son of the gamekeeper on the estate. But what they don't know is that Morcom is being sent to Rookwood as a reward for saving the life of Bob's brother. Eventually, Lord Bob goes to Rookwood as Morcom, who is afraid he may be persecuted by snobs at Rookwood. So Morcom goes to Cornwall on holiday,

while Lord Bob goes to Rookwood as Morcom.

I am looking forward to next week to see what happens when the false Morcom meets up with Jimmy Silver who knows him as Lord Bob.

Middlesex are the county cricket champions, and Philip Mead is top of the batting averages. I am proud to own a Philip Mead cricket bat, even though he plays for Hampshire which is not my county.

The Gem is much better than it was a little while ago, even though there are too many serials, and they have started a section like the Greyfriars Herald in the Magnet and Billy Bunter's Weekly in the Popular. I can't think why they didn't call it Tom Merry's Weekly, but, in any case, it is a very feeble imitation of the Magnet and Popular supplements. Still, the old writer is doing most of the stories now.

The first three weeks covered a circus series by the old writer, though I didn't like it a lot. In "Tom Merry's Ten Pound Note," which was the best of the series, Gussy was going to fight a circus boxer for the £10 note and the honour of St. Jim's. Finally Tom Merry took the boxer on and beat him, which was rather a mouthful to swallow. The last two tales were "In the Hour of Peril" and "The Schoolboy Lion Hunter." The circus trainer, who had stolen Tom's £10 note in the first story, let the lion loose, and it caused some nervousness at St. Jim's. But Wildrake caught the lion with his lasso. Last tale of the month was "Levison to the Rescue." Some counterfeiters were operating in a cell under a flagstone in the old tower of St. Jim's. They kidnapped Levison. By the old writer, but not one of his best.

Under Sir Ernest Shackleton, the vessel "Quest" has sailed for the Antarctic. He has taken two scouts, selected from all over Britain, with him, and the expedition has received a lot of attention in the newspapers and also in the magazines.

A very good month at the picture palaces. Jackie Coogan's new picture "Peck's Bad Boy," was on for a week. I enjoyed it very much, even though it is an anti-climax after "The Kid." Elmo Lincoln was in "Under Crimson Skies." Charles Ray was in "R.S.V.P." which was not so good as his usual. Mabel Normand was good in "Pinto," though I liked her better in two-reelers. Pearl White was good in

"White Moll" but I liked her better in serials. Finally, "The Better 'Ole," based on the cartoons of Bruce Bairnsfather was a real scream.

The Magnet has been so-so; first-rate while it went on with its caravan series which seemed to be cut short. In "Caravanners Afloat," Harry Wharton and Co., like the Rookwooders a bit earlier, decided to go to the north of France, though the Greyfriars fellows took their caravan with them. Colonel Wharton went with them for a short time, to see them settled.

Finally, the series was brought to an abrupt halt when Bunter sold the horse and the bike in order to get money with which to gamble in the casino.

"Champion of the Remove" was one of those boring affairs which was intended to be a crash hit. All sorts of sports to find the best athlete in the school, for a cup provided by Sir Hilton Popper. Bob Cherry won it, but Archie Howell nearly beat him. I wish they would bury Archie Howell. Finally, in "Bunter the Bard," Bunter went in for a poetry competition supposed to be run by the weekly paper "Answers." They thought Bunter had won the prize, but it was a mistake. The winner was Penfold. Goodness gracious. Silly old tale, but it had a few amusing moments in connection with some neat rhymes.

Doug had a new Sexton Blake Library entitled "The Mystery of the Hundred Chests," featuring a character named the Hon. John Lawless.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT: Danny's entry about the Arbuckle case will touch a chord in some memories. To some extent, one can find a parallel in the film industry of 1921 with that of 1971. Fly-by-night companies were producing films which went far beyond good taste, and plenty of the films produced and the lives led by some of the players were coming in for sharp criticism. The industry had just decided to put its own house in order when, at a party in a San Francisco hotel, a minor screen actress named Virginia Rappe died under mysterious circumstances. The blame was placed on Fatty Arbuckle and he was arrested. The reports were unsavoury, and the rumours far worse. Two juries failed to agree; a third found him not guilty of the charge of manslaughter. Arbuckle's films were swept from the screen, and he disappeared as a character in English papers like Kinema Comic. Paramount had a half-dozen or so Arbuckle comedies awaiting release. They have never been released to this day. Arbuckle went back to films as a director, under another name.

This was the first of the big scandals to strike Hollywood in the early twenties. More were to follow very soon.

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BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

As promised I have devoted most of the space in Blakiana to the new information on the Sexton Blake Saga, and a real Saga it is, one that I think will never end, at least in our time.

Now in connection with the Penny Pictorial stories, I have referred back to the articles by Frank Vernon Lay in the July 1970 and September 1970 issues of the C. D.

In the Supplement the last Sexton Blake story in the Penny Pictorial has been given as No. 756 but Frank says in his article in July 1970 that 757 also contained a Sexton Blake story. This was entitled "The Locked Door" was dated 29 November, 1913. No further Blake tales appeared in the Penny Pictorial. As some of the first of G. H. Teed's fine stories were now appearing in the Union Jack one can only assume that it was impossible to carry on publishing the type of Blake tale as featured in P.P. According to Mr. Cyril Rowe there might have been another Blake story in No. 758 and in No. 770 began the Cecil Hayter stories about another detective - Derwent Duff. Mr. Rowe also goes on to tell us the following:

MICHAEL STORM

From the appearance of Rupert Forbes, Marston Hume and Lady Molly Maxwell in many of the Penny Pictorial issues (known Michael Storm creations) and also with them of Bathurst, Sexton Blake's friend, and on stylistic evidence it is my convinced belief that all the following tales were by Michael Storm, viz:-

Nos. 490, 491, 499, 522, 523, 524, 525, 531, 534, 545, 546, 547,
548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 556, 557, 558, 565, 572, 575,
582, 585, 587, 592, 594, 595, 596, 601, 602, 604, 605, 606,
607, 608, 611, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 620, 621, 625, 627,
630, 631, 633, 635, 636, 637, 638, 640, 645, 647, 648, 660,
663, 672.

If anyone can supply information about other authors I would be pleased to have it.

The names of the actors taking the parts of Sexton Blake and Tinker in the silent films of the 1920's were Langhorne Burton and Mickey Brantford. No doubt collectors who have copies of the Union Jacks of the late 1920's will already know this. I have been asked to give the commencing number of the S.B.L. for the years from 1929 onwards so here they are:-

January 1929	No. 173	2nd series	January 1946	No. 111	3rd series
" 1930	" 221	" "	" 1947	" 135	" "
" 1931	" 269	" "	" 1948	" 159	" "
" 1932	" 317	" "	" 1949	" 183	" "
" 1933	" 365	" "	" 1950	" 207	" "
" 1934	" 413	" "	" 1951	" 231	" "
" 1935	" 461	" "	" 1952	" 255	" "
" 1936	" 509	" "	" 1953	" 279	" "
" 1937	" 557	" "	" 1954	" 303	" "
" 1938	" 605	" "	" 1955	" 327	" "
" 1939	" 653	" "	" 1956	" 351	" "
" 1940	" 701	" "	February	" "	353 " "
" 1941	" 735	" "	"	" "	354 " "
June 1941	" 1	3rd series	March	" "	355 " "
January 1942	" 15	" "	"	" "	356 " "
" 1943	" 39	" "	None for April	1956	
" 1944	" 63	" "	May	1956 No.	357 " "
" 1945	" 87	" "	"	" "	358 " "

END OF 3rd SERIES

The 4th series commenced with No. 359 in June 1956.

January 1957	No. 373	4th series	January 1961	No. 469	4th series
" 1958	" 397	" "	" 1962	" 493	" "
" 1959	" 421	" "	" 1963	" 517	" "
" 1960	" 445	" "			

SEXTON BLAKE SERIALS IN THE UNION JACK

1927 The Striking Shadow

5 March 1927 to 21 May 1927
No. 1220 to No. 1231

cont'd..

- 1927 The Fox of Pennyfields featuring Leon Kestrel. This serial began in the same issue as the previous story finished, i.e. No. 1231 and ended in No. 1235.
- " The Black Abbot of Cheng Tu. No. 1236 to No. 1254
- 1932 The Next Move No. 1516 to No. 1529



DEBLAKINISATION

by S. Gordon Swan

SOME TIME AGO there was comment on a process known, if I recall correctly, as DEBLAKINISATION. The article in the Collectors' Digest referred to the practice of publishing Sexton Blake tales as novels, with other characters substituted for Blake and Tinker. It was being done by W. Howard Baker and some of his contemporaries, like Jack Trevor Storey. One peculiarity was a story of John Drake, Dangerman, by W. Howard Baker, which was originally a Blake yarn by Arthur Maclean.

This process is nothing new: it was being performed before the war by writers such as Anthony Parsons and Pierre Quiroule. I have a hardcover book by Rex Hardinge which was previously a Blake tale.

Eighteen months ago I found a bookshop which was selling up its stock after some forty years in business as a lending library. Much nostalgic reminiscence was provided by the names of some of the authors, many of them forgotten to-day: Louis Tracy, E. Phillips Oppenheim, J. S. Fletcher, E. Charles Vivian, etc.

Then on one shelf I came across The Sign of the Saracen by Gwyn Evans. On examination this proved to contain two stories, The Sign of the Saracen and The Case of the Wandering Jew -- two prime examples of the type of yarn that flourished in the Union Jack in its heyday. Blake and Tinker had, of course, been replaced by other characters, but Splash Page remained the same.

Then there was Voodoo Island, by G. H. Teed. This was a reprint of a Sexton Blake Library of the 'thirties, The Isle of Horror (No. 376, Second Series). Blake and Tinker had been given new names, but Mdlle. Roxane and Marie Galante were unchanged.

The oddest item of all, however, was Dene of the Secret Service,

by Gerald Verner. This author had written several tales about Dene, but this one was something different. I hadn't read very far before I realised that it had once been a Sexton Blake Library, not by Gerald Verner (or Donald Stuart), but by Warwick Jardine! (No. 409, The Man From Tokio, Second Series). Blake and Tinker had become Trevor Lowe and Arnold White, and Granite Grant was transformed into Dene -- but was still No. 55 of the Secret Service. Mdlle. Julie, however, remained Mdlle. Julie.

This is surely a remarkable book. In the first place, Warwick Jardine was writing about somebody else's characters -- Granite Grant and Mademoiselle Julie, as created by Pierre Quiroule. Then along comes Gerald Verner, who eliminates Blake, Tinker and Grant and substitutes other names, but retains Julie, and publishes the story under his own name. One wonders if this was done with the consent of Warwick Jardine, or didn't he ever know about the publication of this book?

In conclusion I might mention that a wartime Blake by Stanton Hope about Nazis in South America was published in post-war days in Australia under another title, with the names of Blake and Tinker altered, needless to say, while the Nazis had become Communists!



HOW TO BE A DETECTIVE

by William Lister

Along with most people I find myself better able to remember events that took place many years ago rather than those of the last few years. The same applies to the books or stories I have read.

One of the highlights of my reading - way back in the "twenties" - is the memory of Coker and Bunter and their attempts to conquer the art of ventriloquism. I think Handforth too made the attempt. Not that they were alone in this endeavour. Living in Blackpool as a boy I spent hours running from one ventriloquist entertainer to another (there were two of them in those days on the sands).

Sitting on top of a pair of ordinary step-ladders with two dolls, they entertained the holiday crowds for the price of a collection and to add to their earnings they sold a leaflet "How to be a Ventriloquist" for a penny. Many of these were sold - and I must have bought two or three every year. I attempted to follow the advice given. If the endeavours

of the boys of St. Frank's and the "Hamilton" schools made the readers laugh, mine was enough to make them cry. I never mastered it, nor did I meet any penny instruction buyers that did. However this will not deter me from helping my fellow O.B.B.C. friends to become at least amateur detectives. Of course we shall need the help of Sexton Blake. I took the liberty of watching him at work during one of his most interesting cases "The Affair of the Seven Warnings or The Brothers of Justice" recorded by Anthony Skene, No. 44, New Series the Sexton Blake Library.

Now it appears the main ingredient of successful detective work is - observation.

Watch closely your favourite detective at work, if you value your life. "Nevertheless, when the man re-entered, Blake gave him a quick glance which missed very little. Blake was too old an hand at intrigue to rely wholly upon intuition."

"If Fortune had entered with one hand in his jacket pocket for instance, Blake would have been the first to draw, he took no chances."

So here you have lesson one - if you wish to be a long-living detective - keep your eye open for hidden weapons.

Now for lesson two - know your enemy. "During Fortune's absence Blake had used his eyes to some purpose. The literature around the room was almost all concerned with biology, poultry keeping theories of evolution, and novels of a revolutionary kind. On the table a copy of 'Financial Times.'

"Blake realised he was in the presence of a student of sociology who was interested in the stock markets and the breeding of poultry, an interesting personality, without doubt."

Again a simple matter of observation. Turn over the page, here goes for lesson three.

"Have you such a thing as a fountain pen?" Blake said, after what appeared to be an ineffectual search of his own pockets.

"He desired to compare James Fortune's fountain pen, and the ink it held with those addresses upon the envelopes which had contained the seven warnings."

To use a phrase of Victor Gunn or Berkley Gray's, "are you following me, readers?"

By now you will have gathered that if you are quick-witted and have good powers of observation you will make a good detective.

Not being quick-witted the writer has to rely on his not-so-good powers of observation. Unfortunately his deductions do not seem to work out as clearly as Sexton Blake's.

What appears to be a rabbit's footprints usually turn out to be a cats, or the tracks of some strange bird proves to be but the footprints from the soles of a schoolboy's "moonwalker" shoes. The life of a detective is certainly not for me, but for my readers? Time will tell.

But come now, apart from Sherlock Holmes, shall we ever see a detective as great as Sexton Blake and apart from Dr. Watson, so faithful an assistant as Tinker?

W A N T E D: Goldhawk St. Jim's series No. 1 "Tom Merry's Secret"; No. 2 Tom Merry's Rival; No. 6 Trouble for Trimble; No. 9 D'Arcy's Disappearance; No. 10 D'Arcy the Reformer.

C. H. MATTHEWS, STATION HOUSE, MARKET HARBOROUGH, LEICS.

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W A N T E D: ONE COPY ONLY of each of the following: (for either 1931, 1932, or 1933); Film Fun Annual; Cinema Annual; ROVER weekly; Wizard weekly; Dixon Hawke Library.

L. MULLIS, 3250 - 63rd S.W.; Seattle, Wash. 98116, U.S.A.

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W A N T E D: Dandy, Beano, Magic pre-1942 only - any reasonable price. All Howard Baker Press facsimiles will be available on publication and Nos. 1 to 5 still available. Also Bill Lofts and Adley's Men Behind Boys Fiction, Bibliography of Boys/Girls Magazines, etc., Edgar Wallace Bibliography.

VERNON LAY, 52 OAKLEIGH GARDENS, WHETSTONE, LONDON, 9AB.

01-445-6490.

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W A N T E D: Good loose copies or volumes containing one or more of the following: GEMS 801, 817, 826, 828, 832.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, 113 CROOKHAM ROAD, CROOKHAM, HAMPSHIRE.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

W A N T E D: Gems before No. 1325. Will pay 32p each - and the following Nos. 1653, 54, 56, 57, 58, 61, 62 and 1663, will pay 32p each for these also.

W. SETFORD, 155 BURTON ROAD, DERBY.

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W A N T E D: Magnets, Gems, Populars and Hamiltonia S.O.L's.

DR. B. KELION, 69 FRIERN BARNET LANE, LONDON, N11 3LL.

DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 92 — Gem No. 372 — "Levison's Double"

The Blue Gem is generally reckoned to have been at its best about 1912, but there is no doubt that it did enjoy a second lease of life about 1914-15, which was, of course, the time of the first three Talbot series. An unexpected friendship arose between Talbot and Levison, which in a way presaged Levison's reform, and intermittent stories appeared which featured this uneasy alliance.

"Levison's Double" began, appropriately enough, on a stormy March evening. Kildare came into the hall, banging the door shut and looking as angry as the weather. He had caught Levison coming out of the Green Man, dressed in a grey suit. Levison replied that his name was Smith, and dodged off. To everyone's surprise, Levison was shortly afterwards seen in his study, dressed in etons, and finishing a long imposition for Herr Schneider. A year before, Clavering had turned up in the neighbourhood, and he was the double of Tom Merry. Levison now claimed that he had a double who was giving him a bad reputation, and Talbot loyally emphasised the possibility of it.

D'Arcy caught Levison gambling in the old shepherd's hut on Wayland Moor, and followed him as far as he could. When he returned to St. Jim's, he accused Levison who was already there when he arrived and an investigation of D'Arcy's allegations by the juniors only succeeded in proving the existence of the double.

The vintage stories of Levison's roguery have intricate and fascinating plots that render them highly entertaining. Indeed, the reader often thinks that Levison deserves to succeed if only because of his brazen effrontery. Levison also possessed a sense of humour at times which, if not so amusing as Skinner's, did at least season the villany with a certain spice of irony. After Kildare's accusation, Levison's belongings were searched, and one unexpected discovery was a diary, that was taken to the Head. Dr. Holmes was astonished to read that Levison had sent all his pocket money one week to a charity, and that the Head's sermon the previous Sunday had moved Levison to tears.

Perhaps one of the most surprising points about the blue Gem

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIALNo. 162. THE GIFT

Good writers, like good schoolmasters, good musicians, and good cooks are born - not made. A man in any walk of life can improve himself by training or by experience, which is said to be the best teacher, but unless he is born with that elusive special gift he will never be anything out of the ordinary.

Charles Hamilton had that gift which no power on earth could have given him. He was a born writer. Even in the very earliest examples of his work extant he was entirely readable. There was a warmth in his writing which, right from the beginning, took him out of the hack class and placed him on a different plane from his contemporaries in the same field.

The born writer improves with the passing of time, because he can see where his errors lie. The others do not progress, for they are incapable of seeing where they are wrong.

So far as the Gem was concerned, I have always considered that Hamilton was at his very best in the period 1911-1912. His very greatest years lay far ahead - in the Magnet of 1925 to 1935.

In his blue Gem days, he was intentionally giving that paper of his best for he regarded it as the most important thing in his writing life. The Magnet was of secondary importance. Within a very few years, those values were to be reversed, even though he temporarily swung back to the Gem in the early twenties.

Most of our readers find delight in our serial "The Only Way," which appeared a year or so earlier than the golden period of the Gem to which I have referred.

"The Only Way" is a period piece, with its candle-lit corridors and schoolboys "laving" themselves at wash-hand basins in their studies. The sense of period gives the story a piquant charm, but far beyond that is the readable quality. One senses the competence of the born storyteller.

Nevertheless there are faults in the writing - faults of which Hamilton would never have been guilty just a few years further on. Just here and there are signs of over-writing - the stress on soliloquy and rhetorical question - with which some of the substitute writers

packed their work and which, with the passing of time, they never had the sense to eradicate. And Hamilton, even with faults, remains infinitely readable, while most of the substitute writers were barely readable.

To most adults, the substitute writers are laughable for their lack of restraint. In parts of "The Only Way," Hamilton himself lacked restraint. Take the instalment which we published in June.

One sentence reads: "A thousand possibilities flashed through his uneasy and terrified mind." It is over-writing and exaggeration. A thousand possibilities could not flash through anybody's mind in the space of a few moments, even if there were a thousand possibilities, which is quite improbable.

And the boy's mind was "uneasy and terrified." Nobody could be uneasy and terrified at the same time. If you are uneasy, you are very far short of being terrified. If you are terrified, you are far, far beyond being uneasy. The sentence is an example of loose writing, such as was found constantly in the substitute tales.

This is further ground for criticism only a few lines further on in the instalment. "He crept stealthily up to the door and listened. He could hear breathing inside the room."

It is an absurdity to suggest that anyone could hear another person breathing inside a room with the door closed. Even if the occupant was a sufferer from chronic asthma - and Countney was not, it appears - the sentence would still be near-ridiculous.

This sort of thing became a source of comedy in so many substitute stories, because those stories were over-laden with such inanities. It got by in the early Hamiltonia for it was comparatively rare. He wrote with the gift of warmth which only the born writer has, and one did not bother about a side-slip into journalese when it occurred.

Within a few years Hamilton was incapable of slipshod writing. Imperceptibly he eradicated the little vices, and impeccable English joined his gift for character-etching and atmosphere. And that is why his stories go on living down the years. There will never be another like him.

NELSON LEE COLUMN

EARLY STRUGGLES THE BOYS' HERALD

by Bob Blythe

(continued)

July 23rd, 1911.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

I enclose herewith the beginning of the 10th instalment as requested, and will let you have the remainder by Tuesday morning.

Thanks for your letter of the 21st inst. I have noted what you say concerning the synopsis for the "Bush" story, and will therefore submit you another synopsis on newer lines.

Yours sincerely, E.S.B.

July 24th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Brooks,

Many thanks for your letter with the further batch of M.S.

When you have finished "The Stowaway's Quest," perhaps you will let me have one or two long complete stories - 6,000 words. These should be home or foreign adventure, or detective tales, with novel plots. I should like to see synopses.

Yours sincerely,
HORACE PHILLIPS

July 25th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

I enclose herewith the remainder of the last instalment of the "Stowaway's Quest," and trust that the conclusion will be to your liking.

Please accept my best thanks for your letter to hand this morning, and I will certainly let you have the synopses for which you ask with all possible speed. As the "Stowaway's Quest" is now finished there is really no necessity for me to come up to town to-morrow, so I am missing my usual weekly visit on this occasion, and devoting the time to evolving a plot or two for you. I want to carefully consider these but will try and post at least one of them off to you to-morrow, Wednesday night.

With regard to the "bush" serial I am reading up several books on unexplored Australia and will have another shot at a synopsis for you after I have digested them. I was a little dubious myself about the previous one, but I think I have now got the germ of a less hackneyed plot, and shall soon be able to submit the new synopsis.

With renewed thanks for your kind letter concerning the short stories.

Yours sincerely, E.S.B.

July 30th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

I enclose herewith two Synopses of long complete stories for your consideration, and will, if possible, forward the synopsis of the "bush" serial to-morrow night - in order that I can discuss it with you when I come up to London on Wednesday next.

Yours sincerely, E.S.B.

August 1st, 1911.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

I enclose a synopsis of the first instalment of the suggested Australian serial,

and will call upon you to-morrow morning, when I hope you will have read it - also the synopses of the two long completes which I forwarded a day or two ago.

Yours sincerely, E.S.B.

Although the "Bush" story referred to in these letters was not published in the BOYS' HERALD Edwy never wasted a plot if he could help it, and it was used two years later for the SCOUT under the title "In Quest of Millions."

The serial now being finished Edwy now suggests some short stories to keep him going.

August 12th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

I thought it best not to come up to town so soon after the holidays, as I felt sure you would be extra busy, so all last week I remained down here. This week, however, my family are returning to Brockley so I shall be somewhat nearer to Bouverie Street. I enclose two synopses of short stories for your perusal and am sending off the MS. of "To Save the President" to-morrow night.

Yours sincerely, E.S.B.

August 15th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

I am sorry that I have been unable to send you the MS. of "To Save the President," but as it is "complete" stuff I feel sure you are in no immediate hurry. The fact is I am coming up to London this evening - motor-cycling - and what with packing, etc., I have been unable to write the matter. I could have finished it by hurrying, but I thought it best not to let the story suffer for the sake of a day or two. However, once back in town, near the hub, as it were, you can rely on my sending in any stuff you commission me to do, with as little delay as possible.

Yours sincerely, E.S.B.

The proposed serial, (the plot of which was apparently laid in South America, was changed to Australia for the SCOUT serial) seemed to have difficulty in getting off the ground, and was later abandoned.

August 29th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

You will find enclosed the corrected MS., and I trust it will now be satisfactory. As I shall be in the city to-morrow perhaps you won't mind if I postpone my visit until then - when I hope to have one or two short-story plots to talk over with you.

Yours sincerely, E.S.B.

September 4th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

I find you were right after all; before commencing the writing of the 1st Instalment there was a lot of planning to be done and I could only have let you have the stuff to-day by hurrying - and that you requested me not to do. However the MS. of the 1st Instalment will be in your hands to-morrow, either by the first post, or, failing that, I will bring it up myself.

Yours sincerely, E.S.B.

September 13th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

I find that the alteration and re-writing of the first instalment of the new serial requires much more time than I first imagined. I am doing it thoroughly and am writing in a good deal of new stuff, as well as going over - and improving where I can - the original matter. I find that I cannot mail the complete MS. in time to reach you to-morrow, Thursday evening; but you can rely upon having it in your hands early on Friday morning. I hope the slight delay will not put you to any inconvenience.

Yours sincerely, E.S.B.

September 14th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

I enclose the revised MS. of the serial herewith, and trust that it will now be quite satisfactory. With regard to the title; you made no mention of this to me on my last visit, but as you had queried it beforehand, I was not quite certain what title to place on the MS.

The short story I am now doing for you will be finished this week, and I will post it off to you so that you receive it on Monday.

Sincerely yours, E.S.B.

September 19th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

I must apologise for not having despatched the enclosed MS. before to-night - but as you told me when we last met, it was not urgent, I have not especially hurried over it.

With regard to the Serial, I hope to hear from you shortly. In the meantime I am reading up matter on South America.

Sincerely yours, E.S.B.

Finally, the last letters that we have show that E.S.B. is still trying but, so far as I can trace, "Flying to Victory" was the last to be used in the BOYS' HERALD.

September 20th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Brooks,

Many thanks for your letter enclosing the complete story "The Petrol Train," which I will look at as soon as possible.

I have been expecting to see you about the revised first instalment of the suggested airship serial. I am very sorry to say this is not quite satisfactory, and I shall have to go into the matter with you.

Yours sincerely, HORACE PHILLIPS

September 26th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

You will find enclosed herewith the MS. of the "Petrol Train," slightly altered, as requested.

With regard to the aeroplane story, how would it be to finish it up, as a complete, in the following manner?

Englehardt, furious at his failure, swears he will be revenged. That night he gets into conversation with a ruffianly ex-convict named Rube Lucas, and offers him £100 if he will make his way into Maitland's hangar and file certain wire stays three parts through. Lucas cannot refuse, for Englehardt has recognised him as

being badly wanted by the police. The ruffian goes to the hangars, and after a short time sneaks away with an evil grin on his features. Next day crowds of people are at the aerodrome to see Maitland and Englehardt fly. Maitland goes up, but when he reaches a good height there is a crash - but it is caused by the falling of Englehardt's machine! Rube Lucas had deliberately filed through the wires of the German's aeroplane, feeling sure that Englehardt would give information against him immediately Maitland had fallen. Englehardt would be quite safe, for nobody would believe Lucas's word against his. In the accident Englehardt can be either killed or seriously injured.

Will you kindly let me know how the above strikes you? And how would "Flying To Victory" do for a title?

Sincerely yours, E.S.B.

September 27th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Brookes,

Many thanks for your letter with the complete story, which I will read as soon as possible.

I think your suggested conclusion for the aeroplane story is very good, and I shall be pleased to have the tale on these lines. Dramatic justice demands the death of Englehardt, but please do it very carefully. No need to go into details.

Yours sincerely,
HORACE PHILLIPS

October 9th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

I enclose herewith "Flying to Victory," altered in accordance with the synopsis contained in my letter of the 26th ult., and which you intimated would make a satisfactory conclusion to the story.

I expect to be in town this week, and I will give you a call while at No. 23 Bouverie St., when I hope you will be able to spare me a few moments.

Yours sincerely, E.S.B.

February 21st, 1912.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

I enclose herewith two synopsis of foreign adventure for your perusal. I shall be in London tomorrow, Thursday, so will call at your office - when I hope you will be able to spare me a few minutes.

Yours sincerely, E.S.B.

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WANTED URGENTLY ANY MAGNETS. Please write stating numbers and price Required. -

JACKSON, 19a AYLMEY PARADE, LONDON, N.2.

RETRIBUTION OVERTAKES THE SCHOOLBOY POACHER. THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY BY WHICH HE CAN BE SAVED. HE ASKS HIS FRIEND TO TAKE

THE ONLY WAY

Valence glanced at Courtney as the Sixth went into the classroom that afternoon, and the prefect avoided his glance. He would hold out no false hopes to the fellow. What Valence had asked of him was preposterous, outrageous, unheard-of, impossible.

When the form came out Valence joined Courtney, although the latter had turned to walk away quickly.

"You're going to turn your back on me then?" Valence asked in a low voice.

Courtney looked him full in the eyes.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

Valence was silent. Even he could not formulate such a demand in plain words.

"I can do nothing for you," said

Courtney coldly. "You can save yourself - by going to the hall at six o'clock."

"I can't!"

"Then you must take the consequences."

And Courtney walked away. He had spoken firmly and decidedly to Valence, but he was far from feeling firm and decided in his mind. He left the school, and went for a stroll in Friardale Wood to think the matter over.

"It's impossible!" Courtney muttered again and again.

He strode along with his hands in his pockets and his brows wrinkled with a deep frown.

The hour of five rang out from the village church.

One hour more, and Sir Hilton Popper would be expecting the schoolboy poacher at the hall.

Courtney knew that Valence would not go. He had no courage and no nerve for such an ordeal. He was reckless enough to get into scrapes, but he had no courage to extricate himself.

"Arthur!"

It was a soft, sweet voice. Arthur Courtney started and looked up, and the frown faded from his brow. The face looking at him was the face that had been in his

mind - a sweet, kind face, circled by clustering brown hair.

"Violet!" he exclaimed.

The girl smiled.

"Rupert told me I should see you here, she said. 'I want to speak to you.'"

"Rupert told you?"

"Yes, he has just cycled over,"

Violet explained. "He is in trouble, Arthur. I could see that at once."

Courtney smiled grimly.

"Yes; I daresay anybody could see it," he said.

"Then he has told you about it?"

"I know about it, Vi. Has he told you what it is?"

"Only that he is in trouble, and that you could help him if you liked," said Violet softly. "He says he had words with you yesterday."

"So he did."

"Rupert is always hasty, Arthur. I told him you would never allow anything of that sort to make any difference, if you could help him."

"Of course I wouldn't, Vi!"

The girl drew a breath of relief.

"I was sure of it, Arthur. But - but why won't you help him then?"

"I can't."

"He says you could."

Courtney crushed back the words that rose to his lips. His contempt for the fellow who would drag his sister into the matter like this knew no bounds.

Courtney sat down on a fallen tree, and the girl sat by his side, her eyes turned anxiously upon his troubled face.

"How much do you know, Vi?" he asked at last.

"Only that Rupert has done something reckless, and says he will be expelled from Greyfriars, unless --"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you save him, Arthur."

"Did he say I could save him?"

"Yes."

"But how?"

"He did not say that, or what he had done. It cannot have been very bad. Rupert is reckless and foolish," said Violet, with a troubled look, "but he is not wicked. I don't want to ask anything about it. But - but you'll help him if you can, Arthur, won't you?"

"I've been trying to think out some way of helping him, Vi," groaned Courtney. "Not for his own sake - for yours; but - I can't."

The girl drew a sharp breath.

"You cannot help him?"

"No. There's only one way, and that's impossible."

"Then - then he will be expelled?"

"I fear so."

Violet bowed her head. Although her face was turned away from Courtney, he knew that she was crying.

"Vi! Vi! Don't!" he said huskily.

"You know I'd do anything to help him out of this, but it can't be done."

"Is there no way, Arthur?"

"None."

"But - but you said --"

"Yes, there's one way - the only way; but that's impossible," said Courtney hoarsely. "If you knew what it was, Vi, you wouldn't dream of asking it."

"If you would have to do anything dishonourable, of course it is impossible," said the girl quietly. "Is it that?"

"No, not exactly that."

"Would it be a great trouble to you?"

"That's nothing."

"You mean that you would suffer in some way if you helped my brother," said the girl, slowly.

"Well, yes."

"And that is why you won't do it?" Courtney groaned.

"You don't understand."

Tears were running down the girl's cheeks now.

"If you tell me you cannot help poor Rupert, I suppose you cannot. But --"

She broke off with a sob.

Courtney sprang to his feet. He could endure it no longer. And - and surely if he put it plainly to Rupert, if he urged him and backed him up, the wretched fellow would have the courage to face his punishment, and if not --

"Vi, don't - don't! I can't bear to see you cry," said Courtney huskily.

"Don't! He shall be saved. I'll manage it somehow. He shan't be expelled from Greyfriars. Vi, I promise you that!"

The girl's face brightened through her tears.

"But can you do it, Arthur?"

"It shall be done."

"Oh, thanks - thanks!" murmured Violet. She rose to her feet. "Arthur, I don't know how to thank you."

"It's all right!" muttered Courtney.

"Let me see you to your gate, and I shall have to cut back to the school. There isn't much time to lose. At six o'clock it will be too late."

"Then go at once, Arthur - never mind me!" exclaimed Violet eagerly. "Save my brother, that is all! Save him!"

"I will save him!"

A minute more, and Arthur Courtney was striding back towards the school. He had promised to save Valence. But how?

* * * * *

"Come into my study, Rupert, will you?"

"Have you seen Vi?"

"Yes."

Rupert followed Courtney into his study. His face was pale with anxiety. He had called in the aid of his sister as a last resource. Violet's influence over Courtney he knew to be strong, but if she had known the facts she would never have asked of Courtney what Valence had asked of him.

Courtney closed the study door, and turned and faced Valence.

"I've seen your sister," he said.

"Well?"

"You've told her that you're in danger of being expelled, and that I can save you if I choose; but that's all."

"Have you told her anything more?"

"No."

Valence drew a deep breath of relief.

"It's just as well," he muttered. "Vi has queer ideas - all sorts of romantic and overstrained notions, and --"

"And if she knew the truth she wouldn't want me to do what you want me to do," said Courtney scornfully.

"But you haven't told her."

"I wouldn't insult her by telling her what a blackguard her precious brother is."

Valence winced.

"Oh, pile it on!" he said.

"I told her you shouldn't be expelled," said Courtney.

Valence's face brightened.

"You mean that, Courtney?"

"I've come to talk to you," said Courtney. "You've simply got to play the man this time. Don't be a coward."

"Look here --"

"Other fellows have been flogged and stood it. Why can't you? I dare say Sir Hilton will lay it on, but after all, it's only a licking. You can stand it."

"I - I can't."

"You can - and must - for Violet's sake!"

"Then you - you won't --"

"It's impossible."

Valence sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. He groaned aloud in his misery and terror.

"Then I shall be expelled."

"There's no need for that. Take the flogging, and Sir Hilton will say no more about the matter. For goodness sake have a little pluck."

Valence shuddered.

"I can't. If I went up to the house, I shouldn't go in - I should bolt. I can't face it."

"Are you a coward?"

Valence gave him a haggard look.

"Perhaps I am. I don't care. It makes me shudder all over to think of it. I won't be expelled either. I won't go home. I'll run away to sea."

Valence was crying.

Courtney looked at him in wonder and contempt.

"My hat!" he said savagely. "I think it would kill you if you had to face a flogging. You cur!"

"You can call me what you like," groaned Valence. "I know what I'm going to do."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to run away," muttered Valence. "I'll go to sea."
Courtney laughed.

"Yes, you would do well at sea - when you haven't the pluck to take a single licking. If you run away from school, you'll go sneaking home, and hide behind your mother, if your pater cuts up rusty."

"Oh, pile it on!"

"Rupert, be a man! If I were to take this on for you, you'd despise yourself as long as you lived," said Courtney.

"I can't do it."

"You must!"

"I won't!"

Courtney paced up and down the study. What was he to do? There was only one way to save the wretched coward - only one way. Could he take that - the only way?

"Rupert," he broke out at last. "I've promised Vi that you shan't be expelled."

"Keep your word, then."

"Do you refuse to go and take the flogging?"

"You can stand it better than I can!" muttered Valence.

"It's not that. It's the disgrace - the horrible humiliation!" muttered Courtney with flushing cheeks. "And then - to be supposed to be a rotten poacher."

"You've promised Vi."

"I know I have," said Courtney between his teeth.

"You've promised Vi."

Valence had nothing else to say. He could face obloquy and contempt; he could face scornful looks; he could face his own conscience. But he could not face a flogging.

The prefect halted in his pacing at last.

"Very well," he said quietly - very quietly. "Pull yourself together, Rupert. I'm going."

Valence raised his head.

"You're going to take the flogging, Arthur?"

"Yes. It's the only way."

"God bless you! I --"

"I don't want your thanks. I'm sick to death of you. I'm doing this for Vi's sake, not for yours. Don't let anybody see your face like that."

He swung angrily towards the door.

Valence rose to his feet. His face was brighter now.

"You are going up to the hall?"

"Yes."

The quarter to six rang out from the clock-tower of Greyfriars. Valence gave a nervous start.

"You'll be late!" he exclaimed.

"You needn't be afraid of that," said Courtney. "I shall go on my bike. I shall be in time."

He left the study, closing the door angrily with a slam.

Valence went to the window, and looked out. He could see the school gates. In a couple of minutes Courtney came in sight, wheeling his bicycle down to the gates.

Valence caught his breath. Courtney was going. Yet it really seemed to be too good to be true.

He watched the prefect as he mounted in the gateway, and disappeared down the road.

Valence left the study with slow and faltering steps. He was saved, but he was saved in a way that would have brought bitter shame and remorse to most hearts. And even Rupert Valence felt something of remorse; but his remorse was not so great as his relief.

Courtney had saved him, by the only way; and, after all, what did it matter how, so long as he was saved? Valence's heart was lighter every moment now.

Six o'clock chimed out from the clock-tower, and Valence started. Six o'clock! Where was Arthur Courtney now?

FOR THE ANSWER TO THAT
DRAMATIC QUESTION, SEE
NEXT MONTH'S THRILLING
INSTALMENT.

In this series, Eric Fayne recalls some of the cinemas and theatres he knew well, long ago, in the far-off days of his youth.

THE SYNDICATE HALLS

The Syndicate Halls formed the third of the trio of England's leading music-hall circuits, the other two being the Stoll Theatres and the Moss Empires.

To the best of my recollection, all the Syndicate Halls were in or near London. They were large, solid, well-built theatres, but somehow they lacked the cosy, lush splendour of the houses of Stoll and Moss. Almost certainly they were older by a decade or more. I assume that most of them were built in late-Victorian times or near the turn of the present century. Stage lighting was adequate, but not more. Some of them, and in particular Clapham Grand and Camberwell Palace, tended to be draughty in the winter, unless the theatres were well filled.

The shows comprised the best of the touring revues, such as featured at the Stoll and Moss Empires, but the number of chorus girls was usually slightly less than when the same show featured at, say Finsbury Park Empire (Moss) or Chiswick Empire (Stoll). Probably Stoll and Moss stipulated for extra girls in the chorus, while the Syndicate Halls took the normal touring company.

Kilburn Empire was the finest and largest of the Syndicate, and it was a fine theatre. This was the star house, with a large orchestra. Chelsea Palace was perhaps the most pleasant of them all. Brixton Empress was certainly the most modern. It may have been of much later construction, and I fancy it was probably partially gutted and re-built in the late twenties or early thirties.

Other syndicate halls were the South London Palace, the Islington Empire, Ilford Empire, Walthamstow Palace, and Wanstead Palace. I knew them well, though I only visited the last two once or twice. A S.H. Hall I knew well was Croydon Empire.

The king of music-hall was Lew Lake, who sent many first-class shows touring. He directed one of the theatres at Islington, though I cannot recall for certain whether it was the Syndicate's Islington Empire, or Collins' at Islington.

I once approached him to try to hire some scenery for a school show I was producing.

He rang me up, and I shall never forget his harsh, cockney voice. Constantly he called me "old cock!" I have never doubted that then, knowing I was a schoolmaster, he intended to pierce my scholastic pomposity. But when I asked him the price, he said:

"That's all right, old cock. Have it on the house. I'll deliver it to you, and I'll collect it when you've finished with it."

So I have the kindest memories of that rough diamond, Lew Lake.

In passing, my musical comedy was presented at Hillcroft Theatre, Surbiton. It was a splendidly equipped little theatre (the Kaiser of Germany once occupied its solitary box) but it had no expert scene shifters. My professional scenery was extremely bulky and heavy, and it cost me a packet to persuade the Hillcroft stage men to handle it. But it was worth it.

And now to return for the third and last time in this series to the Elephant & Castle. Here stood the large South London Palace, a somewhat garish house which always seemed to hold the history of much more affluent times in very late Victorian days.

Standing almost opposite the South London Palace - and nothing at all to do with the Syndicate Halls - there was, during the late twenties, a cinema. I fancy it had the strange name of Golden Domes (there was another cinema of this name in Kennington, not far from Kennington Theatre). I only once visited Golden Domes (if that was its name) at Elephant & Castle, and it was for a reason which seems strange to me now. A murder had been committed in Reading - a tradesman, I think. Numerous people claimed to have seen a bloodstained man pass them in the street, and the curious thing was that they later identified this man as an actor named Drew who was appearing that week at the Reading Theatre.

There seemed to be suspicious circumstances in connection with Drew. His name featured in the national press for a short time, but I do not think he was charged. Apparently it was decided that, in spite of circumstantial evidence, he had nothing to do with the murder.

However, the Golden Domes cinema cashed in on the name of Drew. He had been in Hollywood, and had made a series of two-reel cowboy films. They must have been pretty old by the time of the Reading murder, but Golden Domes cinema advertised them as a special attraction. Goodness knows where the enterprising cinema manager unearthed them. Two-reel cowboy dramas were long out of fashion by that time. However, for some reason or other - and I cannot think that it was just to see a short film featuring a man who had been associated with a sensational murder case - I paid my only visit to that little cinema opposite the South London Palace.

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

The July meeting of the Golden Hours Club was a happy occasion but tinged with sadness at the knowledge of the loss of those very great hobby stalwarts Jack Wood and Gerry Allison. Members were also deeply sorry to learn of the sudden death of Mrs. Isobel Cook wife of Jim Cook of Auckland, New Zealand, and extended their sincere sympathy to Jim in his sad loss. It seems no time at all since we learned of the sad passing of that indefatigable Sexton Blake enthusiast Walter Webb whose inspired contributions to "Blakiana" were ever a source

of great interest and satisfaction.

The club was pleased to welcome Ron Brockman, our newest member, who is a very keen Hamiltonian devotee, and is by way of being a dedicated mathematician. Apropos of this, for those who might be interested, Ron had submitted an extract from a book by G. H. Hardy known as "A Mathematician's Apology" in which the erudite author, commenting on a school story that had made considerable impact upon him, remarked that "a book can hardly be entirely bad if it fires a clever boy's imagination."

There was a spirit of discussion as to which was the best period of the "Magnet" and "Gem" - together with the puzzling fact that during the first four years of the life of "The Magnet" it could be so different in style and quality to its companion paper "The Gem" - it was felt that the latter paper was far superior during this period.

One of the members related his conflicting reaction to his viewing of the film "The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes." Having overcome his desire to leave the theatre in the early stages because of the film's preoccupation with the sordid, without which film making would be lost today, he settled down to become greatly impressed by the Baker Street decor, costumes and atmosphere, and the author's apparent dedication to the true Sherlock Holmes legend.

B. PATE

Hon. Secretary.

* * *

MIDLAND

Meeting held on 27th July, 1971.

This informal meeting mustered ten members which was not at all bad for the height of the summer holiday season. Appropriately, Bob Wareing brought along a huge bowl of freshly-picked strawberries, which were much enjoyed during the evening.

Discussions ranged over the whole field of individual collecting experience, including an account of browsing in a Los Angeles film bookshop which used modern merchandising and stock control techniques - though heaven forbid we ever find an O.B.B. supermarket in the "old

country!"

All members stood in silence in memory of Gerry Allison of the Northern Club, who was so well known to many of us in the Midlands.

Tom Porter produced the Anniversary Number, Magnet No. 546, dated 27 July 1918 and this 53 years old to the day. The Collectors' Item was Sexton Blake Library No. 400, of 1958 vintage, entitled "The Sea Tigers" by Peter Saxon.

Chairman Ivan Webster kindly presented us with a copy of the Howard Baker facsimile edition of "Billy Bunter in the Land of the Pyramids" and was thanked and applauded.

We then enjoyed a discourse by Ray Bennett on the D. C. Thompson papers "Adventure," "Wizard" and "Rover," illustrated by copies of the "Wizard" from 1971, 1961, 1951 and 1949, showing how the traditional written story has been wholly replaced by picture strips. The whole decline is most excellently summed up by Anthony Lejeune in his article "Do you say what you really mean?" in the "Daily Telegraph Magazine" No. 341 of this year, as Ray read out.

The evening concluded with a reading by Jack Belfield from "The Best of Magnet and Gem."

IAN BENNETT

Vice-Chairman.

* * *

LONDON

An excellent agenda had been prepared for the August meeting at Friardale, and it was pleasing to see such a good attendance. Fortified with a glass of Chartreuse, kindly supplied by the host, Bob Acraman, the company settled down to an enjoyable programme.

Two sad announcements by the Chairman, Brian Doyle, were the demise of both Ted Davey of the Midland Club and Frank Shaw of Merseyside.

A hearty welcome was given to Bert Hamblett, of Merseyside, who was in attendance.

Well the varied programme pursued the even tenor of its way and there was something for almost everyone present.

A B.O.P. feature from the "Daily Telegraph" colour magazine was ably read by Ray Hopkins, a fine quiz from Larry Peters, Tom Wright obliging with a humorous St. Sam's reading, Millicent Lyle's Holiday Suitcase quiz, Bob Blythe exhibiting two gifts that were presented by the Nelson Lee and the Magnet, Ben Whiter with another Underground Quiz, Brian Doyle playing over his recording of Mary Cadogan's question in the radio programme "Does The Team Think?" Josie Packman giving information re Rex Hardinge and his son David, and an excellent tea served in the garden. Of the latter, Betty Acraman must have put in quite a good deal of time and suitable tributes and thanks expressed at the termination of the meeting.

Margate Luncheon Party meeting. Coach leaves Woolworths in the Vauxhall Bridge Road at 10 a.m. sharp, Sunday, 5th September.

Leytonstone meeting on Sunday, 19th September. Kindly let the host, Reuben Godsave know if intending to be present. Phone: 534 1737.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

* * *

No Northern Report received this month.

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

SYD SMYTH (Sydney, Australia): I suppose everyone is praising your editorials - I have before and once again I must do so. We are having a devil of a time here with this more money, less work, attitude, amongst other things. The country is slowly being ruined by people with other motives to the ones they publicly profess. Tons of trouble over the South Africa footer tour is on right now. The ones kicking up the most racket couldn't care two hoots for the African native.

Your old theatre series is well received here - this may surprise you but the descriptions are redolent of the old England we love, and altho' quite different to our set-ups here of years ago - they hold great interest for us to read.

CHARLES VAN RENEN (South Africa): The monthly advent of C.D. continues to give me great pleasure. Danny's Diary is approaching my

golden era and even many of the cinema pictures and the players he mentions in 1921 are familiar to me. Of course it took a good long time for new releases to reach the sleepy little provincial paradise where I grew up. I always have been and continue to be a very keen picture-goer.

BILL LOFTS (London): Leslie Charteris has just informed me that P. Montague Haydon a life-long friend of his died in July. 'Monty' as he was affectionately called was the Controlling editor (later Director) of Magnet/Gem/Nelson Lee/Sexton Blake/Thriller/Ranger/Pilot - and all the papers that we remember so well. A creative genius, Charles Hamilton and E. S. Brooks had much to thank 'Monty' for his control and administration of papers. Friendly, kindly, and always willing to give freely his own ideas to authors. Creator of The Thriller, and where Leslie Charteris owed so much to him for building The Saint up to a world-famous character - another link has gone with the past. We have much to thank 'Monty' for behind the scenes, and I know that in his ten years of retirement, he was pleased that his papers were so much thought of and remembered.

ERNEST SNELLGROVE (Ramsgate): I was very interested in the article "Upstairs Cinemas." I was born in Homerton, but my family moved to Woolwich in 1904. The Woolwich Hippodrome was then the 'Grand Theatre' which specialised in melodramas such as 'The Bad Girl of the Family,' "The Temptress of Paris," etc. The trams did not run to Eltham until 1910 but there were brakes from Murray's Yards in Powis St., and at the "Borrad Tavern" on Woolwich Common. Horse trams ran from Beresford Square to Woolwich Dockyard. From there electric trams ran to London. Electric trams also ran from Beresford Square to Abbey Wood and Bexley Heath. Our only cinema was the one by the Woolwich Arsenal Station which was known as the 'Assembly Rooms.'

A brand new cinema was opened eventually in New Road next to the 'Gun' public house and opposite the Grand Depot Barracks. This was a very up-to-date and comfortable place with free tea and biscuits at matinees. This was named the "New Cinema" (now a motor show-room) and was actually much earlier than 'The Cinema' opposite the

Market which we regarded as the last word and which boasted a small orchestra.

L. M. ALLEN (Bournemouth): The article on Upstairs Cinemas reminded me of a visit I made to an Upstairs Theatre many years ago. At the top end of O'Connell Street in Dublin, my wife and I saw an imposing facade for the Garrick Theatre. The play advertised was one still appearing in the West End of London, a brief excerpt had recently been shown on TV. We were both curious to know the end of the play and decided to pay an evening visit. Seats were bookable so we reserved two stalls. In due course we arrived for the commencement at 8.0 p.m. Nobody was about so we climbed two flights of stairs and found an empty pay box. After creating a great deal of noise an actress appeared and ushered us into a room containing about twenty rows of seats, a stage which extended the breadth of the room and nobody else. We sat in solitary state for twenty minutes when two other people arrived, five minutes later the curtain rose and the play began. Considering the stage limitations, small with no wings, the performance was quite good and we certainly enjoyed the experience of being members of an audience that was outnumbered by the eight artistes on the stage.

F. R. LOWE (Derby): Why did the Nelson Lee Library have four Series - or possibly five Series if we count from No. 112? Was it because, mostly, of a sales decline in each period, and the New Series were introduced to boost it up? This was how it always seemed to strike me, in those days.

I often wonder if at No. 112, or in 1925, the N.L. could have been enlarged to something like the size of the Gem or Magnet, but still retained its 'Old Series' appearance; this would have enhanced its future, without need for further New Series, and also would have given it a much longer life.

JOHN TOMLINSON (Burton-on-Trent): I am interested in the fact that Danny has reached in his reading of "The Gem" the "Seven Schoolboys and Solomon" series. I thought this was great, but am partly prejudiced as, like yourself, I specially enjoy tales featuring the characters you refer to as "the star seven." Apart from Cardew (featured in one story) there was no other St. Jim's character taking part. At a time when there was a glut of characters on the St. Jim's stage and substitute writers were starring minor (sometimes very minor) figures, this series must have been a welcome pleasure and relief to the readers.

R. HIBBERT (Sandbach): Now that the Post Office is issuing stamps commemorating 'Literary Anniversaries' - on July 28th stamps appeared commemorating John Keats (died 150 years ago), Thomas Gray (died 200 years ago), Sir Walter Scott (born 200 years ago) - is it too soon to start lobbying for a stamp commemorating the birth of Charles Hamilton? He was born in 1875, was he not?

If we put pressure - either as individuals or as a group on the Post Office Philatelic Bureau, 2-4 Waterloo Place, Edinburgh, EH1 0BE they might turn out a stamp in 1975. After all the School Story is thought of as something peculiarly English and Charles Hamilton is the greatest writer of school stories.

I asked my younger son - a literary minded lad, but one who is keen on the early Gems - what he thought of the idea. He was shocked. Said it was silly. "Putting Frank Richards on a level with Thomas Gray!!!" I don't know that I was doing that, but when I think of some of the commemoratives the Post Office has put out I don't think it's as silly as all that. I see that in August they're going to commemorate 100 years of Rugby Union and I can't think that that's more important than 100 years of Charles Hamilton.
