

STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS DIGEST

VOL. 37

No. 441

SEPTEMBER 1983

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A Word from the Skipper.

TRANSLATIONS AND UPDATINGS
INCREASE THE FAULTS OF A WORK
AND SPOIL ITS BEAUTY.

DID THEY WRITE ABOUT CHARACTERS THEY HATED?

Recently some of our contributors have commented on writers who disliked the characters whose adventures they created. Conan Doyle disliked his most famous creation, Sherlock Holmes, it has been said in the past. Agatha Christie is reputed to have said that she wished she had never invented Poirot and Richmal Crompton, according to some reports I have read, often wished she had never thought up her delightful William. I take that all with a grain of salt.

I had a good deal of correspondence with Mrs. Christie, and often corresponded with and met Richmal Crompton. To me, at least, both these writers always expressed rightful pride in the inventions of their genius. Sherlock Holmes, William, and Poirot each made their respective creators rich and famous. It is impossible to think that those creators disliked the children of their brains.

Doyle, of course, certainly tried to bump off Sherlock on one occasion. He might have wished to turn to something new. If so, there was really nothing to stop him doing so, but he brought his famous tec back on the scene. Mrs. Ariadne Oliver, the Christie character, usually believed to be an autobiographical picture of Christie herself, often stated in the story that she "wished she had never made her detective a Finn". But it is hard to believe that Mrs. Christie ever regretted making Poirot a Belgian.

Of course, with the great number of those who penned the stories of Sexton Blake and also with those who wrote sub tales of the Hamilton characters and schools, we have another kettle of fish entirely. Of all the Blake stories I have read, I always felt that Pierre Quiroule and Lewis Jackson were the only ones who had a real love for Tinker, and, in consequence, wrote with warmth about him.

I have always believed that, of the Hamilton sub writers, the only ones who had a love, perhaps superficial, for the characters were Samways and Down, and they tried hard to copy the Hamilton style. Down, in my view, was possibly the most successful of them all, as he concentrated on light, flimsy plots or lack of plots, and did not seem to try to "take over" the characters as some others did.

For most of them, obviously, it was merely a job, and, in consequence, their stories lacked warmth. There was often a glut of sentimentality, but real warmth is another matter.

If, actually, they disliked the characters of which they wrote - understandable in a way - then clearly they should have gone in for inventing characters of their own and have left another man's creations alone.

ANISEED BALLS AND THE REST

Remember the sweets we enjoyed as children? Mackintosh's Toffee De Luxe, Packer's Crispets, American Gums, Everlasting Strips, Fry's Plain Chocolate (a big penny bar divided into four sections), Liquorice Cuttings - and Aniseed Balls. I loved Aniseed Balls. You bought them in any sweet shop - 16 a real penny or, maybe, 24 for a real penny.

Today, in a chemist's shop in Fleet, I saw a huge jar on the counter, filled with Aniseed Balls. I couldn't believe my eyes. But there was a big label on the jar - Aniseed Balls. I was tempted. I looked for the price. There it was - 1p each. One pee! Each! 2½d in real money. Aniseed Balls, which used to cost one real penny for 16 or more of them, are now 2½d each. I didn't stay to work out the rate of inflation. And, alas, I didn't stay to buy a pennorth of them.

THE C.D. ANNUAL FOR 1983

With this issue of C.D. comes to you the order form for the 1983 Annual. In spite of many vicissitudes I accepted the assurance of so many readers that Christmas would not be Christmas without the Annual. To make sure of a copy you should order early. In these times it is not possible to print many extra to allow for late-comers. Next month I hope to find space to tell you of the good things in store.

As usual, on the order form is space for you to send your season's greetings to your friends or to advertise your wants or what you have for sale. The Annual is a fine medium for these, and if you feel inclined to use it for same, you will be helping to keep the wheels turning.

My grateful thanks go out once more for your kind and helpful letters concerning Madam's illness. I am in sackcloth and ashes that I have been unable to reply, but your letters have been very deeply appreciated. Madam is out of hospital now. Her progress, so far, is very slow, so I ask for your continued understanding.

THE EDITOR

Danny's Diary

AUGUST 1933

All the month the Modern Boy has gone merrily on its adventurous way. "Biggles on the Trail" led the way in the air story of the Great War. Captain Justice, Midge & Co. starred in "The Forest of Terror". "Hurricane Huskies" was the title of the one in the series about Crackerjack Charlie and his team of six dogs in the Yukon.

Next week, "Quits!" is the Biggles tale; "The Burke Lake Derby" is the Yukon story; and "Stranded on Stellaris" is the Captain Justice yarn.

In the third week George E. Rochester started a new series of Bushranger stories, the opening one being "Buckaroo"; "Biggles in the Trenches" is the flying tale; and "Men of Steel" is the Captain Justice ditto. In week number 4 Biggles stars in "The Dragon's Lair"; Capt. Justice stars in "The Dauntless Five"; and the Buckaroo tale is "The Outlaw's Revenge". In the last Modern Boy of the month there is "Biggles' Pay-Off!"; Captain Justice features in "The Mechanical Giants"; and "Keeper of the Trail" is the Buckaroo story. The Rio Kid picture tale has gone on all through the month (stories in pictures are not for me) and Percy F. Westerman's serial "Standish of the Royal Constabulary" has gone on its way. I wonder when King of the Islands will be coming back.

In Parliament they voted, three to one, to allow any cinemas to open on Sundays if they want to. Previously it rested with the Town Councils, so the number of cinemas open in the land on Sundays was quite small.

While on the subject of cinemas, we have seen some good pictures this month, and they are all in my Diary. Here they are: James Cagney in "Picture Snatcher", a snappy tale of a kind of gangster who takes scandal photos of people when they're not looking (Cagney is a great favourite of mine); Marie Dressler and Polly Moran in "Happy Days are Here Again" (it has a lovely theme

song which keeps cropping up and makes my feet tap); Regis Toomey and Anita Paige in "Soldiers of the Storm"; Ramon Novarro and Evelyn Laye in "A Night in Cairo"; Elissa Landi in "The Warrior Husband"; Lionel Barrymore in "Sweepings"; Douglas Fairbank Jr. in "The Narrow Corner"; and Katherine Hepburn in "Christopher Strong". Not really a great month of films, but could be worse.

The chums of Greyfriars, in the Magnet, are on a hiking holiday. "I'm happy when I'm hiking," sings Bob Cherry. And they have with them a Holiday Annual in which is the secret of the whereabouts of the loot from a bank raid - and a number of unpleasant people are trailing the chums in order to get hold of that Annual. And Ponsonby of Highcliffe is also after that Annual.

"Down on the Farm" finds the chums in Little Puddleton with a local feud going on. And Ponsonby, still in his eton suit, according to the artist, plays his part in this romp. Next week, "The Hunted Hikers". This week we meet Mr. Bunce who has a wooden leg, which he wields effectively against Herbert Higgs and others. And now Lord Mauleverer has joined the hikers.

After that comes "The Spectre of Hoad Castle", the haunted Hoad Castle being in Oxfordshire. Next comes "Coker, the Hiker", with the great Horace joining up with the party of which he tries to take control. In this one we visit Ponsonby Park, the home of the iniquitous Pon, and we meet Colonel Ponsonby, Pon's nunks. Final tale of the month in the Magnet is "The Kidnapped Hiker". Only Bunter knows what's happened to Bob Cherry who has disappeared - and Bunter won't tell till he's had his supper.

And that's not the end of it. At the end of September the Greyfriars chums are still hiking away on holiday - while I've been back at school a fortnight. I think I'll go to Greyfriars.

"Allison of Avonshire", the Magnet serial has just finished its run. I wonder what it was like.

Two excellent stories in the Schoolboys' Own Library this month. "Billy Bunter's Bodyguard" is the second half of the old Magnet series about Billy Bunter in charge of Whiffles' Circus. Simply great. The second tale is a St. Jim's one this month. It is "The Missing Schoolboy". Sidney Troope is the owner of a racing

stable which includes the famous winning runner Koh-i-Noor. And Troope gets kidnapped to stop the horse from running in the big race. Wildrake takes a hand, and all ends happily. Fine tale, picked out from somewhere in the Gem.

There has been a terrible hurricane in Cuba, and 80 people died in the affair.

Two towns have been made Boroughs this month. They are Wood Green in North London and Dartford in Kent. The Lord Mayor of London visited both towns to present their Charter of Incorporation. So they are celebrating in Wood Green and Dartford tonight.

Some tip-top tales in the Gem. The month started with "Gussy's Sacrifice". Somebody has thrown tar over Mr. Selby. Gussy knows that the culprit was his brother, Wally, and, because he refuses to give the information, Gussy is to be flogged. So he runs away from school. In "The Circus Schoolboy" Gussy joins up with Tomsonio's Circus, and becomes a riding star. In this story comes the tramp, Dry Billy Bowers, who has turned up now and then in different tales. And Gussy falls in love with Clotilde for a while - until he finds out that there is an understanding between Clotilde and Jack Talbot. A lovely couple of connected stories.

Next "The Mystery Schoolboy" in which a new boy named Thurnell comes to St. Jim's, but he is really a man of about twenty who is there to admit someone to rob the Head's safe.

Then, to wind up the month, two holiday tales. "Tom Merry & Co Go Gay" in which Miss Fawcett is ordered to the south of France for her health, Tom Merry goes with her, and takes a party along. There's a visit to the Casino, and there is also a carnival. A very colourful yarn. The sequel is "The Black Domino" with a visit to Monte Carlo - and a man in a black domino robs Miss Fawcett. Figgins' uncle, Major Figgins, is in this tale, and he traps the thief who proves to be another nephew of the Major's. Another nice couple.

The St. Frank's serial - "St. Frank's versus Foo Chow" - has continued all the month.

NOTES ON THIS MONTH'S "DANNY'S DIARY"

S. O. L. No. 203 comprised the second half of the delightful Whiffles' Circus series of the Magnet of midsummer 1928. S. O. L. No. 204 "The Missing Schoolboy" is the 3-story Sidney Troope series of the Gem of the late summer of 1926. The 3 stories fitted snugly into the S. O. L. medium.

Of the 1933 Gem stories, "Gussy's Sacrifice" and "The Circus Schoolboy" had been "Honour Bright" and "The Swell of the Circus" very early in 1910; "The Mystery Schoolboy" had been entitled "The St. Jim's Surprise" which had been separated from the circus tale by two sub stories in early 1910; "Tom Merry & Co. Go Gay" and "The Black Domino" had been "Tom Merry's Carnival" and "Tom Merry at Monte Carlo" in the Spring of 1910.

It is interesting to see that it is 50 years since Sunday cinemas became generally permissible. Before that, the majority of cinemas did not open on Sundays. The town of Gravesend in Kent, where I lived as a child, was one of the few which had Sunday cinemas from very early times, though the performance was not allowed to commence before 8 p. m., after Church services had ended. I recall going, as a small boy, to St. James's Church in Gravesend with my mother for the evening service. When it was over we crossed the road and went to the Popular Picture Palace where they were showing a long film, all in colour, entitled "The Life of Christ". I remember we thought it a magnificent picture. I feel fairly sure it was an Italian film, released by the Cines Company of those days. It was the only time I ever knew my mother to go to the pictures on a Sunday.

* * * * *

OBITUARIES

Another grand old-timer has left us. We regret to record the death of Howard Pipe of Westbury-on-Trym, which occurred in mid-July. Mr. Pipe was a bachelor and a rather lonely man, but it pleases us to know that he derived very great pleasure from the Digest. He was a founder member of the South-West branch of our Old Boys' Book Club.

Our deepest sympathy goes out to our friend and contributor, Mr. William Lister of Blackpool, whose wife Florence died recently after a short illness. Mr. and Mrs. Lister had been married for nearly 50 years.

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WANTED: Sexton Blake Library 2nd series, 3, 20, 53, 57, 76, 101, 143, 151, 201, 214, 221, 266, 281, 316, 433, 435; Union Jacks before 1918.

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BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

At the time of writing these few words the heatwave is still with us. The heat is not conducive to making our brains work but I do hope some of you have thought about writing something for the Annual this year. I already have one article for the Christmas number of the C. D. but would like to have another to make up the pages of Blakiana. If anyone wants to read the Christmas tales in the Union Jack will they please apply early for them?

THERE ARE RELICS - and Relics!

by Raymond Cure

According to the dictionary the word 'Relics' can cover - part of a holy person's body or belongings kept after death for reference, or memento or souvenir. Objects interesting because of age or association! Under that heading, as an Old Age pensioner, Senior Citizen or whatever, you could eventually qualify as a relic providing you attain the age of 100. The Queen's telegram, your photo in the local paper and cards from folk you never knew existed. Reach one hundred and you become an interesting object.

However, in the "Affair of the Roman Relics" Edwy Searles Brooks comes up with an object of interest in the form of a chest full of Roman Relics - Gold ones. Now anything like this causes trouble. Of the two men who discovered it almost by accident, one was dead within twelve hours.

If you stand at the side of the collapsed floor and gaze below you will see what the trouble is all about. With two legs protruding from the treasure chest and a dagger in his back its a case of "Gordon Croxley - this is your life" or rather the end of it.

It is said that "One man's meat is another one's poison" in this case the misfortune that befell Gordon Croxley becomes our good fortune, it opens up before us a vista of crime detection and brings Waldo and Sexton Blake on the scene.

Now, I am all for relics, I have a 'yen' for them. Show me an old castle or cathedral, or old church and I am all 'agog'. The baronial halls I have walked down and the things I have seen and

handled that were here before I was born and that will be here after I am gone, are legion. They haunt me. I think of the eyes that have seen them, of the hands that have handled them down the years that have now passed into eternity. But I have never had the good fortune to find or even to see a well-filled Treasure Chest. However, and more to the point, the late Mr. Gordon Croxley had and a fat lot of good that did for him. To add insult to injury even the dagger that did for him was a Roman relic which no doubt, had punctured many human bodies in its time.

Every murder story needs one or two strong suspects. Mr. Daniel Gregson had been trying to borrow £1,000 from the deceased and though refused, was with him when the treasure was discovered. Its obvious to all "Who Dun It", you and I, Mr. Croxley's family, the police all suspect Danny. That is, all except Sexton Blake.

From hereon the reader is carried on apace. Waldo the Wonder man gets wind of the treasure, so he puts in an appearance. Now while you are working out who the murderer is and if Waldo gets his sticky fingers on the loot and if Daniel Gregson is comfortable in his prison cell, and above all, if the victim's wife is holding up amid the buckets of tears she has been shedding, turn your eyes on Sexton Blake. There are twists and turns to this tale that only Edwy Searles Brooks can conceive. Could it be Mrs. Gordon Croxley? definitely no! Sexton Blake unravels the mystery. You see there is no Mrs. Croxley. There is a drag woman impersonator, a Vivian Freeman wanted for the murder of his wife eight years before. Croxley agreed that Freeman should pose as his wife and cook up crime, always holding the threat of exposure over poor old Vivian. So, no tears for Mr. & Mrs. Croxley but let's have a loud hurrah as Daniel Gregson steps out of jail into the arms of his weeping wife. Thank you Sexton Blake. This tale is related in Union Jack No. 1118 and can be borrowed from the Sexton Blake Lending Library.

THE SECRET OF THE SURGERY BY WARWICK JARDINE

(2nd SBL 697)

(from Ann Clarke)

The day I read in the CD of the death of Warwick Jardine I

was reading one of his stories - "The Secret of the Surgery", a prosaic title for a story as nightmarish as "The Island of Dr. Moreau". An ape-headed leopard pursued by Egyptians in an English woodland, and in the underground temple of Isis:

"Half-veiled by the haze of drifting incense-smoke, the creature lying there by the feet of the girl in the ivory chair was so perfect in its sleek, feline form that not until the haze had thinned, and he had seen its fair human head, could Tinker have credited that what he saw was not one of the leopards from the Dower House, but the nightmare creation of human hands! An androsphinx - such as Dr. Schult believed essential to the full worship of the moon-goddess; a perfect living counterpart of the strange stone monsters that seemed to gaze so steadfastly across the temple floor!

As he watched, with swimming senses, he saw the creature stir and lift its head.

For a moment the curiously placid human face was turned half towards him. A face unknown to Tinker. But he had no need to wonder whose face it was - and it was all that he could do to choke back the cry of sheer startled horror that had surged into his throat. For there could only be one answer. "

The story begins in Dr. Lepper's surgery in the East End, when Andrew Mayne finds the doctor has gone away, leaving Dr. Schult in charge. Mayne meets briefly "a girl called Cora, a remarkably graceful and pretty girl with a vaguely frightened face", and that is the last that is seen of her until Tinker sees the androsphinx in the temple.

Mayne also meets a man with leopards for sale, who is later found drowned, Mayne is suspicious and goes back to the surgery to investigate. Blake and Tinker are drawn in by a friend of Cora, who is worried by her disappearance. They discover Andrew Mayne held prisoner at the surgery. They free him but he agrees to go back so that they can follow where he is taken.

Both Mayne and Tinker find themselves trapped in the house above the temple of Isis - Tinker believing that Sexton Blake is lying in hospital in London. At the last moment, when another

androsphinx is about to be created, one of the Egyptian attendants shows his true colours - Sexton Blake of course.

Dr. Schult really believes in the cult of Isis, but his associates are only interested in the money of the woman backing the cult (Cora's aunt). When the doctor discovers this, from Tinker's delirium, he shoots down their plane as it takes off with the androsphinx on board.

"The cult was finished - he knew that. It was enough that he had had vengeance on those who had blasphemed against the goddess Isis."

* * * * *

Nelson Lee Column

BULLYING PREFECTS

by R. J. Godsave

The 'Bullies League' series of the Nelson Lee Library written by E. S. Brooks in 1919 o.s. 195-204 shows the power of the St. Frank's prefects, especially when the College House and the Ancient House prefects combine forces. Since the prefects of the College House and they had no authority over the juniors of the Ancient House, then of course, the Ancient House prefects had no authority over the College House juniors. By taking advantage of this situation the juniors of both Houses were of the belief that Walter Starke and his fellow prefects were powerless in their dealings with juniors of other Houses.

It was by combining forces that those prefects and seniors who had a tendency towards bullying made themselves a force to be reckoned with. Since the Remove juniors could not openly oppose the prefects it was necessary to act in secret. The formation of a secret society led by Nipper was extremely successful in beating the bullies in more senses than one. The real aim of securing power was the desire of such prefects as Starke, Kenmore and their friends to force the Remove to act as fags in place of the somewhat unsatisfactory Third Formers.

It is interesting to note that the bullying prefect Walter

Starke was expelled from St. Frank's in the series following the 'Bullies League' for falsely accusing Nipper of striking him a violent blow on the forehead with a walking stick, whereas Starke had actually been knocked down by a passing motor car. Whether Brooks realized when he wrote the series that Starke's offence was so grave that it would have been impossible for him to be re-admitted to St. Frank's or sent to another school. Thus Brooks in writing a thrilling series did so at the cost of being deprived of one of his leading characters.

By contrast, the bullying of the St. Frank's seniors was an extremely mild affair to that of public schools of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and, indeed, well into the twentieth. In the past, of the two public schools in which the prefectorial privileges were dominant were Winchester and Harrow. The unchecked brutality of Winchester prefects has been revealed by far too many observers to be ignored. One such victim was forced to be on tap for unlimited fagging, and having so much to do began to fear the frequent canings from prefects for cutting school activities such as football, etc. These canings, perhaps thrashings would be a more accurate description, of junior boys were not just the usual six but were so severe that the life of a boy was in some danger for some days. That authority did not intervene was because of the widely held belief that it was best for disciplinary purposes that boys should control boys.

Usually where prefects have the right to cane no harm is done by what is in effect a form of legal bullying. Generally speaking, boys in their 'teens are unsuitable persons to be entrusted with a form of punishment undesirable, except as a last resort. There is no doubt that fagging has greatly decreased in public schools, and does not exist at all in other schools. Prefects appointed and sensibly employed play a useful part in any educational system. The law of the jungle, which was rife in the past, has in modern times largely disappeared.

"WHAT A LOT OF PEOPLE!"

by C. H. Churchill

When one considers the huge number of Juniors introduced

into the N. L. L. it rather makes the mind boggle. Altogether 90 boys were listed by Bob Blythe in his Bibliography in the old "small" series, 13 more in the 1st new and another 17 in the 2nd new. No wonder the Remove had to be split up into two forms.

A goodly number, of course, were introduced in the very early days as a start, that is in the first few stories after No. 112 with very little written about them. They were just to build up the scene as it were. A small number such as Kemp and Young were only mentioned a few times and as time passed could be considered to have left.

The vast majority of newcomers afterwards either turned up during a series about something else or just starred in a single story, such as Fatty Little, Larry Scott, etc., but many did have a whole series to themselves viz Reggie Pitt, Levi, Singleton and so on.

Two characters came to St. Frank's in the Boys Realm in 1919. They were Timothy Tucker and Augustus Hart. The latter was known as Hart-Hyde in the Realm but when mentioned in the Lee was just Hart. Why, we do not know. After sometime he just disappeared and was not mentioned for some years. We must presume that E. S. B. just forgot about him.

Looking at the large cast it strikes one how gifted E. S. B. was to invent them all and then think of a different plot to last some 8 to 10 stories.

The result of all this meant that as time went on, with so many new characters arriving many of the old favourites tended to be ignored, which was always a pity to those readers who had been taking the Lee for years.

Just as a footnote I would like to say that I do not believe Mr. Brooks provided the information contained in the Portrait Gallery. In this the family name of the Duke of Somerton was given as Cavendish whereas when he arrived in August 1918 (O. S. Nos. 166 to 169) he stated in No. 168, Page 14 that his family name was Ffyfe-Browne. I do not think E. S. B. would have made such a blunder.

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 241. THE JEW IN THE HAMILTON STORY

My two good friends, Mr. A. V. Packer and Mr. E. Kadish, have sent me copies of an article "A Jew at St. Jim's", written by Michael Katanka, which they have come across in the Jewish Chronicle.

Mr. Katanka, presumably himself Jewish, was a bookseller and publisher in Stanmore, Middlesex, and died recently.

The article, in its broad survey of Hamiltonia, is covering familiar ground, but it strikes a fascinating note, one previously not touched upon to the best of my recollection, as it casts an eye on the way the Jew was handled in the Hamilton schools. Mr. Katanka decides that "Hamilton's work is entirely free of any form of racism or antisemitism."

Mr. Katanka wrote:-

"The stories in "Magnet" No. 216 (1912) and "Gem" Nos. 394 and 397 (1915) are similar in content. Both Monty Newland and Dick Julian are good-looking boys, well supplied with cash, true-blue British to the core, good at games and can hold their own in a fight. They are hard workers and successful in their studies. Both are orphans and have uncles (Isaac and Moses) who are their guardians and who wish them to have a better chance than they had in their youth. Of course their uncles are moneylenders and have foreign accents, but although their rates of interest are excessive they have hearts of gold.

In these stories the Jewish boys meet with a certain amount of name-calling at first (sheeney, etc.) and are made fun of by the bounders and black sheep. However their prowess with fisticuffs soon puts a stop to this and they end as heroes of unimpeachable character."

A passing thought. Here we have an example of a minor weakness in the Hamilton writing. With three long-running sagas, side by side, a repetition of themes was unavoidable, and, often, quite pleasant. But to repeat themes without any variations - to re-introduce the same sidelines and characteristics in the themes -

was really quite unnecessary and a bit of author-laziness. It gave the regular reader the feeling of "this is where I came in".

Personally, I always found the stories of the early Newland and Julian just a shade patronising, but it may just have been that I was on the wrong wavelength. I think it unlikely that the author meant them so. While a much, much later story with Newland starring, "Harry Wharton's Amazing Relation" was not only "amazing", but I would think, for the average reader, rather an embarrassing affair.

Hamilton never let us forget that Newland and Julian were "Jewish juniors", and my long experience as a schoolmaster tells me that it wasn't really true to school life. For many years I had three Jewish brothers in my school at Surbiton. The elder was Captain of the School for a year or more. They all entered into everything. I never saw any evidence that anybody at all bothered two hoots about their origins. I have said before, what I strongly believe, that boys at school are accepted for the way they behave and not for what they have, or their religion, or anything else apart from their characters.

Possibly there was not a shade of difference between the Gem's Julian and the Magnet's Newland, but St. Jim's always showed less bias in any form than Greyfriars and Rookwood. There was very little snobbery at St. Jim's, and that is one of its charms. Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence were scholarship boys. There was some fairly good-natured reference to their scholarships in a couple of tales, after which everybody - probably the author included - forgot all about it. And my experience is that that is true to real school life.

In my lifetime I have had large numbers of Jewish friends. Without one exception they have been excellent citizens, charming people, and possessing a wonderful sense of humour. And never a thin-skinned one among them. The two Hamilton creations were typical of them.

To be strictly accurate, Julian was introduced to the Gem in "The Jew of St. Jim's" at the end of August 1915, immediately following the famous story "The Housemaster's Homecoming". The sequel, "The Honour of a Jew" (depicted on our cover) appeared 3

weeks later in September 1915. The first tale was reprinted in the autumn of 1937; "The Honour of a Jew" was not reprinted.

* * * * *

THE ROOKWOOD STORY COMPETITION by W. O. G. Lofts

A very interesting item, recently come across in The Boys' Friend in 1922, was the short Rookwood Story Competition, which as far as I know has never been mentioned in the hobby before. Most readers are aware of the famous (or infamous) Greyfriars Story Competition that H. A. Hinton the Magnet editor launched in 1915. This was simply an idea to try and get further substitute writers for his papers, due no doubt to so many of the regular ones away on War-Service. He was successful to some degree as E. L. Ransome, Will Gibbons and W. L. Catchpole's names were in the winning entries. All later became writers at Amalgamated Press in their own right, as well as contributing to the Hamilton saga.

In the Magnet competition readers had to write a full-length Greyfriars story, but in the Rookwood one they had to finish off a short story in no more than 300 words. In the Boys' Friend issue No. 1099, dated 1st July, 1922, the following announcement appeared ...

A Chance For Budding Authors

Rookwood Story Competition.

Story: The Rookwood Tiger.

Readers have to finish the story in not more than 300 words.

1st Prize: £2; Second Prize: £1; 3rd Prize: 10/-. Two prizes at 5/- each, and eight at half-a-crown.

We may find a budding 'Owen Conquest'. Now is your chance to beat 'Owen Conquest' at his own game.

The entry was repeated the following week, when the short story about some exploits at Rookwood with a tiger-skin (which I doubt was penned by the genuine 'Owen Conquest') had to be completed. The winning story was published in No. 1112, 30th September, 1922, by ..

Stanley E. Pratley,
3 Cross Street,
Essex Road,
Islington, N. I.
London.

This was, to be fair, quite good, and written in the 'Owen Conquest' mould, but as far as my records show he never had any other story published in The Amalgamated Press boys' fiction field. Nor, were any of the minor prize-winners names published. At least Mr. Pratley kept the Islington, North London area on the map where boys' fiction personalities were concerned. Thomas Peckett Prest greatest of all penny-blood writers lived there, so did Warwick Reynolds. Two Heads of juvenile fiction, R. T. Eves and Montague Haydon were born there. Last but not least our late Bob Blythe the Nelson Lee expert was also born there, as well as Basil Reynolds the artist.

* * * * *

REVIEWS

THE JOKER OF GREYFRIARS

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker Special: £15)

Here we have ample proof of the staggering, unwavering popularity of Charles Hamilton's marvellous school tales of Greyfriars. They entertained our grandfathers and they go on entertaining our grandchildren. Here we have the first volume, produced now in limp cloth covers, of some of the earlier successes in the Howard Baker output - second time round on the Howard Baker Circuit. It was inevitable, of course.

This one is the superb series about Christopher Clarence Carboy, the youth with a propensity for practical jokes. It comes from the autumn of 1928. A 5-story series with the writer at the very peak of his powers. Not so much acclaimed as some better known later series, but actually, totally centred at school, and one of the best yarns Frank Richards ever wrote. A real dream of a tale. Just perfect.

Also in the volume, from the same star year of 1928, we have the delicious "Who Punched Prout?" couple, with Coker yapping that he would like to punch his form-master on the nose - and then - somebody does it and Coker is blamed. To wind up, a single delight, "The Form-Masters' Feud", the sort of thing that Hamilton did so well.

THE GREYFRIARS HIKERS

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker Special: £15)

This is the second volume in the new Howard Baker series - second time round the track and well worth waiting for. This is the 9-story summer holiday series which our Danny was reading exactly 50 years ago - in the late summer and early autumn of 1933, to be precise. Set in the unmatched (in those days) English countryside it is one of the best of the holiday series, with Coker and Ponsonby popping on and off the scene, and some shifty folk on the trail of Bob Cherry's Holiday Annual which contains the clue to the whereabouts of the loot from a bank raid. Far superior to the Water Lily series, in this humble reviewer's opinion, and a joy for all. Turn to this month's Danny's Diary and see how Danny got on with it exactly 50 years ago.

DEVOTION, EMOTION, RELIGION & DEATH

Tommy Keen with
G. P. McDermott

Tommy Keen ends his essay with the comment "Thinking back to all the jeers and snide remarks to which the book 'Eric' has been subjected, perhaps we can blame 'Eric' for the tragedies in many of our beloved schools". He is probably right. The Gem sub tale "The Pluck of Edgar Lawrence" certainly had its basic episode lifted from that famous book rather blatantly, though the tale is not considered in the essay. But, of course, "Eric", though unnecessarily over-tragic, was well-written, was well-plotted, and had some good characterisation. Some of the Gem and Magnet tales in the class were not.

All the same, the essay, lavishly illustrated from the stories considered, is full of interest, even though some of the tales some of us may have found mildly embarrassing in their sentimentality.

But the Gem's "His Brother's Keeper" 3-story series was probably the best series that Hamilton wrote for the Gem in the years of the First World War.

A well-worth-while effort. Privately published, it can only be obtained direct from Mr. Keen for the modest £1. See the advertisement in last month's C. D.

JOHN NEWTON CHANCE

John Newton Chance, who wrote a number of superior Sexton Blake thrillers as John Drummond, died in hospital in Cornwall on the 3rd of August. He was 72.

He was born in Streatham in 1911, son of Dick Newton Chance who for many years was controlling editor of the Amalgamated Press comics department (Comic Cuts, Golden Comic, Puck,

Startler, Happy Days, etc.). From an early age Chance contributed stories both to his father's papers (including the Dane-Detective series in Chips) and many other AP publications (a series of novelettes about 'Red Sword', a kind of latterday Scarlet Pimpernel, was featured in the last days of The Thriller), although unlike most of his peers he successfully branched out into the mainstream of fiction-writing -- starting to write for the BBC at the age of 20, and achieving a notable success with his first thriller Murder In Oils in 1935. Both his publisher Victor Gollancz and the poet and critic Torquemada (E. Powys Mathers) thought highly of his early work. A novel, The Devil Drives (1936), was much praised.

His wartime experiences as a flying instructor with a terror of flying were poignantly yet at the same time amusingly described in his excellent autobiography Yellow Belly (1959). On being invalided out of the RAF in 1944 he went straight back to writing, and embarked upon a period (the 1940s and early 1950s) that was particularly fertile in first-rate thrillers.

He had the gift of encapsulation, and wrote hundreds of short-sharp-shock stories for the London Mystery Magazine, the Evening News, the BBC, etc. Probably his only serious rival in this field was the prolific Eric Allen. A number of his twist-ending tales were collected in The Night Spiders (1964) under the pseudonym John Lymington, the name he normally used for his excellent psychological SF novels. These usually hinged on some kind of disaster overtaking the planet Earth, and were set firmly within that peculiarly English science fiction tradition to a certain extent pioneered, and certainly made critically acceptable, by the late John Wyndham. One, The Night of the Big Heat (1959), was made into not a bad film.

As well as a number of children's books (some written in collaboration with his wife Shirley), he undertook a 'novelist's reconstruction' for the publishers Hodder & Stoughton of the Rillington Place murders, going against the tide of general opinion by pointing the finger at Evans rather than Christie.

Latterly he was staggeringly prolific, sometimes publishing

as many as six or even seven books a year. Robert Hale, his main publisher since 1957, could happily sell all he could produce, and although he was rarely backlisted each new book was, and is, extremely popular in the rental- and public-library field. A professional to his finger-tips he was invariably well ahead of deadline, and Hale still have in the pipeline four books a year until the end of 1988. His entire output was probably akin to 180 books over 50 years.

John Newton Chance had a taste for the 'Impossible Crime' genre and a rich talent for describing the eerie and the bizarre, all of which was put to stunning effect in thrillers such as Screaming Fog (1944), The Eye In Darkness (1946), Coven Gibbet (1948) and The Man In My Shoes (1952), and Blakes such as The Manor House Menace (SBL 3rd, 75), The Painted Dagger (86), The Mystery of the Deserted Camp (169), The Town of Shadows (182) and The House on the River (266). Indeed, for sheer sustained creative effort, his Sexton Blakes may be counted as his finest contribution to the thriller genre, not simply because they were Blakes, but because overall the quality of writing and plotting was so astonishingly high. In my view a strong case may be made out for Chance to be considered as the best detective-story writer, in the adult sense, in the entire Blake canon.

J.A.

* * * * *

The Postman Called

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

Mrs. BETTY HOPTON (Burton-on-Trent): I love Danny's Diary. How nice to go back for a while to the time when terrorism, muggings, and hi-jacks were words that most of us had never heard, when people took pride in their work, when things were made to last, and food was the real thing, not the tasteless instant packet rubbish we are fobbed off with today. Our cat, Purrfit, says that he knows exactly just how the Princess Snowee feels about the present hot weather. He just can't find a cool spot anywhere.

BILL LOFTS (London): I think our editor's theory is right. As the

St. Frank's characters had been introduced into the St. Jim's stories, it was logical that when The Nelson Lee Library folded it was the best paper to amalgamate into. Apart from this after being banded about in various departments - The Magnet editor told me he was saddled with it in the end, when it was something he did not want, so being in the Companion papers section it went in The Gem, hoping that St. Frank's readers that were left would swell the also ailing Gem's circulation. Ranger was actually another department, when with 'Frank Richards' writing a new series - plus the power of his name - they probably did not want St. Frank's stories anyway that had lost their appeal to readers. In answer to Margery Woods query 'Johnnie' appeared in Schoolgirls Own Library No. 402, dated 1933, written by Joan Vincent who was really Reginald Kirkham. Curiously Derek Adley had this copy at one time for years, but eventually let it go in favour of Morcove.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: The suggestion that the Gem of 50 years ago was ailing is surely guesswork or hearsay. In any case, the ailment can hardly have been very serious for the paper was to last for well over another 6 years until the war closed it down along with many other magazines.)

PETER HANGER (Northampton): Further to my suspicions of the Loder-Captain series. I have just discovered that there is a Grant in the Rookwood Third (Lovell's Minor series 1919). This adds to my suspicion rather than detracts from it, for sub-writers would be more likely to mix these things than Hamilton. In any case, that still leaves four non-Hamilton names in the Captain series. It is, so I understand, generally accepted that the "official lists" are not accurate. This being so, surely the question we should be asking is WHY?

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Hamilton created Cousin Ethel Maynard. A little later he was calling her Ethel Cleveland. A much bigger mix-up than introducing a Third Form Grant into Greyfriars, I would think.)

D. J. MARTIN (Southampton): I have a little problem. I am not happy with Gem No. 1254, "The Treaty of St. Jim's". It does not

ring true to me. Is it a sub or not? I am sure Hamilton would not have been guilty of using the conjunction "and" four times in a paragraph of only 30 words. It seems quite out of character. Perhaps the experts will enlighten me. The paragraph in question is the second in the story.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: "The Treaty of St. Jim's" was a reprint of Gem No. 1 (new series) "The Gathering of the Clans". The par was exactly the same in the original of 1908. The conjunction may have been repeated for the sake of effect, but I would say that there is no possible probable shadow of doubt that Hamilton wrote the story. It had a sequel the following week.)

W. T. THURBON (Cambridge): I am writing to comment on a small Hamilton item I have just noticed. I have not much in the way of a collection now, but I have one or two bound volumes of the Marvel. I have just noticed, at the foot of the last page of No. 261, of 23 January, 1909, the following in the Editor's chat:-

"By the way, Charles Hamilton, known to you as the author of so many popular tales, has just written a rollicking new football song, entitled 'On the Ball'. The price is only sixpence from any music shop."

I've had this volume of the Marvel for years, yet never noticed the item before. Hamilton wrote a few football stories for the early Marvels, and of course, his rugger story about Inky, before he wrote about Greyfriars in the Magnet.

Strange that after so many years I should have noticed this small paragraph. I wonder if anyone remembers the song? or has come across it later.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: In Edwardian days, Hamilton, in association with his brother-in-law Percy Harrison, wrote a number of songs of which "On the Ball" was one. Another had a title like "Don't Speak to me of Love". Some of them got mention from time to time in the early St. Jim's tales. I have them all, given to me long ago by Chas. Hamilton's sister. I expect there are a few of them about. I had the impression that the composers may have paid for their publication themselves. I do not recall them at all outside the mentions in the stories.)

DON WEBSTER (Bideford): I was intrigued by the reference, in the

July C.D., to the film "If I Had a Million". I well remember it - Charlie Ruggles in the glass shop, George Raft as a down and out who could not pay for a night's kip with a million-dollar bill, and, of course, Chas. Laughton as the clerk giving his boss a "raspberry". What a welcome sight the C.D. is when it plops through my letter-box!

H. HEATH (Windsor): "A Fifth Form Mystery" by Harold Avery was the first book I read by this author. Encouraged by your observations in C.D. October 1980, I have read recently another one - "The Dormitory Flag". It was a longer and more powerful story than the first named, and I think probably it was written earlier. Whilst I agree that Avery, on the evidence of these two books, wrote for the 12-14 year olds, it seems to me that he is an under-rated author. I hope to read more of his work in the near future.

Incidentally about three years ago you mentioned the name of the writer of "Cloyne of Claverhouse" and "Captain of Claverhouse" which appeared in the B.F.L. in June and July 1939. I forget it now. Could you repeat the name, please?

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Whoever wrote the Cloyne tales, it was NOT Wally Hammond the cricketer, as claimed when the stories were serialised in Modern Boy. I, too, forget the name now, though we gave it some time ago. Can somebody oblige?

ESMOND KADISH (Hendon): What a thrill when the "Digest" landed on the front door mat, earlier than expected! Of course, it may have disturbed a few aberrant ants who, in spite of repeated warnings, had strayed into the Remove Passage - but that's their look-out. They ought to feel honoured to have the "Digest" drop on them from the heavens. Was it my imagination, or was there a new style of type in the current issue? I thought it seemed slightly different - easier on the eyes. Not, of course, that the old "Digest" isn't always excellently printed and produced, I hasten to add.

I share the feelings about the disappearance of the "Nelson

Lee" in 1933. I agree it would have been more appropriate for the "Nelson Lee" to have "amalgamated" with the "Ranger" rather than the "Gem". I liked the original Grimslade stories in the "Ranger", (but not much else!) although I thought the "Cheerio Castaways" series dragged on too long.

JOE WILLIAMSON (Wangaratta, Australia): I enjoy the C.D. more than ever these days. I particularly like any articles concerning Greyfriars, and Roger Jenkins is absolutely first-class in this realm.

* * * * *

News of the Old Boys' Book Clubs

LONDON

A highly successful gathering at the Beckenham home of Mary, Alex and Teresa Cadogan took place in ideal weather and with the President of the club present. A happy time was had by all. John Wernham gave a short address. Roy Parsons, in the chair, welcomed Graham McDermott as a new member and Alan and Myra Stewart who had made the journey from Burnham-on-Crouch.

Mary Cadogan exhibited copies of the new impression hardback William books and also the covers of the paperback edition. A quiz on William was won by Brian Doyle. In second place was Tommy Keen and Graham McDermott.

Bob Whiter's quiz was won by Eric Lawrence. Roy Parsons and Roger Jenkins were both in the second place. Three of Bob Whiter's excellent Greyfriars cut-out figures were awarded as prizes.

Mark Jarvis had on show a copy of a booklet on the Rover and its issues from 1945 until 1973.

A tape on Children's Wireless was supplied by Brian Doyle.

"Any Good Rebellions Lately" was the subject of a discourse by Ray Hopkins and dealt with barring outs at St. Jim's and Cliff

House.

Roy Parsons read humorous extracts from the book A. J. Wentworth, B.A.

Votes of thanks were accorded to the Cadogan family and it was au revoir until the next meeting at the Leytonstone home of Reuben and Phyllis Godsave on Sunday, 11th September.

BEN WHITER

NORTHERN

Saturday, 13th August, 1983

Owing to structural alterations, our Club had one of its rare meetings away from the Swarthmore Education Centre. It was perhaps most appropriate, that this, our 400th meeting and therefore a special event in its own right, should be held in the informal environs of "Wharton Lodge" - or, to be more exact, Thornes Vicarage, Wakefield, the home of our Secretary. 10 members - and we were pleased to welcome Harry Barlow's wife - congregated in the spacious lounge in the Vicarage.

Welcoming glasses of sherry were available to all who required them. Our Chairman, in his opening remarks, mentioned how the Northern Club was founded thirty-three years previously - three of the founder members still attending meetings; Norman Smith, Bill Williamson and Harry Barlow. At the first meeting, people had brought along copies of their favourite papers, Magnet, Gem and Nelson Lee and Sexton Blake - and that was how it all started. It perhaps was not realised at the time, that over thirty years later, the Club would still be going strong.

Sample dust jackets of the new William books to be published in September, were passed round for inspection, along with sample covers for the paperback versions - these to be a different design to the hardbacks. Unlike the new Bunter books, these are not to be abridged in any form.

After refreshments, we adjourned to the dining room, where Jack Allison had been spending some time preparing a game. Jack had set out on the table a set of 100 cards, each with the title of

a Magnet story. Although the cards looked colourful in the various designs of text and background, there was a purpose behind it. Each person had to select a favourite title, then the cards that had a similar typescript and coloured border, were eliminated in turn, until the table was cleared. At the very end of the game - causing a lot of amusement - our Club Accountant, Keith Balmforth, added up the grand total of the 10 various years given - result, 400 the very number of that special meeting. It had turned out to be a mathematical square and obviously, Jack had spent a lot of time working it all out, and designing the cards. He was given a round of applause for this very ingenious game. We can always rely on Jack! How appropriate, at this point, for us to depart to Geoffrey's extensive library of old boys' books, and other collections. The library itself is the highlight of any visit. It was a very reluctant crowd that had to draw itself away from the delights of that room at around 9.30 p.m. A very successful meeting - and justly so, for our 400th.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

REPORT ON THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CAMBRIDGE CLUB

An extra meeting was held on 26th June, 1983, to honour one of the club's elder but extremely active statesmen, Bill Thurbon, who was 80 on 25th June. The time soon came to present Bill with a card and a cake specially decorated for the occasion and a present in the form of a writing case from all the members. The card was made for the celebration by Keith Hodgkinson, being a montage of covers of Bill's favourite papers from his youth, i. e. Sexton Blake Library, Union Jack, Marvel, Boys' Friend and The Scout, all surrounding a drawing of a boy scout (Bill's favourite organisation) with a photograph of Bill's face superimposed on that of the scout. All the members had signed the card.

A sumptuous feast followed, provided by Mrs. Thurbon, despite protests from the members that they should be doing the providing on such an occasion and Bill and Alice should be sitting back. The meeting was at Bill's flat - 5 All Saints Passage, Cambridge, so he was acting as host as well.

Bill then gave his reflections on the club, its early days with anecdotes on the members of those times, calling on past reports to the Collectors' Digest to jog his memory, and a very pleasant and joyful gathering came to a close at 6.00 p. m.

Also to be published in September 1983, paperback versions of the controversial Bunter books, edited by Jay King. The 4 titles, at £1.25 each, will be: Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School, Billy Bunter's Double, Billy Bunter Does His Best, Billy Bunter Comes For Christmas.
From HAPPY HOURS UNLIMITED See advertisement on back page.

BEAT THIS FOR A TALE

by R. Hibbert

I read the 'Times Educational Supplement' every week. I feel I have to as it costs 45p these days. Anyway, I work through it Friday nights. Not many laughs in the T.E.S., but there are some bizarre bits which make my rheumy old eyes fill with a joyous wonder.

In one issue (23.10.81) there's a shortish piece about a New Zealander Head Master who's been carrying out scientific research into boy beating.

The possibility that he's not always on target's been worrying him. Wheals, apparently, are acceptable, but 'not below the level of the bathing suit'; that makes for embarrassment; sneers and jeers round the old swimming hole. Pin point accuracy is needed .. so ..

With the help of 25 volunteers - masochists? - locally anaesthetised? - copies of 'War and Peace' stuffed down their bathing trunks? - our Head videotaped his caning strokes. 'By playing the video back in slow motion he could follow the movements of the cane'. As a former aeronautics engineer he 'was accustomed to experiments of wind tunnel movement.'

And there are still people about who think Edwy Searles Brooks' school stories are far fetched.

Another T.E.S. (6.11.81) carries a report on a University of Minnesota research team's findings that 'obese schoolchildren have higher I.Q's than their thinner fellow pupils'. Bunter fans won't be surprised.

* * * * *
NOT JUST A CARPING DETAIL!

by Tommy Keen

A few days before the arrival of the August C.D., a friend and I were chatting about our favourite hobby (we often do), and I mentioned the fact that something I had always objected to in the MAGNET and GEM stories, was the oft repeated reference to the HOLIDAY ANNUAL, and in fact in one or two series it became rather more than a little tiresome.

Even as a very young boy, reading the Christmas issue of the GEM from the 'Cardew of St. Jim's' series, in which it stated that Sidney Clive and Doris Levison were sharing a window seat at Eastwood House, reading the HOLIDAY ANNUAL, I remember thinking to myself (partly believing the characters to be real), "How can they be reading about themselves?" In the MAGNET, Greyfriars boys were often reading the GEM (and occasionally The BOYS' FRIEND), and in the GEM, a St. Jim's boy could be found reading the MAGNET.

I suppose it helped to establish the popularity of our papers, and the HOLIDAY ANNUAL, but as with the hiking series in 1933, and again in 1937, when Marjorie Hazeldene attempts to return a £10 note to a HOLIDAY ANNUAL belonging to Lord Mauleverer, but which was being held by Dr. Locke, all references to this famous volume became irritating. So, regarding the query in the August C.D., 'is this a carping detail', definitely NO. Imagine if Alice, before going "Through the Looking Glass", had been sitting by the fireside reading "Alice in Wonderland"!

Referring back to the hiking series, one other rather odd thing struck me when I read this series several years ago. Although our heroes were apparently plodding along the roads of the Southern Counties, for one issue they were suddenly transferred to Yorkshire, with all the villains of the series there also. Was there any explanation? Rather a long hike, especially as by the following week, they were down south again, HOLIDAY ANNUAL and all.

No, the HOLIDAY ANNUAL was for we poor mortals, not for the likes of Harry Wharton, Tom Merry, Bob Cherry, and Jimmy Silver ... or even Sidney Clive and Doris Levison.

* * * * *

"WAS CHARLES HAMILTON A SUBSTITUTE?" by James Hodge

Writing one's will is a frustrating affair because one knows one will not, in the usual order of things, be present to hear the reading. So it is with this small item, for it could be a prime example of the "Article No Editor Dared to Print". However ...

CD readers may have noticed how much is being written by

so few on the subject of who wrote what in Magnet and Gem. Try as you may, if you want your full 34 pence worth, you can't avoid the issue, although of late I have been tempted to try.

For the past eight years I have been making amends for a mis-spent youth by greatly enjoying reading the bulk of Magnet and Gem, via HB facsimiles and Roger Jenkins's library. I must confess that, in my innocence, I read for pleasure. It never occurred to me that such self-indulgence might serve only to further perpetuate a myth and negate the dedicated and often heroic endeavours of those among us who seek only after Truth.

Paradoxically, the light of Truth casts shadows of doubt. Logically, if we wish to learn the Truth of everything we must question everything. For those of us who have our existence on the fringe of this intellectual maelstrom and who only "Know what we like", our cherished illusions (sometimes as many as six at a time) are monthly swept away.

Where will it all end? Can the final denouncement be far distant? How much longer can we be expected to believe that there ever existed a Charles Harold St. John Hamilton? Consider -- an Autobiography whose author was seventeen at birth, numerous improbable photographs of an elderly Johnny rigged out in skull-cap, dressing gown and slippers and playing chess with a cat, relatives whose credentials (birth and marriage certificates) have yet to be checked out, dear Miss Hood who herself could have been -- hoodwinked.

Some gullible souls corresponded with him and got replies -- signed "Frank Richards". The Post Office tells us that children still write to Father Christmas and get letters back -- signed "Father Christmas". Some journalists and a few of the faithful are allowed interviews; many were courteously rebuffed -- perhaps the star player was carrying out another acting engagement on those occasions?

After giving due credit (or discredit, according to your predelictions) to Pentelow, Samways, Cook and others of that ilk, who is left to denounce and debunk? Even numbskulls like myself know that, seek as we may, we shall never find recorded the births of Frank Richards, Martin Clifford or Owen Conquest; you might say that they were all - er - 'SUBterfuges'. Which brings me to the questions posed in my heading.

I do not know the answer but as the remorseless probings and dissections seem unlikely to cease, some one of our literary surgeons will eventually excise the ultimate tumour of doubt from the body of Truth and I fear the worst.

For, dear Reader, would you accept a cheque from a man who signed it with twenty-eight aliases?

Or should that be twenty-nine?

* * * * *

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