

# COLLECTORS' 2/-

VOL. 19 No 224

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# Collectors' Digest

FOUNDED in 1946 by HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 19

No. 224

AUGUST 1965

Price 2s. Od.



## A WORD FROM THE SKIPPER.

### MAGNET NUMBER ONE

As most of our readers will know by this time, Magnet Number One is to be issued by Fleetway Periodicals during August, and will be available at all newsagents for 1/6. That practically all of our readers will welcome it wholeheartedly goes without saying.

We understand that 50,000 copies are being printed, and, according to one report, they are being printed on the original machines which gave the Magnet birth in 1908. The latter seems rather unlikely. It seems more feasible that a photographic process is being used, though we do not know.

There can be little doubt that this return of Magnet Number One in all its glory is due, however indirectly, to Collectors' Digest and the clubs which it links together. It has been the publicity which our movement has received in the past few years which has highlighted the possibilities of the old stories.

We maintained long ago that the weekly Magnet should have returned as soon as the paper shortage eased after the war. We believe it would have been a success, and we still think so. The creator of Greyfriars was on hand to continue his series, and there is no doubt that he could easily have produced a new story every week. It would have been supported by young and not-so-young, just as the publishers clearly are confident will happen to the new Magnet Number One.

What effect will this venture have upon collectors? Probably but little. We welcome it because it enables so many folk, who would have no chance at all of obtaining such a prize, to obtain something they have always wanted. It is unlikely that it will have much effect on the values of the few existing genuine Number Ones.

What effect a wholesale reprinting of this type would have, it is difficult to say. It is unlikely that anything of the sort will happen. Indeed, it is hard to think of any single issue apart from the Number One Magnet which could be assured of an adequate sale. If, however, the idea caught on, we might find the "Is it a genuine Rembrandt or a copy?" of the Art world being transferred to our own little circle. An intriguing thought.

### THE MILCH COW

The old papers, the old authors, the old artists - all have suddenly become fashionable. There have been so many newspaper comments, articles in magazines, programmes on television and radio in connection with them and those things which make us tick that one wonders whether the whole idea isn't being done to death.

I have lost count of the number of occasions during the past twelvemonth that our telephone has tinkled and a courteous voice has said: "I am thinking of doing an article on the old papers for the Weekly (or daily or monthly) So-and-So. I wonder whether you would help me with some information."

We at this office, and probably all of us throughout the clan, are willing to help anybody. It goes without saying. But Collectors' Digest, which is not a profit-making concern, and its contributors who write simply for the love of the hobby and who put their knowledge, wit, and talent to the benefit of fellow-hobbyists, should not collectively become a milch cow for the benefit of professional writers. I wonder just how many times it has been done. Not so long ago a C.D. editorial was lifted word for word and published in a county paper without one mention of the source being given.

Does it matter? Probably it doesn't. Probably it's all the same if it does.

### THE ANNUAL

Some of the finest articles we have ever published are now in Collectors' Digest Annual for 1965, but we are still short of material. Articles on Sexton Blake, Nelson Lee, and other topics apart from Hamiltonia are urgently needed. Please get going, dear friends.

THE EDITOR.

# DANNY'S DIARY

August 1915

We spent a week at Margate this month, though I heard Doug tell Freda that we were going to Cliftonville. That sounds more posh than Margate, and Freda is very posh.

We went from Victoria, and had to change at Chatham. It was a pleasant journey by train on the Slow, Easy, and Comfortable. And Margate is a nice town.

There are some lovely open-topped trams, and we had several nice rides on them. They go through fields over the island of Thanet to Ramsgate.

The weather was warm and sunny most days, and I went in the sea several times. The beach is soft and sandy. There are plenty of amusements, including a pleasure park called Dreamland, where there is a scenic railway. There is a cinema at Dreamland, and it was showing a different Mary Pickford film every evening for a week. The pictures were "Mistress Nell," "Eagle's Mate," "Such a Little Queen," "Behind the Scenes," "Tessibel of the Storm Country," and "Hearts Adrift." But we had seen all these at home.

We did, however, go to the Parade Cinema one evening and saw Marguerite Clark in "The Goose Girl." There was also a serial called "The Black Box."

Another time we went to the Hippodrome and saw Welman's Revue, and the night before we came home we saw "What-ho, Tango" at the Theatre Royal. I like stage shows.

The week passed very quickly, but it was good while it lasted. At home we have been to the pictures twice this month, and we saw a Sexton Blake film called "The Great Cheque Fraud" and Lionel Barrymore in "Battle of the Innocents."

I have, of course, had the Gem every week. The first tale was "A Captured Chum," and I didn't like it much. Kerr accidentally broke Knox's watch, so Knox took Kerr's watch. In revenge, Kerr disguised himself as Mr. Mason, a friend of Knox's father. He gave Knox a high old time, but Knox discovered that Mr. Mason was an impostor, and called the police. Not real Martin Clifford.

Nor was "For the Old School's Sake." A fugitive named Featherstone appealed to Tom Merry and Talbot for help, but it was a mixed-up affair. Levison came into it, and so did Mayne, the new boy in an

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awful tale last month, and Blenkinsop.

But the Gem was back in top form with a vengeance in the Summer Double Number. A very long story was called "The Housemaster's Homecoming" and it was Martin Clifford at his best. Mr. Railton, wounded in the arm, came back to St. Jim's, and with him came an army friend, Colonel Lyndon, who was Crooke's uncle. Crooke tried to blacken Talbot to his uncle, and the uncle demanded that Talbot should leave St. Jim's. Dr. Holmes resigned as Headmaster, but in the end it turned out that Talbot's name was really Reginald Wilmot, and he was Colonel Lyndon's nephew, and Crooke's cousin. A fine story.

The last tale of the month was "The Jew of St. Jim's" which was good, even though I did not like the theme much. A Jewish boy named Julian came to St. Jim's, and Lowther became his enemy. In the finish Julian saved Lowther from drowning, so all was merry and bright.

The editor says that he is planning to bring out Tom Merry's Weekly as a Companion Paper. It sounds exciting.

There was a terrible and amazing train disaster this month at Weedon. A taper pin, smaller than a pencil, fell off the engine of a train on the up line. Then the coupling rod fell off and fouled the down line, just as the Irish Mail train from Euston was passing at high speed. The Irish Mail was derailed, ten people were killed, and sixty-four badly injured.

Chuckles, the comic paper, has started a club, which they say will be the largest club in the world. Some hopes! The Boys' Friend has started an Anti-German League, and if you want to smash Germany, you are asked to sign a coupon with your address and send it to the editor. I can't really see what good it is.

Charlie Chaplin has made his first appearance on the cover of the Funny Wonder. It is a halfpenny comic which comes out on Tuesday. I have bought one or two copies, and there is a good serial called "All On His Own."

Rookwood has been quite good in the Boys' Friend. The first tale was "Police Constable Jimmy Silver," in which Jimmy disguised himself as a policeman, and put the wind up Herr Kinkel, the German master of the Modern Side. A new serial entitled "Polruan's Millions" by Maurice Everard started this week.

In "A Spy in the School" Jimmy Silver discovered that somebody was signalling out to sea from the old tower of Rookwood, and he suspected Herr Kinkel. Next week came "Renounced by Rookwood" in which Herr Kinkel was arrested as a German spy. So Rookwood no longer has

a German master.

Final tale of the month was "Last Man In," a cricket tale. Smythe and Co were furious that Tommy Dodd wouldn't give them a show in the games, so on the day of the Bagshot match they kidnapped Tommy Dodd, the best junior cricketer at Rookwood. As the game was nearing its end, Tommy managed to get free and raced to the cricket ground where Jimmy Silver was stonewalling to keep the innings going. So Tommy went in as last man, and while Jimmy went on stonewalling to keep his wicket up, Tommy Dodd hit runs all over the place, and Rookwood won in spite of all. A good story.

A terrible thing has happened on the Thames. A tug ran into the "Alert," a cutter of the T.S. Cornwall, full of boys. The cutter sank off Purfleet, and 16 boys were drowned.

The Magnet has been pretty good this month. In "The Master Who Stayed at Home" Skinner and his friends started persecuting Mr. Lascelles because he hadn't joined the army. It turned out that Mr. Lascelles didn't like to leave his sister, so Dr. Holmes told him to bring the sister to Greyfriars when she could be like a daughter to the Head and his wife. So Mr. Lascelles joined the army in contentment.

The summer double number of the Magnet contained "Schoolboys Never Shall Be Slaves." Sir Hilton Popper was annoyed by boys trespassing on his island, and he arranged for a Sergeant Sharp to become a drill instructor at Greyfriars. Sharp was a brute, and he taunted Wingate into running away from school to join the army. Finally it turned out that Sharp was a deserter from the Prussian army. And Wingate was discharged from the army when they found out he was only seventeen.

"Ponsonby's Plot," next week, was pretty good. Ponsonby caused trouble between Wharton and Courtenay on the eve of a cricket match. Finally Ponsonby locked up Courtenay in the vaults. Quite a month for kidnapped cricketers.

I wasn't very struck on "The Fellow Who Won." Dick Russell was accused of being a coward, but he fought an Etonian in the public schools' boxing tournament at Aldershot.

It's awful to think that the holidays are flying by, and before I have turned round I shall be back at school.

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**CHANGE OF ADDRESS:** Jim Cook's new address is:

P.O. Box 86, Swanson,

Auckland,

New Zealand.

# NELSON LEE COLUMN

CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD

GHOSTS OF OUR PAST

By William Lister

While browsing through some books in the Public Library I picked up one with the title "Teaching The Mother Tongue" by P. B. Williams (first published in 1921).

The book was, of course, about the English language.

Speaking of reading matter for children, the author goes on to say, "What about the Penny Dreadful?"

"Is it a friend of the school, or an enemy?"

He mentions such names as Dick Turpin, Deadwood Dick, Jack Harkaway Spring-Heeled Jack, the Terror of the Antilles, and Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street. These he says have passed away, giving place to periodicals that record the doings of Sexton Blake, Nelson Lee, Tubby Haig, Buffalo Bill and Robin Hood.

These tales fall into five groups. They deal with cowboys, football, school life, medieval adventure, and detection of crime, and when they deal with two at once, as in the Nelson Lee series (Nelson Lee is both a school-master and a detective), the highwater mark of popularity seems to be reached. (The underlining is mine, to emphasise the impression of a schoolmaster of the '20's.)

The school stories, he says, differ from the older type in being on the side of law and order: they do not hold the masters up to ridicule, nor do they glorify insubordination and the breaking of rules. If a master figures as a fool, he is exceptional; and if he is baited and hoaxed, it is not because he is a master but because he is a fool. The author tries to secure verisimilitude by a free use of schoolboy slang.

At St. Frank's, the school of Nelson Lee and Nipper, "giddy" is the great word. Everybody is giddy. Even inanimate things suffer from the general vertigo. "He won't open his giddy mouth;" "Dick acts the giddy ox generally;" "the bits of furniture we see in any giddy study;" "his father is shoved in the giddy county court for debt;" "a giddy fine thing - I don't think;" - all these are extracted from the same story, a story which, on the whole, is fairly well written. (Underlining again mine, great praise from a schoolmaster in those days, and also reveals that he himself appeared to have enjoyed our Edwy Searles

Brooks.)

St. Frank's, in common with its rivals, he says, is eminently "classy;" it enrolls among its scholars the Duke of Somerton, the Hon. Douglas Singleton, and Sir Montie Tregellis-West.

At this stage he gives a paragraph to the detectives, merely mentioning they are palpable imitations of Sherlock Holmes. "Sexton Blake having rooms in Baker St., and Nelson Lee, although the headmaster of a school, has rooms at Grays Inn Road."

A mention of cowboy and Indian stories, of Buffalo Bill and Robin Hood and then he touches on the girls' stories, starring Bessie Bunter. He says:

"As for girls' papers, nothing could exceed their scrupulous propriety. So far as I can judge from the one periodical that every schoolgirl seems to read, the prim attitude of the maiden aunt is never departed from." (Underlining mine.) This particular journal deals week by week with the doings of the girls of Cliff House, a boarding school of high repute, where the mistresses are models of rectitude, and all that is lady-like and proper is fostered by the tone, the general atmosphere, and the sympathy between teacher and taught.

"The bulk of the girls are always on the side of authority. The rebellious get no encouragement from their classmates; and the good meet with their universal approval.

"The stories of the school seem endless. The tap is turned on every Thursday, and a given measure of narrative is doled out to eager customers. There is the rich girl who "swanks," and the poor girl who tries to hide her poverty; and the noble girl who suffers in silence rather than implicate some other girl base enough to accept her sacrifice - and above all there is Bessie Bunter.

"Bessie is perennial. She gives continuity to the tales. The other characters shift and change from week to week: now one is the centre of interest, now another; new girls enter the school and old girls leave; the seasons roll by and the terms pass into years. But Bessie Bunter remains unchanged."

All of which I found of interest - as a reader of "Collectors Digest" and wondered if any others had come across this mention of our Old Boys' Books. The author has a little more to say on Dick Turpin, Claude Duval, Rob Roy, etc., all of which is in a sympathetic tone.

The last sentence, I thought struck a note: "But Bessie Bunter remains unchanged." (Of course she did, and does, even now.)

But then they all remain unchanged, these ghosts of our past. Nelson Lee and Nipper, Handforth & Co., Billy Bunter, Tom Merry, Harry Wharton, Coker, - all remain "unchanged" and that's how we like it, and

why we like them. God forbid, that any should be tarred and tainted with the modern brush. Only one of our favourites has fallen foul of modern times; I refer to Sexton Blake, and it nearly meant the end of him, but now there are signs of a resurrected life even for him. Let us hope it is so.

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UNLUCKY DEAL FOR C.D. READER

C.D. reader, Reg Guest, reports an unsatisfactory transaction he has had with a dealer who operates from an address in Norwich. The following is the gist of Mr. Guest's report. The Norwich dealer offered him Holiday Annuals 1920 to 1928 for £20. In order to secure the one for 1920, Mr. Guest sent off a cheque for £20.

After a delay he received 5 Annuals only, and not the one for 1920. The dealer charged £12-10s for these, and said that he would keep the balance on credit. Such impudence annoyed Mr. Guest, who demanded the immediate return of the balance of £7-10s.

Mr. Guest waited for some time, and then wrote again in mid-May. The dealer replied that he had sent crossed postal orders on April 22nd and that he would inform the post-office.

After further unpleasantness, Mr. Guest was told by the dealer that he, Mr. Guest, must claim the money himself from the G.P.O.

The course that Mr. Guest should follow is plain. He should place all the correspondence in the hands of a good solicitor and let him take immediate action. On the facts as given by Mr. Guest, the dealer has not a leg to stand on. He did not keep his bargain, and his action in retaining the balance of Mr. Guest's money is quite indefensible. Furthermore, the only one who can claim from the post office is the man who holds the counterfoils for the postal orders which he alleges he sent. We advise Mr. Guest to put a solicitor in action without delay.

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WANTED: Good loose copies or bound volumes containing any of the following: MAGNETS 52; 131 to 149 inclusive; 195; 205; 237; 238; 239; 277; 318; 319; 353; 386 to 400; 417; 422; 435; 752; 753; 762; 763; 773; 809. Most issues between 821 and 890; 900; 921; 924; 925; 936; 938; 940; 942; 943; 946; 951; 965; 967; 988; 996. GEMS: 493; Some issues between 801 and 832. Also Nos. 935; 953; 954; 956; 975; 980; 984; 985; 989; 990; 992; 993; 998. POPULARS: 183; 190; 452; 455; 466; 474. Early Penny Populars: Nos. 12, 13, 45, 47, 58.

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

# BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

27, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22IN AND AROUND BAKER STREET (8)

\* \* \*

By Walter Webb

## The Feminine Touch

Sexton Blake a tuft-hunter. A sycophant. Prepared to take a short-cut to unlimited wealth by wooing a pretty woman with a title and then proposing marriage. It doesn't sound a bit like Blake; but that is how he was portrayed by one of his earliest chroniclers - a writer, incidentally, responsible for the best characterization of Blake in an era when he was not particularly well served by those whose duty it was to write his adventures. During this period such UNION JACK stories as "The Man From Scotland Yard," "The Master Anarchist," "The Blue Room Mystery," and "The Mystery of The Scarlet Thread," shone with the brilliance of a searchlight in a black-out. They were seldom surpassed in any era; certainly never in their own. Yet, where authorship is concerned, they must be labelled as 'suspect,' for certain astonishing errors, particularly in the third story, give rise to the suspicion that more than one pair of hands had been utilised in the production of them and of other stories credited to the same author, Michael Storm. Having read the entire contributions to the U.J. by this writer - all 17 of them - I am convinced that at least a third of them are not bona fide efforts at all.

What was unprecedented in the history of the UNION JACK - or, for that matter, in the history of the boys' papers as a whole - was the amazing hold-up of the second story in the Plummer series. Why did Willie Back, who accepted the story, withhold publication of it for over a year and a half - 80 weeks, to be precise - after promising that it would appear immediately after the first? Clearly, it was not due to indisposition of the author, for stories by him were being used to bridge the extensive gap created by the first and second tales just referred to, and, in any event, the narrative must have been in his hands to have prompted the promise of its publication being made. Unfulfilment must have been due to his displeasure being directed at something in the story matter.

Authorship of this second story - "In Deadly Grip" - is, basically, as in the first; but certain incursions, including the brief - and

unnecessary - appearance of a character created by another writer, suggests that a number of alterations were carried out on the story before it left editorial hands, an early indication of this being a difference in framing of the chapter headlines and mistakes involving the name of a character, which cannot be shrugged off as a printers' error, for the same character had been mis-named many times previously in "The Blue Room Mystery" published three weeks before. This character was a Dr. Fleming, a somewhat vitriolic brain specialist, and one of Blake's most intimate friends. It is quite astonishing that having used this character in previous stories he should after introducing him as Fleming in the above-mentioned story suddenly switch his name to that of Fielding, and I find it difficult to believe that one author engaged on a novel and bringing in a character he was quite familiar with should have persistently written the name down wrongly on one manuscript and followed it up to a lesser extent on another. What is even more incredible is that those whose responsibility it was to have checked the story before it reached the printers did not detect the errors. Another error - an amusing one this time - was a reference to Blake putting the leash round Tinker's neck and leading him nose to ground and tail erect out of the consulting room on a tracking expedition. If bloodhounds possess a sense of humour, Pedro must have chuckled loud and long at this unexpected rejection of his services!

There appears to be a clear case of amalgamation in the stories credited to the elusive Michael Storm, but who helped him in his work it is not possible to say at this juncture, though an obvious collaborator seems to have been the lady known as Mrs. Michael Storm, who sold work to various editors at the A.P. Whether she was the wife of the author is anybody's guess; after all, both names were assumed, and it may have been to their advantage that she should be known as Mrs. Michael Storm, since, without the preface of Mrs. she would become just plain Michael Storm, and stories presented by her, if written by herself, would naturally be presumed to have been the work of her spouse.

Whether the two collaborated in the writing of the Plummer tales or not, the feminine hand was strongly indicated in the third and fourth issues in the series, which were, I am now firmly convinced, banned from appearing in the UNION JACK as unsuitable for the readership it catered for. Not hard to see why Willie Back so strongly disapproved of them, for the author, or authors, presented Blake in a most outrageously uncharacteristic manner by making him appear to be a tuft-hunter. His flirtation with the beautiful, coquettish Lady

Marjorie Dorn must have shocked the editor, as it certainly would have his readers had he dared to publish the stories. Their reactions can well be imagined. Blake falling in love with a girl, titled, and with unlimited riches, seeking her warm, scented embrace, and asking her to become his wife.

Yet, these stories contained some of the most sensitive passages I have ever read in a Sexton Blake, so sensitive, in fact, that I feel convinced that a woman's hand helped in their production. This is not to imply that a male author is not capable of such writing, simply that the delicacy of touch, the dialogue between Blake and her ladyship in the love scenes, and the emotional passages following the death of Rupert Forbes, Blake's former fag at school, had the woman's touch written all over them.

It may seem odd to the Blake connoisseur that following the U.J. editor's decision not to publish the stories they should appear as one long novel in the BOY'S FRIEND 3d. LIBRARY. But there is a logical explanation for this. Those who knew Hamilton Edwards when he ran all the boys' papers are unanimous in their contention that he was always impressed by anybody who was fortunate enough to hold a title, or who stood firm on the upper rungs of the social ladder. Such Blake contributors of culture like Lord Mountmorres, Cecil Hayter, and Arthur S. Hardy were all very friendly with Edwards, and there is little doubt that the controlling editor was favourably impressed by Michael Storm. Storm may not have had a title, but he was an extremely well educated man, and, if his writing is anything to go by, something of an aristocrat. Whether the novel - "The Mervyn Mystery" was its title - was unsuitable for a boys' paper would not have worried Edwards unduly, for all was grist that came to his mill at that particular time, since his department was not doing at all well, and he was threatening to resign.

Stories credited to the authorship in question deviate remarkably between the crude and the excellent. "The Mystery of the Scarlet Thread" comes into the second category. This is a really absorbing yarn, doubtless inspired by the troubles in India at that time. One of the unfortunate results of the fighting was that a relative of the author - a cousin, I believe - was killed during an attack on the towers of Halwai, the home of Dadai, notorious Zakka Khel outlaw in India. A point of interest worth making here is that it must have been around this time that G. H. Teed was doing his stint as manager of a jute plantation on the Malabar Coast just before setting sail for Europe and a writing career.

Another point of interest - this time concerning the story itself

- is that the picture on the cover of 'the U.J. in which it appeared was used to illustrate a Sexton Blake article that appeared in the BIRMINGHAM MAIL in 1953. A contributor had sent in an article on Sherlock Holmes, whose centenary occurred in January of that year, and what was written brought a letter to the correspondence columns of the MAIL signed "Sexton Blake," from "5, Baker Street, London," suggesting that "my own exploits are worthy of a similar write-up." The result was a lively article on the earliest days of our famous sleuth, interesting, but with data obviously gleaned from the hobby magazines.

Another story, "The Great Conspiracy" promised to be an exceptionally good contribution, and undoubtedly would have been if the author who started it - Storm - had finished it off. The sort of Blake yarn which always goes down well, it described the efforts of a foreign power - Germany - to bring about the economic ruin of England. The culminating point had been reached, and the country stood on the verge of a General Strike. Blake was summoned urgently to the Palace for an audience with King Edward VII, the then reigning monarch. With him were the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. In the hands of the King and his Ministers rested the destiny of Great Britain; but it was to Blake whom they looked to smash the conspiracy which aimed to ruin it. "Vous avez raison," said the King encouragingly, dismissing Blake with a friendly slap on the shoulder. "Bon appetit."

Well, the story got off with a bang, all right, and I was quite enjoying it. Then, at page 14 another author took over, and the yarn fizzled out like a damp squib. Intelligence gave way to puerility, and the ending was one of the most banal I have ever read. A case of an exceptionally good story completely spoiled, though why there should have been a change of authorship in midstream is a mystery. A possible explanation was that it was a manuscript left unfinished due to the death of the author.

A point about Storm which, hitherto, has not been made is that after his disappearance from the scene some of his work was published under the name of "John Michael." The christian name may have some significance in view of Storm's real name being Sempill, for there were two John Sempill's living up to about the time of Storm's alleged death. They were cousins, and the less distinguished of them died in April, 1908, obviously passing away abroad since there is no record of his demise having occurred in England, and though it will be instantly detected that the Michael Storm stories continued into 1910, it must be understood that the Plummer yarns were running two years behind schedule owing to Willie Back's 80 week hold-up of the second

contribution in the series. Also, numerous U.J. stories were written many months ahead of the date of publication. As to the difference in christian names - well, since his own coincided with that of a relative, he would have good reasons for wishing to be known as Ernest Sempill rather than his baptismal name.

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R I P P L E S

Last month, the Editorial of Collectors' Digest, under the grand old Union Jack heading "A WORD FROM THE SKIPPER," contained a summing-up of criticism that sex is over-done in the Sexton Blake Library. A few letters have been received commenting on the matter, but their limited number suggests that the general interest in the subject is not great.

We quote from the letters received, but we do not propose to give space to the question in the future. The editor of the Sexton Blake Library knows his own business best. The S.B.L., after all, will rise or fall by the quality of the stories it offers, and nobody knows that better than Mr. Baker.

Up to the time of writing this, none of our correspondents has acquitted himself particularly well in writing his views of this topic. Mr. Smith, who had a point, spoiled his case by exaggeration, and by selecting as a whipping-boy the story "The Witches of Notting Hill," a tale which our editor has read and found "innocuous." The few who have answered him express views without bothering to weigh up any pros and cons to any great extent.

The main sale of paperbacks, unlike that of magazines, is almost certainly chiefly casual. Shops stock them indiscriminately. Sexton Blake, on account of his history, attracts a number of regular supporters who buy two issues every month - when they can get hold of them. The distribution being what it is, that is not always easy.

And what of C.D. reviewers? Critics, of course, only express their own opinions. Some critics in the national press gain the reputation of slating everything. Their comments come to count for little. Any reviewer who praised everything, good or bad, would not count for much either. Do C.D. reviewers, to mix metaphors a little, tend to turn a blind eye, to try to please everybody, and to write with their tongues in their cheeks? Or do they, as most people seem to think, strike a pretty fair balance?

The following views are those expressed by certain C.D. readers. The views are not necessarily those of Blakiana or the editor of Collectors' Digest.

DEREK ADLEY: I consider "Witches of Notting Hill" one of the best stories for years, and the macabre setting was great. Mr. Smith's remarks seem to be from one absolutely biased against the Sexton Blake Library. I am disgusted that Mr. Howard Baker should be given this kind of treatment for he is a man who has done his very best to please the old Blake fans, and in these new Blakes he has done a wonderful job.

The story was not offensive in any way, and one would have to be looking for faults to expose this novel in the way that Mr. Smith did. There was a great deal of realism in the context, and I know that some of the rites described have definitely happened in real life.

P. MANTON KING: I am no prude, but I do not look for sordid sex in the S.B.L. "The Mind Killers" is now awaiting the next visit of the dustmen. I have decided that unless reprints of the "classics" appear fairly soon, as promised by the editor, I shall cancel my regular order, merely ordering reprints - if they appear - when I see them reviewed in C.D.

NORMAN WRIGHT: I feel, and I think others will feel that Mr. Smith's letter in the July C.D. in which he criticises the new Sexton Blake Library were groundless and unfounded.

The times in which we live are far different from those when Sexton Blake made his debut, and as times change so do styles, and in particular, literary styles.

All the novels so far published in the new series have been fairly good in both plot and dialogue; to say that they are full of sex and sadism is utterly wrong from a modern stand point; fifty years ago, perhaps, but not today. In the "Witches of Notting Hill" the theme is one that depends on showing that evil is always beaten by goodness; to do this, firstly the evil must be shown, but in this story it is shown in such a way that there is hardly any sex or sadism in it. In contrast to this, good examples are the black magic stories by Dennis Wheatly, (the theme of these stories is the same as that of the Witches of Notting Hill) that are I may add very good, but do contain a fair bit of sex and sadism.

I hope that I have shown that the new Blakes are not in any way below the standard that the S.B.L. has always maintained. Collectors may say that the old Blakes were better than the modern ones, but this is not really so. The truth is that the style in (cont'd p.22)..

# HAMILTONIANA

## BENEATH THE VEIL

By John Trovell

Reference to Rupert de Courcy of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe in a recent issue of the Digest, recalls the welcome change and his own brand of humour, that the whimsical Caterpillar brought to the Magnet pages when he graced them with his elegant presence.

Beneath a deceptive and incredibly lazy exterior, lay a keen and active brain that functioned promptly when occasion demanded, and Rupert de Courcy had proved himself a fighting man of no mean ability when aroused to wrath.

A capable sportsman, the Caterpillar needed all his great chum Frank Courtenay's persuasion to indulge in activity of any description, and this was never better illustrated than in Chapter 8 of Magnet No. 1323 "The Worst Boy in the School."

The Remove eleven are at Highcliffe for a cricket fixture. Courtenay the Highcliffe captain has won the toss and decided to bat, the Caterpillar extended in a cane chair in front of the pavilion, the picture of elegance and laziness is to partner his captain in opening the Highcliffe innings -

"Courtenay glanced at him and frowned.

"Come on fathead!" he said.

The Caterpillar sat up slowly.

"Frankly old bean" he said, "I've got an idea."

"No time for ideas now, if you have any - which I doubt. Where's your bat?"

"I believe I have one, and I've an impression that I stood it somewhere. But let me tell you my idea - it's rather great. There's room for new ideas in cricket. Why not make me last man in?"

"I'm likely to make my best batsman last man fathead!"

"Only second best, old thing" said the Caterpillar. "You're the best - I come next - a bad second. But this is the idea - instead of leaving the finish to the tail, why not leave a good man to the end and wind up with fireworks - what? Make me the head of the tail, if you know what I mean!"

Whether the Caterpillar meant that bright idea to be taken seriously, or whether he was merely too lazy to lift himself out of the chair, Courtenay did not enquire. He just poked his bat into his chums' ribs, and the Caterpillar gave a gasp and jumped up! - ■

Later Courtenay is caught by Vernon-Smith for 30 -

"Hard luck, Franky!" called out the Caterpillar as Courtenay was going off. "All in the game!" answered Courtenay cheerfully.

"I mean hard luck on me; I'm still battin'!"

"Fathead!"

"Some men have all the luck!" said the Caterpillar confidentially to the wicket keeper. "There's a happy man goin' to sit down in the shade; and look at poor little me, still standin' on my hind legs." Which remark made the wicketkeeper stare. "

The Caterpillar did stand 'on his hind legs' and defied every effort of Vernon Smith and Hurree Singh, the crack Remove bowlers, to dislodge him, and was not out for 60 at the end of the Highcliffe innings.

This then was the Caterpillar. One could wish for so much more of him but possibly his appeal lay in the comparatively few occasions we were privileged to meet such a delightful and entertaining character.

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MAGNET NO. 1 for 1/6d !

By W. O. G. Lofts

The original MAGNET No. 1 is to be published in August by FLEETWAY PUBLICATIONS as a souvenir edition. Not to be given away as a gimmick to boost a flagging periodical - but complete exactly as the original down to the last detail with a wrapper, and a short account of Frank Richards and Greyfriars - written by W. O. G. Lofts.

If the sale of this souvenir proves successful it is quite possible that others may follow. Fleetway Publications have come in for some sharp criticism in the past for their post-war presentation of pre-war favourite schools such as Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Rookwood, and St. Frank's, but one can only give the highest praise to them now.

I am the proud owner of MAGNET No. 1 in mint condition - and have recently refused a large sum - for the most valuable of all collectors items. It will obviously lower the value considerably, but on the other hand, many hundreds of collectors will now at least be able to get for their collection the most prized treasure of them all for the low sum of 1/6d.

On a recent visit to Fleetway House, I was able to see the actual work in progress on this project. Every page of the original number one MAGNET had been carefully photographed to four times its original size. Two staff artists were busy at work touching up parts that had become somewhat faded through the years. One of the

artists told me of how interested he was to see the first appearance of Billy Bunter in the stories in chapter 5 - where he ran into Wharton and ejaculated a rather unusual expression from Bunter and indeed Frank Richards - 'Ker-woosh.'

Full press publicity will be given to this souvenir - which will also contain an advert for the forthcoming GREYFRIARS PROSPECTUS - written by the late Johnnie Butcher.

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 90 THE THOUSANDTH MAN

"One man in a thousand, Solomon says,  
Will stick more close than a brother,  
And it's worth while seeking him half your days,  
If you find him before the other.  
Nine-hundred-an-ninety-nine depend  
On what the world sees in you,  
But the thousandth man will stand your friend,  
With the whole round world ag'in you."

My readers will recognize that I am quoting Kipling. When I was a boy, I was very fond of that piece of rhyme. And that is practically a confession that as a boy I was rather sensitive, rather sentimental, and rather idealistic. I thought friendship the most wonderful thing on earth. My great ambition was to score a century in a cricket match and to find a friend like Tom Merry. I did neither.

I think it likely that most of the youngsters who had for the Gem and the Magnet, or any other paper featuring the same characters all the time, a loyalty which lasted for many years, were sensitive, sentimental, and idealistic too. Charles Hamilton, by luck or design, founded the system of the schoolboy Peter Pans, who remained the same, year in, year out, and that was part of the reason for his extraordinary success. He provided the type of friend for whom we yearned but could not find in real life. I say "part of the reason" because, in addition, his stories had to be well-written, otherwise we should not have gone on reading of his characters as we grew older.

Before my time, a music hall star named Tom Costello, had made famous the song "Comrades." As a very small boy I heard Costello sing that very song at a flea-pit of a music-hall. It touched my sentimental soul very deeply. Had I been older I might have been even more touched by the fact that his heyday was long past, or he

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would never have found it necessary to top the bill at a flea-pit of a music hall.

A ballad, sung hopefully by tenors even up till the outbreak of the last war, was "Friend O' Mine." The sentiment was the same.

Noble, self-denying, inspiring friendship was the theme of many school story writers of late Victorian and Edwardian times. One of the greatest exponents of the art of writing of ideal friendships was Talbot Baines Reed. Now, after twenty - perhaps, even thirty - years I have re-read "My Friend Smith," "A Dog With a Bad Name," "The Adventures of a Three-Guinea Watch," and "Tom, Dick, and Harry." I have always loved them, and, even in this cynical age, they still make delightful reading.

In the first three of these tales, coincidences fall thick and fast. Reed was the past-master of coincidence - which means contrivance. A reader must suspend belief, but the coincidences provide great pleasure for the youngster, and even make cosy reading for the adult. There are no loose ends in a Reed story. All the bits and pieces are safely gathered in before the end.

Friendship is the golden thread of many Reed stories. A big boy can be warmly friendly with one of several years his junior, and only good for both results from it.

Our age has lost its innocence. Dean Farrar once said that the innocence of ignorance is a poor thing, for it can in no circumstances be permanent. That may be so. Nevertheless it is sad that innocence in our time, has been replaced with suspicion; that we tend to see a dirty reason for everything.

It is probably not desirable that two boys of widely varying ages should be close friends. But when I was twelve I was very friendly with a school prefect who was nearing seventeen. I was devoted to him, and we went on many excursions together. Our friendship lasted for probably a couple of terms, until his schooldays ended. Since when I have never seen him or heard from him. My parents knew of it and approved. My Headmaster knew of it and approved. A very different view would be taken in 1965, yet his influence on me was always of the very best. I gained nothing but good from his friendship.

When, say thirty years ago, we read of the friendship between the 17-year old Tempest and the youngster, Jones, in Reed's "Tom, Dick, and Harry" we thought it ideal. In 1965 we shake our heads and wonder. Our broad minds and our narrow waists have changed places.

Which brings us to the friendships portrayed by Charles Hamilton. To the best of my recollection, Hamilton never depicted a friendship between an older boy and a younger one.

It is probably true to say that the most successful and satisfying friendships in school life are twosomes. For this reason I would consider the friendship between the Bounder and Redwing the most delightful in Hamilton history. Mornington and Erroll, carbon copies, provided a similar picture.

Of the schoolboy leaders, the Terrible Three provide the finest study, in my view. A trio was more likely to work out well than a group of larger numbers. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther had just those little differences in characterisation which went to make a happy partnership. And they all shared the same study.

Broadly speaking, the Famous Five was an unlikely combination. In fiction it worked out well; in real school life, a thread linking five into close friendship would be improbable. Even allowing for the fact that breeding counts, five fellows going around together could easily become a little gang of rowdies. If Wharton and Nugent enjoyed an ideal friendship, as they did, helped by being in the same study, they would hardly have sought three more from other studies down the Remove, to diffuse the friendship.

Yet the Famous Five, due to the superb craft of their creator, got by with much success. We would not have had it different.

The Fistical Four, as I see them, were never a striking group, due chiefly to the almost entire lack of characterisation bestowed on Raby and Newcome.

Hamilton always used the friendship theme with wise restraint. One recalls the friendship between Tom Merry and Talbot which was delightful in itself, the only drawback being that it upset the relationships among the Terrible Three - or it should have done. Wingate and Lancaster, in a famous series, gave a fine picture of the friendship between seniors.

It was often on the friendship theme that the substitute writers floundered in a morass of sentimentality. Compare the remarkably fine characterisation of the Gem's "His Brother's Keeper" series with that sentimental sub story "The Pluck of Edgar Lawrence."

Talbot Baines Reed probably did not write the impeccable English employed by Charles Hamilton - one could not imagine Hamilton being guilty of "Being a fine evening, Tom went for a walk." Nevertheless, Reed had that rare gift of the born storyteller. Even now, so many years later, his tales make splendid reading for the young and the

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not-so-young.

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CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 88. ROOKWOOD OVERSEAS

ROGER JENKINS: The Alberta series in the Boys' Friend is certainly deserving of special attention, not only because it lasted so long but also on account of the fact that it was not one series but a succession of them. I have often wondered if this experiment was tried out in the Boys' Friend because it was not wholly a school story paper, and the Cedar Creek stories had been so popular when they had run in the paper in earlier years.

At all events, there is no doubt that it was intended to transfer the Rookwood stories to Canada permanently. Charles Hamilton has confirmed this. He said it would interest me to know that my surmise was correct: "actually the idea at the time was to transfer the Rookwood series to Canada. But other counsels prevailed later, and home they came again."

I have never discovered whose counsels he was referring to. Perhaps the readers clamoured for a school setting once again. When they did come back it may be that there was a slight decline in the standard of writing, but I fancy it would take a very perceptive reader to spot this.

Incidentally, did you notice that nearly all the villains in the Alberta series originated from South of the Forty-Ninth parallel?

DONALD WEBSTER: I think the introduction of this series was chiefly responsible for the demise of the "Boys' Friend." A lot of readers (including myself) were bored with such a long series, particularly away from the School. We missed the Hampshire lanes and the characters we had grown accustomed to. I must disagree with your remarks regarding "pruning" Rookwood "repeats" in The Popular. I think many stories were cut, but it was not noticeable to any extent.

ERIC FAYNE adds: The Canadian series can hardly have been responsible for the demise of the Boys' Friend 2½ years later. In any case, it is likely that most readers, even if some missed the school, still thoroughly enjoyed Jimmy Silver in Canada.

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GEMS OF HAMILTONIA No. 22 (New Series)

"Come in, Blundell!"

Mr. Quelch addressed the captain of the Fifth cordially enough.

The Lower Fourth master had little to do with the Fifth - Prout's Form; there were Fifth Form men whom he hardly knew by sight. But everybody knew Blundell, and he was generally liked. Although not in the Sixth, or a prefect, Blundell was a great man in the senior world, a member of the first eleven, and a tremendous "Blood." Sixth-Form men treated Blundell with great respect. Juniors regarded him with awed admiration, as second in glorious greatness only to Wingate of the Sixth. With all his greatness, Blundell was a good-natured, unaffected fellow, though he had a due sense of his importance in the Greyfriars scheme of things. Prout affected the manner rather of a friend than a master towards Blundell; and it was generally considered good-natured in Blundell to let him do it.

As he came into Mr. Quelch's study, Blundell, for once, seemed to lack some of the assurance that was usually his. It was related that Blundell, if he tea'd with the Head, would ask that august gentleman to pass the sugar, just as if he were an ordinary human being. So the smaller fry on the staff were trifles light as air to Blundell. But on the present occasion Mr. Quelch, cordial as he was, seemed to disconcert the captain of the Fifth.

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R I P P L E S (continued from page 15)...

which the story is told has changed and that many collectors would rather read stories that are written in pre-war style than in post-war style.

STANLEY SMITH: I congratulate you on the way in which you dealt with the matters raised in my screeds. I am sorry that you thought my remarks too extreme, but I believe in plain speaking in these matters. I picked on "The Witches of Notting Hill" as a whipping-boy because there was a case of blatant bad language, so much easier to pin-point than the sexy interludes of other stories - distasteful though they have been. To suggest that denizens of the underworld may use such expressions is beside the point - there is no possible excuse for putting them into print.

I have read articles by Walter Webb for many years and I have enjoyed them all. I regret that he, with his wide knowledge and regard for the Sexton Blake tradition, should be willing to accept the present stories without making a protest.

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URGENTLY WANTED: Magnet No. 773

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

# NEWS FROM THE CLUBS

## MIDLAND

29th June, 1965.

The attendance was small, only 7 members being present.

The programme was very much curtailed by the absence of three members due to give items, but despite this two items of news struck a pleasant note. The first was that our own librarian, Councillor Tom Porter has been appointed chairman of the Borough at Rowley Regis Libraries' Committee and will attend an important Libraries Conference in September. The second was that a telegram was received by Ivan Webster, our new chairman, informing him he was a proud grandfather.

Tom Porter provided the two collectors' items - No. 17 of the Monster Library - The Prisoner of the Mountain - a wonderful shilling's worth even in those far-off days - A reprint of the Nelson Lee Library series.

Also on show was Magnet No. 542. 47 years ago to the day it was published and told how Percy Bolsover got into the clutches of a card-sharper. The title was "Bolsover's Enemy."

A quiz provided by our youngest member Ian Parish was well received and was won by Tom Porter. The raffle followed with prizes in the form of a Sexton Blake "The Break Out" and a Gem for Nov. 18th, 1936. Ian Parish was the winner.

Tom Porter gave a short report on the recent B.B.C. programme when Marjorie Norris interviewed Edwy Searles Brooks of Nelson Lee fame, but it was described as disappointing. Little of interest or importance was said to Old Boys' book lovers.

The final item was a discussion started by Norman Gregory on the topic "Did the Magnet and Gem have only two Seasons, Summer and Winter? What about Spring and Autumn?" Somehow the discussion ended (as discussions have a way of doing) on the question of whether Greyfriars and St. Jim's were public schools at all in the proper sense - because of their lack of games facilities - only football and cricket seemed to be played there. Perhaps they were only private boarding schools with limited facilities?

J. F. BELLFIELD

Correspondent.

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NORTHERN and MERSEYSIDE combined

On Sunday, 4th July, we travelled to Manchester for the meeting of the Northern and Merseyside sections. As things turned out the date was an unfortunate choice for our Liverpool friends, and a number were unable to attend because of holidays and other commitments. However, at one o'clock 19 of us sat down to an excellent lunch at the New Millgate Hotel, and as three more arrived shortly afterwards we were 22 strong for the meeting, which made it well worth while.

Geoffrey Wilde took the chair, and in his opening remarks expressed regret that one familiar face, that of Gerry Allison, was not to be seen on this occasion, Gerry's recent illness making it impossible for him to travel as yet.

The first item on the programme was the picture quiz by Henry Webb. Thirty cleverly-drawn pictures of characters from the old boys books and comics were passed round for us to identify. Some were familiar, and some not so familiar, but all of us identified a number, and the two Merseyside 'exiles' present, Frank Case and George Riley tied for first place with 17 each.

If Gerry Allison was absent in the flesh he was certainly with us in spirit as he provided the next item, a talk on Courtney of the Sixth Form at Greyfriars. Courtney, of course, was the character 'killed off' by a substitute writer - in this case J. N. Pentelow, it is said on higher authority because readers were confusing him with Courtenay of Highcliffe. Gerry speculated as to the justification, if any, for this action of one author killing off another author's character, and his talk also included extracts from two fine stories featuring Courtney. In Gerry's absence they were rendered very effectively by his brother Jack.

St. Frank's then took pride of place, Jack Wood providing a quiz of 30 questions on Nelson Lee topics. As he read out the answers Jack gave us a short talk on each item, and we thereby gained a good deal of St. Frank's lore.

A general 'free for all' in the best party spirit then followed, and many subjects were discussed, among them the new Sexton Blake, the Armada books and present-day periodicals and paper-backs generally. A number of interesting opinions were expressed, and in no time it was 4.30 and tea was brought in.

So ended another re-union between the clubs. We must certainly have another before very long, and maybe next time the odd London or Midland member may be able to make it, although admittedly it is a long and difficult journey for them.

NORTHERNMeeting held on 10th July, 1965.

Geoffrey Wilde, back from his holidays, was in his accustomed place to open our July meeting, the attendance being a decided improvement on last month's. It was good to see Gerry Allison, and Myra, back again.

Incidentally, because the caretaker will be away on holiday, we shall have to depart from our customary practice and hold our meeting on the third Saturday in August, instead of the second Saturday. Will all members please note the revised date - August 21st.

Jack Wood told us of the Bunter book to be issued next, which will be entitled, 'Bunter's Last Fling,' and speculated whether the title was to be taken literally and whether this was really the last of the Bunter books.

Phil Warren has donated a number of books to the library - Magnets, Gems, Populars and Thrillers, which will be very welcome to all our borrowers.

There was also a discussion on the announcement made this week that the Fleetway Press are to republish Magnet No. 1, in facsimile, next month, and it was agreed that we place an order for a quantity of these.

Harry Barlow gave us the first item of the programme proper, being a quiz of 12 questions based on the Billy Bunter's Cruise series, recently reprinted in Armada books. Geoffrey Wilde was the winner of this one.

Geoff followed with a talk inspired by the Test Match with New Zealand now being played at Headingley only a short distance from us. He looked back to previous Tests in which the New Zealanders have figured in this country, and produced the Magnets and Gems of the particular date which, as he said, the boys of the day may well have taken with them to read in the intervals. Extracts from the stories were greatly enjoyed, and Geoff also produced some Sexton Blakes of the same vintage, by such authors as John G. Brandon, Rex Hardinge, Barry Perowne and John Hunter. It all served to remind us what grand value for money we got in those days.

An interval for refreshments followed, and then we had an elimination quiz by Frank Hancock. This proved to be a bit of a teaser, and nobody produced an all-correct solution.

Breeze Bentley, who was paying one of his all-too-rare visits, had brought along that famous Magnet published in 1912 which had the story 'Bob Cherry's Barring-Out,' and a reading describing P.C. Tozer's

efforts to reduce Bob and Inky to order was greatly enjoyed. This brought our meeting to a close.

Next meeting, Saturday, 21st August.

F. HANCOCK

Hon. Sec.

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AUSTRALIA

Despite the onslaught of wet, wintry weather, club members turned up in fine spirits for the June meeting on Thursday 24th. Perhaps the memory of former meetings enjoyed in the peasant surroundings of Cahill's Restaurant, Castlereagh Street, Sydney, may have influenced their optimistic outlook. Whatever the reason it gave the evening a very good start at 6.30 p.m. and before settling down to an excellent dinner half-an-hour later, there was a pleasant interlude with overseas correspondence which served to activate the digestive juices most effectively.

From down south our Victorian friend Tom Dobson wrote to say he hopes to join us in late July so the date of the next meeting was altered to fit in with Tom's visit on Thursday 29th and I know I speak for all when I say it will be a renewal of a yearly pleasure to welcome Tom to our ranks at Cahill's rendezvous.

A special treat was afforded by our Editor whose panoramic photo of the London Club meeting held at his home recently provided a novel introduction to our fellow collectors in this club. Nice to meet you all, folk, - we envy you your flourishing set up and this wonderful setting for a meeting!

Members were extremely sorry to learn that our old friend Harry Broster has resigned as secretary of the Midland Club and send their best wishes to you Harry and Mrs. Broster. Your monthly Newsletter has always been a most welcome contribution to our meetings Harry and we do thank you once again for your mighty effort. We wish your successor well and look forward to hearing that your good work is being carried on.

Some most interesting letters from our friend Arthur Holland of Wellington, N.S.W., Bill Hubbard of Kenya, Ron Hodgson of the Northern Club provided a host of subjects for discussion during and after the meal. The evening closed on a very satisfied note both in the culinary field as well as in a literary sense.

B. PATE (Secretary)

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LONDON

There was an excellent attendance at the Cricklewood meeting on Sunday, July 18th. Amongst those present was Miss Hood, who had come up for the day from Kingsgate.

Bill and Marjorie Norris were the hosts and the latter played over the recent Nelson Lee broadcast in its entirety and this was enjoyed by the whole company.

Brian Doyle read the piece by 'Whitefriar' from "Trade News" re the forthcoming "Prospectus" issue. Bill Lofts carried on with a discourse on both this publication and the re-issue of "Magnet" number one. Then Brian drew attention to the current issue of "The Saint" magazine with Bill's article on Robin Hood in it.

Charlie Wright rendered a fine talk on Dick Turpin and had brought along some coloured plates which one and all perused.

Don Webster read a chapter out of a "Popular" which originally appeared in the "Gem," 'The Mysterious X.'

Brian Doyle conducted a quiz which was won by Bill Lofts, Len Packman was second and Josie Packman was third. The entire company then wished Josie a very happy birthday anniversary. Josie suitably replied and said that she would be pleased to see us all at 27, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22. on Sunday, August 15th, the next meeting of the club.

Excellent library business was done by the two librarians Roger Jenkins and Robert Blythe and the hosts, Bill and Marjorie provided a very fine study feed.

The September outing to Margate was discussed and final arrangements made.

Thus another very fine meeting with something to interest everyone present.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

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MERSEYSIDEMeeting held Sunday, 18th July.

Holidays again interfered with attendance.

In the absence of Norman Pragnell, I took the chair and the business part of the meeting was disposed of first.

John Farrell gave his report of the Manchester meeting which, unfortunately, most of us were unable to attend. He said that it had been interesting and enjoyable although the number of people who attended was apparently less than for the previous meeting.

Pat Laffey tested our knowledge of the world of drama. Bill

Galley proved himself to be the best informed on this subject.

After tea the library business was attended to and then followed a discussion on some of the items in the C.D. with particular reference to the Controversial Echo. We were generally in accord with the writer so far as Baggy Trimble and Bunter were concerned, except that bit about Bunter being detestable until the 1920's. As far as many of us are concerned he has never ceased to be detestable. Probably Baggy Trimble was accepted and tolerated by ourselves and the writer of the "echo" because we did not have to suffer him so much.

Next meeting is SUNDAY, AUGUST 15th.

BILL WINDSOR

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I wish to exchange for MAGNETS MONSTER LIBRARIES BULLSEYES the following:

24 Startler; 33 Modern Boy; 16 Rover and Adventure; 1 Captain, 4 Boys Realm Football Library; 9-Dreadnought; 1 Sports Library; 1 - 1<sup>st</sup> Marvel; 2 - 1<sup>st</sup> Marvel; 1 - 2<sup>d</sup>. Marvel; 2 - True Blue Library; 3 Hotspur; 1 Boys of England; 8 Silver Jacket; 1 Scoop; 2 Tigers; 50 Knockout; 42 Blue Gems; 20 Nelson Lees; 1 Football and Sports Library; 1 Aldine Thriller; 1 Buffalo Bill Library; 92 Champion Libraries; 46 Boys Friend Libraries; Champion Annuals 1952/1954/1955; Puck Annuals 1926/27; Radio Fun Annual 1954; Greyfriars Holiday Annuals 1929/32/34/35; 80 Parade; 14 Weird Tales; 51 Assorted American Detective Magazines; i.e. True Detective, True Police, Startling Det; 300 - Assorted Paper Backs, Donald Duck Comics, Australian Comics, B.O.P., Scout Annual etc.

FRANK L. KNOTT, 29 COLSON STREET, AVALON, LOWER HUTT, WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

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WANTED - Sexton Blake Library (2nd Series) Nos. 500 - 744, especially stories by Brandon, Stuart, Skene, Brisbane, Hardinge, Jardine, Brooks and Gwyn Evans.

EXCHANGE - Blakes (1st Series) Nos. 8, 63, 90, 351; (2nd Series) 38, 77, 734. Details please to:-

PETER KING, "HAVERCROFT," KIRBY ROAD, WALTON-ON-NAZE, ESSEX.

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WANTED FOR LIBRARY, O.B.B.C. NORTHERN SECTION

10/- each offered for Magnets 1043, 1044, 1047; or for SOL 191. Or complete High Oaks Rebellion Series.

GERRY ALLISON, 3, BINGLEY ROAD, MENSTON, ILLKLEY.

# AN OPEN LETTER TO DANNY

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AND HIS REPLY

Dear Danny;

You're talking nonsense when writing down SPORTSMEN ALL. I just won't have it! 1915 was the vintage year of the MAGNET for me. By a lucky chance I happen to have this story. During the first world war there was a call for reading matter for the troops in France. Just hand it in at the nearest Post Office. Patriotically, I handed 400 Magnets and Gems over the counter of the nearest Post Office. Months afterwards I found SPORTSMEN ALL, folded in three, in the inside pocket of an old jacket I'd had on when going up the coalyard for  $\frac{1}{2}$  cwt of coal (the workmen in the 'yard' used to give the boys  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cwt in return for a penny tip). I'd taken SPORTSMEN ALL with me to read while waiting - and we sometimes had to wait a long while in the yard when there was a lot doing among the coal trucks that had come in. I've since learned that SPORTSMEN ALL was a substitute, but what do I care. I thought it was a good story then and I do now. For one thing - there was a gathering of the clans: boys from St. Jim's, Rookwood, Highcliffe; and how delightful to have them all together in one story. As for somebody outshooting somebody else and the rest of it, that's common to all sport: it's all outshoot, outbox, out-dive, outrun... And why carp about the size of Number One study. If a reader could believe that Bunter could as a ventriloquist imitate Mr. Quelch to perfection - and I believed it - he could believe Number One study could hold a regiment. Jam tarts were being eaten, ginger-pop was flowing - that's all that mattered. The scene was one of gay festivity and I revelled in it.

SPORTSMEN ALL is now bound with a few other 'old 'uns', including a double number THE HOUSE ON THE HEATH, a good spy story. I like to look at them when in the mood. Seven or eight hundred other bound copies of the MAGNET and GEM I gave to my son a few months ago.

When I see you I'll punch you on the nose, you burbling jabberwock!

Yours sincerely,  
JACK OVERHILL

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Dear Jack,

It's all that Derek Frayne's fault. My wife met him one day in Surbiton. Horrible place. When she got home she said "I've met that Derek Frayne you used to know," and I said "Is that fellow still living? Must be ninety!"

One day he came barging in on us. Wanted me to write an article

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for that magazine he edits. My gout's too bad these days for me to bother with that sort of thing, but I remembered those old papers he's crackers about. Still got some of them.

I showed him a lot of old diaries of mine, and, to get rid of him, I told him he could print some of the entries provided he didn't embarrass me or give offence to anybody. He's done both.

I don't accept any responsibility for what I wrote fifty years ago. If you like "Sportsmen All," it's all right with me. Why not? Some people like cockles, and it's no skin off my nose.

I shan't mind your punching my nose so long as you keep clear of my gouty leg.

Yours affectionately,  
DANNY

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NEWS FROM P.-G. WODEHOUSE

In a recent letter, Bill Thurbon asked if I had seen an article in "History Today" on "The Tale of the Future." The writer - J. F. Clarke mentions the Invasion story to end all invasion stories. The author was the president of the Northern Section of the O.B.B.C. P. G. Wodehouse, and the title of the book was:- "THE SWOOP" or, "How Clarence Saved England." The epic of Clarence MacAndrew Chugwater, one of General Baden Powell's Boy Scouts, who defeats the forces of Germany, Russia, the Mad Mullah, the Swiss Navy, China, Monaco, the Young Turks and the Moroccan Brigade.

In a reply to the Northern Club, Mr. Wodehouse wrote: ", "THE SWOOP" was a shilling book I wrote in 1909. It contained 25,000 words and I wrote it in longhand in five days, and nearly perished in the process. It had very good comic illustrations by C. Harrison and there was a lot of funny stuff in it, but it didn't sell much. Copies of it must be almost impossible to get nowadays. I managed after years to secure one, but I had to pay £10 for it, which was about what I received in royalties!"

He also asks - "I wonder how those BBC Jeeves things will work out. Ian Carmichael ought to be fine as Bertie." Well, "The World of Wooster" is one of the funniest series there has ever been shown on television. On a previous occasion when such a series was suggested, P. G. Wodehouse wrote:- "tempting though the terms were, it only needed Jeeves' deprecating cough, and his murmured 'I would scarcely advocate it, sir,' to put the jack under my better nature. Jeeves knows his place! But for once, Jeeves was wrong.

\* \* \* \* \*

GERRY ALLISON

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

DON WEBSTER (Richmond): I thought you'd be interested to know that during the performance of a play called "Big Bad Mouse" at Richmond Theatre, Hugh Lloyd (of Hugh and I) rings up his Solicitors and asks for Mr. Wharton, Mr. Bull, Mr. Nugent and Mr. Cherry in turn, but the partners are all out (possibly meeting an Oriental or coloured client). This caused much laughter amongst the audience.

W. K. MAGEE (Wirral): It is gratifying to know that the Armada Greyfriars books are selling well. Although a certain amount of abridgment is obvious, the publishers have not hacked the stories about in the manner we have previously experienced. I wonder if they could be persuaded to republish some of the Rio Kid and King of the Islands stories?

(Some of the Armadas were actually reprinted from the S.O.Ls. in which abridgment was not always too skilfully done. -ED.)

H. MACHIN (Preston): Danny's Diary could be mine if I'd kept a diary in 1915 - the year when I became acquainted with the Companion Papers. The usual progression from the short stories in Butterfly, Chips, etc., to what then seemed long stories in Magnet, Gem, and Boys' Friend. The first Magnet I read was "Bunter's Banknote." Most enjoyable at that time, but written, as I now know, by a sub.

JOHN McMAHON (Uddingston): The first Magnets I ever saw were dated 1916 - 1918. I bought about a dozen at a penny each. They were the last I was to see until I heard about the O.B.B.C. When I buy Magnets now I am not pining for the lost days of childhood. I just enjoy a first-class story, and you will agree that this is just what Frank Richards always provides.

J. JEYES (Northampton): I well remember the appearance of Magnet No. 1, and the juvenile indifference to its publication. There was already the Gem, Pluck, Marvel, Union Jack, etc., so one can understand the attitude of "What! One More!"

W. O. G. LOFTS (London): In answer to Mr. Liddell's query and most highly interesting article on Lot-O-Fun, I can tell him that he is quite right in his assumption that W. E. Stanton-Hope wrote the Bob, Pip, and Nobby series in conjunction with other contributors. The editor was R. Chance Newton, who also wrote several tales himself each week. Hence probably his modesty in not replying to Mr. Liddell. Only other writer in the 1925/6 period was J. G. Jones, the author who had the great misfortune to go blind later in life, and his daughter

typed the stories for him.

YOUNG COLLECTOR HURT

By O. W. Wadham

Readers of Collectors' Digest who have been amused by the clever drawings submitted to these pages by 18-year-old Geoff Harrison, of Taradale, New Zealand, will regret to learn that he is in hospital following a nasty accident while motor-cycling with a girl friend.

Geoff, who is one of our youngest and keenest collectors, will be at least eight weeks in bed, as he suffered a badly broken leg, and had to be given blood transfusions following severe loss of blood when his motor-cycle was hit by a heavy car.

His girl friend also had her leg broken, but both patients are now making slow but satisfactory progress to recovery.

EXCHANGE ONLY - 70 Red Magnets, 80 S.O.L.

WANTED - Magnets before 1168. Gems before 1240. Offers please:

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EXCHANGE or OFFERS: Rivals and Chums; Nelson Lee O.S. Nos. 187 to 194 bound volume.

38 ST. THOMAS ROAD, PRESTON.

WANTED: Tom Merry Books; Magnets; Egypt Series. SALE: Magnets 1228 to 1236.

38 ST. THOMAS ROAD, PRESTON.

SALE OR EXCHANGE: Girls Own Annual 1885/6; Schoolgirls Own Annual 1933; Champion Annuals 1928 and 1936; Holiday Annual 1924. WANTED: Union Jacks.

NORMAN WRIGHT, 9 MILL FARM CLOSE, PINNER, MIDDX.

Death of JOHN HUNTER

It is with sorrow and regret that I have to record the death of that very popular author JOHN HUNTER. A full suitable tribute to him, it is hoped, will be in the SEPTEMBER C.D. W.O.G. Lots.