

Vol. 22
No. 259

COLLECTORS DIGEST

2/3

JULY
1968



The
**RIO
KID**

H. WOOD

TOM PORTER

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489 Boss of the Pacific

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619 The League of Bullies

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Collectors' Digest

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR
 Founded in 1941 by
 W. H. GANDER

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 HERBERT LECKENBY

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A FEW MORE THOUGHTS ABOUT NAMES

From time to time, in our columns, there have been various discussions concerning names - their sources and their suitability to the characters concerned. It is a thought that many of those names have become more familiar to us and certainly more lasting than those of stars in entertainment and sport.

More remarkable, probably, is a character whose name is never known throughout a long story. One in particular comes to my mind. In Daphne DuMaurier's novel "Rebecca" we never learn the name of the heroine. She becomes Mrs. De Winter, but there is no mention of her maiden name, nor does anyone, not even her husband, ever address her by her christian name. This, perhaps, is only possible because Mrs. De Winter tells her own story. And we can read and enjoy the entire novel without realising that we have never learned the heroine's name.

This story also provides one of those instances where the character named in the title never features in the story. "Rebecca" is dead before the narrative begins. In the play and the film from it, Edward never is seen in "Edward, My Son." In "George and Margaret," those two worthies never appear.

Coming a little nearer to most of our homes, we have never known the surnames of Henry and Douglas who have had leading parts in the William stories for nearly fifty years. We know "Ginger's" surname. It is "Flowerdew." But here we don't know his christian name. Even his mother and father call him "Ginger," but that can hardly have been the name proposed at his christening.

It is curious that we know the christian names of most of the boys at the Hamilton schools. This is not due to the fact that Who's Whos of the schools were published long ago. If it were, we should only accept those names with reserve, for the author had little or nothing to do with any of the Who's Whos. We know them because Hamilton quoted them from time to time in his stories. It wasn't necessary, but, in a way, we are glad that he did.

THE PAPERS WE KNEW

Recently, in the street, I met a local reader. He told me with some considerable pleasure that, the previous evening, he had listened to an ITV play in which a character referred to the Magnet as the finest boys' periodical of all time, and, in addition, made something of an appeal for the return to the modern market of papers of that type.

Now, I did not see the play in question, but I did read a newspaper criticism of an ITV play in which, apparently, the leading character was an idealist who lived on the memories of papers he had read as a boy. I feel it possible that our reader may have misinterpreted the intention of the author of the play.

In the years since the war, we have witnessed the deliberate denigration of the world we knew when we were younger. From time to time the papers we loved have been sneered at and belittled. I wonder just how many times we have been assured that those old-fashioned stories would never sell today - the modern boy wants nothing of the sort. And yet, continuously, in the past few years, we have seen many of those old tales re-published.

Then, after they are published, comes the glib report: Oh, no, they didn't sell - we shan't publish any more. And then, amazingly enough if the glib reports are true, comes another flood of them.

Quite obviously, these reprints DO sell well. And it is modern youth which buys them. Publishers, who are far from being idealistic philanthropists, do not continue to issue these reprints just to pamper the few hundred people who comprise the old boys' book clubs.

For ages we were told that Sexton Blake MUST be brought up to date if he was to compete in swinging Britain. We never quite believed it. If we had believed it we might be astounded to learn that four Sexton Blake stories, originally published between the wars, have just been reissued, uncut and untampered with - and more will probably follow. I bet they'll sell like hot cakes.

In May 1967, the musical "Desert Song" started a run in London. Most of the critics sneered as only they can do, and slammed it unmercifully. "Desert Song" was still running in May 1968, in spite of the critics.

Now "The Student Prince" has returned to the West End. This time the critics have been just a little less pungent with their notices, though many of them are patronising. One writes:

"It is a good thing that operetta is back on view. The young can see what they have missed and perhaps catch it, like mumps. The enthusiasts, who are past recovery, will wallow and enjoy it."

Quite a neat summing-up. I wonder it has never been applied to the Magnet & Co.

THE EDITOR

MODERN BOYS WANTED: Buy or exchange. I have some issues before number 220 for exchange and am also prepared to exchange for Magnet Tuckshop Rebellion, Dr. Sin, Brazil, Wild West Series etc. 223, 225, 228, 230, 237, 248, 250, 252, 267, 279, 280, 283, 285, 287, 288, 294, 295, 299, 304, 305, 308, 310, 315, 322, 326, 343, 345, 351, 363, 369, 375, 381, 382, 384, 389, 390, 417, 419, 420, 421, 426, 427, 428, 435, 457, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 467, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 481, 483, 484, 485, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 495, 496, 497, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 505, 520, 521, 522, 523. New Series: 1, 4, 23, 26, 44, 45, 65, 66, 70, 73.

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DANNY'S DIARY

JULY 1918:

It would be rather fun if a bomb fell on my school, so long as nobody, not even old Scatterbags, was hurt. In the Boys' Friend, at the end of last month, a bomb fell on Rookwood.

So Rookwood has broken up early for the summer vac, and Jimmy Silver & Co have gone caravanning. This is a glorious series. The stories so far have been "The Rookwood Caravanners," "The Sorrows of Sergeant Kettle," "Tit for Tat," and "Cuffy and the Caravanners."

Jimmy and Co have a caravan, and a horse which they call Robinson Crusoe. They start off down in Kent, and Tubby Muffin manages to lock himself up in the van and so join the party. They meet up with Tommy Dodd and Co who are also caravanning, under the charge of Sergeant Kettle. The two caravans join forces for a time, and Jimmy thinks of a plan for getting rid of the unwelcome Sergeant. Then Cuffy, who is a real scream, joins up with Tommy Dodd, and causes havoc. By the end of the month, Jimmy thinks up another plan, and after much fun, Cuffy sets off for his home at Ganders Green. This series is a delight, and I hope it goes on for a very long time.

As usual, the Cedar Creek tales have been fine. This month Cedar Creek has been illustrated by H. M. Lewis. One kind of asscerates him with Sexton Blake, and he seems a bit out of place with Cedar Creek. The Rookwood artist is P. J. Hayward.

The first story "Bailey's Bonanza" was a sequel to "The Haunted Mine" of last month. It was Injun Dick who was playing ghost. He was stealing nuggets from the old mine, and got it the reputation of being haunted in order to keep people away.

Next came "The Schoolboy Actors" in which Frank Richards formed the Cedar Creek Thespians who tried, unsuccessfully, to present the play "Julius Caesar." After this, another tip-top couple of tales. In "In Merciless Hands," a man called at Cedar Creek school and asked for the services of an interpreter. He said he had fallen in with an injured man who could only speak French. Frank Richards, who had learned French in his English school, went with the man. Frank found that it was a plot to get money out of the Frenchman, and he managed to find out all about it by tacking bits on to his sentences when he was carrying out the ruffians' instructions as to what he should say.

Next week, in "Tracked by Two," Bob Lawless and Beauclerc went in search of Frank, and managed to save both him and the injured Frenchman. Cedar Creek is a joy.

In fact, the Boys' Friend is a ripper, and one good thing the war has done to it, even though it is smaller, is to cut out all the advertisements. The Redcliffe series about Jack Jackson, by Herbert Britton, is not a patch on Rookwood or Cedar Creek, but it fills up the odd minutes not unpleasantly.

I suppose it's really a bit hot for going to cinemas in July, but if the pictures are good I forget about the temperament. We have had some good programmes. I think the picture I liked the best was Mary Pickford in "Amarilly of Clothes Line Alley." This was really good.

Some time ago - I think it was in the United States- there was one of those big court cases concerning a man who shot another man who stole his wife. It was quite a long time ago, but I have read about it in the News of the World when mum wasn't looking. Harry Thaw killed a man called Stanford White who sootied his wife Evelyn Thaw. In America there is a law called Dementia Americana (that's what it says outside the cinemas) which allows a man to shoot anyone who sooties his wife.

This month there has been a film called "Shadows in my Life," starring Evelyn Thaw as herself. At many of the big cinemas Evelyn Thaw has appeared on the stage before the picture began, and she did so at our Gem Cinema. I wasn't allowed to go, but Mum and Dad went. Dad was very sorry for Evelyn Thaw who looked very sorrowful, but Mum said she reckoned Evelyn whitewashed herself. Which was a good idea after being sootied.

While Mum and Dad went to see "Shadows on my Life," I went to the Empire to see Jack Pickford and Louise Huff in "Jack and Jill." Not the fairy story, of course. It was good.

A real whackeroo was Douglas Fairbanks in "Down to Earth." It was very exciting, with Douglas Fairbanks doing all sorts of stunts.

Another time we saw Billie Burke in "Land of Promise." Billie Burke is a sweet little girl. Then there was Sessue Hayakawa in "The Secret Game" and this was exciting. All together, a very good month at the pictures.

This month, Lord Rhondda, the food controller, died very suddenly. He was the man who worked out all the rationing system. There hasn't been so much shortage since food was rationed. Even sugar is easier to get, and coconut candy is still 4 ounces a

penny and is very nice, though you eat it quickly.

The Magnet has been well below standard this month. The first of the month was "Tom Redwing's Father." Skinner & Co try to embarrass Redwing by paying a boozy man to turn up at Greyfriars and pretend he is Redwing's father. But at the finish, Redwing's real father, Able-seaman William Redwing, turns up safe and sound.

After that, "William the Warlike" was absolute piffle. A letter came addressed to W. G. Hunter. It contained £10 and Bunter claimed it. In the finish it turned out that W. G. Hunter was a temporary new boy in the second form. But Bunter had paid the money over to an old pug, to teach him to box.

Also mighty awful was "The Shylock of the Second." In fact, it was pretty disgraceful. The author made the boys go to Rylcombe station to meet a new boy. On the front cover there was a picture of the boys on the platform, showing the name of the station - Rylcombe. If the author didn't know any better, you'd have thought the artist would have done. The Shylock of the story was a boy named Spring. A girl at Cliff House (we had never heard of her before) said that Spring was older than he pretended. And Spring was a ventriloquist.

The fourth and last tale of the month was the start of a new series, and this tale, "Angel of the Fourth" was pretty good. Vernon-Smith, Temple, and Sir Jimmy Vivian had all known Angel before he came to Greyfriars. Jimmy knew what to expect, but Temple had his eyes opened.

The Gem had been rather above the standard of recent months. The first story, "The Wheeze That Went Wrong," a tale about school-boy japing, was feeble, but the rest were good.

"The Plunger" was quite delicious. Gussy decided to back a horse, Jolly Roger, in order to raise £100 for the Cottage Hospital. I chuckled and gurgled all the way through it. Then came "Lacy's Loss," which was, by the way, illustrated by Lieut. R. J. Macdonald who was home on leave. Lacy of the Grammar School visited St. Jim's and was persuaded that Grundy had stolen his diamond tiepin. This, too, was a very amusing yarn.

For the final tale of the month, the editor had announced "The Schoolboy Hun," but instead he published "The Triumph of Tomkins." Clarence York Tompkins is a bit of a butt and he plays a great joke on the whole of junior school. He managed things so that a Mr. Brown offers a new £16 bike as a reward to some unknown fellow who had saved Mr. Brown's life. There were a number of

claimants for the reward. Jolly good. If the Gem goes on like this, it will take on a new lease of life.

There is a lot of sadness for me as July comes to an end. My dear old Gran at Layer Marney is very ill. I heard Mum say that she has been failing for some time. Mum has just heard from Auntie Gwen to say that she thinks my Mum ought to go. So this afternoon Mum has gone to Layer Marney, and Jessie, who is on holiday from the munition works, has come to be housekeeper at our house for a fortnight. I miss Mum terribly, and I am terribly sad about Gran. She is getting to be an old lady now, but somehow she never seemed old.

FOR SALE: A bargain parcel of BOYS' REALMS, mostly in excellent condition. Includes a long run of loose copies 1904 - 1905, plus some copies for the years 1915, 1916, 1919, 1922, 1926, 1927, plus the Xmas Double No. (fair condition) for the year 1915. £4. Several dozen excellent copies of BULLSEYE: 7/6 each. Several dozen copies of PLUCK down the years: 3/- per copy. Bound volume of the early 1/2d Greyfriars Herald of 1915: £8. Red Magnets: 316, 321, 322, 324: 17/6 each. Also 313, good copy but back cover missing: 15/-. DREADNOUGHT No. 3 (1912) 4/-. Bound copy of "True Chums" by Jack North (Pluck 117) 15/-. Bound copy of "Of Sterling Worth" by Jack North (Pluck 246) 15/-. Excellent bound volume of the Greyfriars Herald (1919 - 1920) (Benbow stories) containing Nos. 1 - 37: £8. Excellent copy of THE SURPRISE (1932) 7/6. Gems Nos. 1146, 1147, 1470, 1472, 1473. Good copies. 5/- each. Postage extra on all items.

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THE MAN WHO MADE SEXTON BLAKE

By C. A. J. Lowder

(Concluded)

Blyth was also a better detective story writer than the majority of his colleagues from the Marvel, Union Jack and Pluck stable, like Louis Weyman or Edgar Lee. This, of course, apart from Maxwell Scott, on whom I cannot pass comment, having only one story by him, non-detective.

Even so, Blyth was no Freeman, or Leroux, or Bodkin - that is, a writer who introduced some new element into the genre. As it is, one can spot the villain of the piece as soon as he steps onto the stage - he might just as well have entered with a bag marked "SWAG" in large letters on it over his shoulder. Yet, for all that, the story has vitality, a certain gusto that forces one to read on and on, and the characterization of the detective is certainly distinct, which is a pleasant relief after reading the rather fatuous efforts of Messrs. Weyman, Lee, Herring, etc., written for the Marvel of the same period.

In any case, this particular story I consider to be the prize of my small collection - it makes up for the fact that a previous owner of these books seems to have meticulously sorted out every early Sexton Blake story from the pile. For, if not the real thing, it comes a close second, being that rather puzzling item of early Blakiana "The Accusing Shadow" (No. 48) featuring the detective's French colleague Jules Gervaise on his, as far as I know, only solo case.

As such - and for the amusing little allusions to Blake in the text - I value it beyond price, though some might say that it is a very poor second.

However - we are introduced to Gervaise, "imperturbable, cosmopolitan," in the dining-room of his house "in the neighbourhood of Kennington Oval," where he is in the middle of announcing to a friend his forthcoming retirement. A danger-signal, this, as any detective fiction follower will know - imminent retirement for a hunter of men usually means that he is about to embark upon his most difficult and dangerous case.

Within half an hour, Gervaise is plunged into a fascinating

turmoil of fraud, chicanery and double murder - plus two other killings, adjunct to the plot - involving, withal, a trip to Paris ("Paris, the beautiful! Paris, the gay! Ah, yes! I also have loved my Paris.") where he narrowly escapes being executed by a secret society.

But the case is not all high-powered action, for Gervaise is a detective who really detects and, before the assignment is but an hour old, he has cleverly noticed, to the confusion of the party involved, that the chief suspect has recently washed his waistcoat and is learning French - a clue that has some bearing, in the reader's mind at least, though not in the author's, on Gervaise's trip to Paris.

Incidentally - and this may cause a flutter in the dovecote - it would seem that his English colleague, Sexton Blake, relied more upon athletic prowess than sharp wits to see him through a case, for at one stage in the proceedings Gervaise, rather cynically I feel, comments:

"I am glad I have not Sexton Blake with me. He would inevitably ride a bicycle, plunge into a stream, or stop an engine in full career, before he got to the end of this business. I must do my acrobatic feats in my head, and on the ground."

The murderer, when finally confronted with the evidence of his guilt, escapes, only to fall into a cauldron of boiling pitch, thus settling the seal on a happy ending.

We have come a long way from my original musings on the authenticity of Harry Blyth - not, I hope, unprofitably.

So, to end, let us briefly finalize answers to those questions I put at the beginning of this article. Blyth, I think, was a penny-dreadful writer long before he joined the early Harmsworth organization - probably a close study of the Aldine journals of the 1880s and '90s would yield some interesting discoveries. Anyway, he was known and respected by Editors and the reading public alike as being dependable for copy and a good, pacey writer of adventure and detective tales. The Editor of the Marvel, a discerning gentleman, on reading a detective story by Blyth recognized a spark of something extra-special embedded in the tale; a more unusual name was devised for the hero, and Blyth was ordered to write more stories around this central character. The Editor, being a long-term businessman into the bargain, saw to it that, even after Blyth's death, the series was carried on by other writers.

So a legend was born.

This, I must emphasize, is only my reading of the case. A thousand other explanations as to why Sexton Blake survived when others fell by the wayside could obviously be put forward.

It may even be possible that the Editor of the Marvel spoke the literal truth when he claimed that "thousands of correspondents" were demanding more Blake stories. Though one doubts it.

Whatever the facts are, there is, surely, no harm in a little innocent guesswork. In any case, reading these fragile, musty-smelling magazines of 75 years ago has been a rare and remarkably refreshing experience.

* * *

IS THE MYSTERY SOLVED?

by W. O. G. Lofts

Perhaps I am unique in our hobby; but the greatest pleasure I get, is not so much in reading the old stories, but in solving the many mysterious things about them and authors, which never seem to cease. The reader who may think that I am always successful, would be greatly mistaken. Although I am proud of the fact that a great many have been solved to my own and other people's satisfaction, there are some which like the brook in the poem seemingly go on for ever. One of these, which would defy the combined efforts of Sexton Blake; Nelson Lee; and even the great Sherlock Holmes surrounds that mysterious brilliant author; creator of George Marston Plummer; the one and only Michael Storm.

So much has been written about this writer in the past, that as Walter Webb says in his excellent article, it is hoped that the reader is just not tired of the whole subject. But to do this, when so much has still to be written would be like leaving a manuscript of the most important part of the Blake saga unfinished. Biographical details about any author being of special interest to myself, I read Walter's contribution to the Annual with interest. Although it is conceded that he did a fine job of research, I must admit that at the end I come to the conclusion that the mystery is far from solved. To complete a jig-saw puzzle one must fit in the details according to the known facts, and many of the details supplied by Walter do just not tie up with the concrete facts known. In many points I do not blame Walter, as it is a fact that only a fraction of information gleaned by myself is ever printed. Many facts are not written simply because they detail things about an author's private and personal life which in many cases is too

colourful or meaty to put into print. Certainly chunks of data regarding Michael Storm are likely to remain in my files for a very long time!

Although I don't dispute the fact that there are husband and wife teams in writing, there is no evidence at all to suggest that Mrs. Storm ever penned any stories. There is no question that Michael Storm was a man, and a real he-man at that. The late Len Pratt of the Sexton Blake Library knew him quite well when he was on the staff of the MARVEL. Like many other editors Mr. Pratt simply refused to discuss any thing about the writer, and took the view that we should not dig up facts around a very 'colourful' writer. Another editor of the old PLUCK was more co-operative, and as he is still alive and refuses to be drawn into controversy his name must remain secret. He used to meet Michael Storm in his office and discuss with him the school stories he was writing then about Ravenscar and Abbotsrag. That this was the man who penned the yarns he had no doubt, as he had a most intimate knowledge about them. He described Michael Storm in 1908 as a large man with whiskers round his face, but whose mode of live was vastly different from his own clean living, and of whom he would never have dreamed of mixing with socially. Horace Philips editor of CHEER BOYS CHEER only remembered Mrs. Storm coming up with stories, but never stated that she wrote them; perhaps in this respect Walter misunderstood his phrasing of this event.

Michael Storm was always being pressed by his creditors, and as a result of this, was forced to live abroad, and only make fleeting visits to Fleetway House. Certainly this point alone does not tie up Walter's view that the Storms were well off financially. Michael Storm apart from living at Boulogne lived in Switzerland, and did live at periods at Bognor Regis. By some detective work I was able to elucidate that his real name was Ernest Sempill and a distant relative of the famous family. He was no connection with Captain Duncan Storm of the late 3rd Huzzars who lived in Western France, though he probably was related to this officer's wife.

"Yes, you are correct; MICHAEL STORM was not the writer's real name, and as you have so cleverly discovered he was a member of the famous family. He died abroad somewhere about 1910" so wrote my editor informant some time ago. Although there is no evidence to suggest that Storm (as I will call him) was in excellent health, likewise there is no evidence that he was in bad health,

though by his mode of living he certainly would not have lived to a ripe old age!

Where Michael died is not yet known; but evidence at the moment suggests that it could have been in far off AUSTRALIA! To give the facts of this; Mrs. Teed, widow of famous George Hamilton Teed, has just been contacted, and at the time of writing will shortly be interviewed on the subject. She does say however, that her husband was returning from Australia where he had suffered severe losses in the sheep farming industry, when he met Mrs. Storm on the boat. Mrs. Storm was a widow, and her husband had never met Michael Storm of course. This disputes Walter's theory completely that Teed and Storm must have met in France. Feeling sorry for Teed, Mrs. Storm showed him stories that her late husband had written, and suggested that G. H. T. try his hand at the same trade. Teed did so, and on arriving in England Mrs. Storm took them up to Fleetway House and got them accepted as being from her late husband's estate. In time it became obvious that Mrs. Storm could not supply them for ever and at the insistence of Willie Back G. H. Teed showed himself and was accepted as a new and talented author.

Mrs. Teed goes on to say that Mrs. Storm was a deeply religious woman, who converted Teed to the Roman Catholic religion. She influenced him so much, that he frequented Cathedrals and other religious places for years afterwards. This kind of woman hardly seems the type to say she was a widow, when she was not!

As Walter says, GILBERT FLOYD, the popular writer of the Bombay Castle stories, adopted the pen-name of DUNCAN STORM, but there is no evidence that he took the name to disguise any activities of the mysterious Michael. I don't doubt that he knew him, but in character and social status they were poles apart. Floyd was a popular and respected man, and I suggested he only took the name STORM because of the suggestion of shipwreck and desert islands of which he was fond of writing.

I do agree with Walter that the Sexton Blake Catalogue is confusing in listing Michael Storm and E. Sempill as authors of the same reprinted stories, but it only explains further the difficulties compilers have in preparing lists of authors' names when many even sign 'nom-de-plumes' or even the name they are known under is not their own! Common sense should be used as I think we did when obvious G. H. Teed stories were paid to Mrs. Storm, and we listed Teed as the rightful author. I can say that for a

short time even G. H. Teed was known as ANTHONY WEST in writing Blake stories. If we had put Mr. West as the author it would no doubt have raised an outcry from the anti-official records clan, who would with indignation have stated that they were obvious 100% Teed yarns.

The simple reason why two sets of signatures are known of M. Storm is that some were signed by Michael of the large hand, and the other by his widow when she took manuscripts of her late husband's effects (and Teed's) to Fleetway House.

It is quite probable that a titled lady did write for the old early Amalgamated Press; but so far as I have discovered through official channels she kept her secret so well by adopting another official nom-de-plume that all the editors who knew of this have now passed on. In any case she was certainly not Mrs. Storm.

In closing on this interesting subject, I cannot help feeling that whenever there is a mystery writer involved of the very early days, it is immediately suggested that a woman is behind it all. F. St. Mars the writer of the nature stories was concluded to have been a woman by several writers when in fact it was a man. A photograph hanging up in Frank Vernon Lay's study confirms this beyond all doubt. That clever artist of Rookwood G. W. Wakefield was a well known boxer named George William who would have handed a solid right hook to the suggestion by some collectors that he was a woman named Grace. A member of the famous family mentioned earlier did undergo a sex change widely reported in the press only last year, but I cannot imagine that this happened in the case of the two M. Storms.

Since the above has been written I have travelled down to South Wales, and had a long interview with Mrs. Ivy Teed. Mrs. Teed informs me "that there is no question that Michael Storm died somewhere around 1910/12 period as her husband ('Hamilton' she called him) always referred to the late Michael Storm and his widow. Sometimes her husband mentioned a Mrs. Sempill, but as at that time she did not think anything of this nature all that important, she did not go into the matter more fully at the time. Michael Storm did live for a time in Paris; and Mrs. Teed herself was a great admirer of his stories which she read in back issues. According to her, Michael Storm also wrote in the STRAND MAGAZINE.

If I may be excused in quoting Walter's expression, there is not a tittle of evidence that any one of the Storms wrote the Lady

Maxwell stories in the PENNY PICTORIAL. My own information from official sources is that they were all penned by Cecil Hayter.

* * * * *

W. J. BAYFIELD

In answer to Walter Webb's article on W. J. Bayfield in the May C.D., after many years of research I have at last discovered what actually happened to this great writer of stories in the 1900-25 period. This will all be reported shortly in Blakiana, when I have contacted and gleaned more details from a close relative.

W. O. G. Lofts.

R E V I E W S

There seems to be an improvement in the Sexton Blake Library. It feels better, it seems to have a more elaborate finish, and it is good to see the name Sexton Blake splashed in large type across the front cover. Our experience, however, is that it is no easier for a hopeful customer to find copies in the shops. Both the stories we now review are for those customers who like their Blake with all the modern trimmings.

Martin Thomas
(Mayflower 3/6)

BRAINWASHED

As always, Martin Thomas writes competently and tells a thrilling story. This one is bang up to the minute, dealing as it does with a prisoner repatriated from the Vietcong. It can't miss for all who like a tense tale of international intrigue with plenty of flavour of the mystic east, plus a good many instances of Blake showing that flair for startling deductions which made him famous before the mid-twentieth century caught up with him.

Desmond Reid
(Mayflower 3/6)

THE ABDUCTORS

A much longer story than "Brainwashed," this one, though in modern Blake style, is a tale in which Blake and Tinker work together, much on the old lines. Blake crosses swords with a kidnapping gang, and, at the start, it is Tinker who disappears - a victim of the gang. Should please all Blake fans.

THE SECRET OF THE SNOWS
 DANGER AT WESTWAYS
 THE SECRET OF THE TEN BALES
RAFFLES CRIME IN GIBRALTAR

Gilbert Chester
 Donald Stuart
 Anthony Parsons
 Barry Perowne

(Published at 3/- each by Dean)

If "Brainwashed" and "Abductors" are for the modern Blake fan, these four are for those who prefer their Blake in period. These are all, in fact, reprints of SBL's of the nineteen-thirties, and it can be said at once that they have worn well. Very attractive, with stiff covers, well-drawn pictures printed direct on to the covers, and the famous scales of justice in one corner, these books are splendid value for money. Only very slightly and very rarely touched up here and there, these books will delight all Blake's older admirers. Whether the pruning pencil has been at work at all it is hard to say, but, if so, no harm has been done.

The stories appear under their original titles, and we should be thankful for this. For those with orderly minds, the following are original serial numbers of the stories: Ten Bales 596; Raffles' Crime 601; Westways 645; Snows 651.

FOR SALE: 4 fascinating volumes of the MARVEL, bound without outer covers containing (a) Nos. 30 - 52; (b) 53 - 78; (c) 79 - 104; (d) 105 - 136. Condition reasonably good. £3.10s. per volume. S.O.L. No. 332 "Mystery of Holly Lodge" (St. Jim's) 7/6. S.O.L. 333 "The Crook Schoolmaster" (St. Frank's); cover damaged 3/-. Postage extra on all items.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE RD., SURBITON

W A N T E D : Radio Funs Magazines and Annuals 1938 to 1945 for a nostalgic collection by New Zealander at present on a sentimental visit to England. Top prices paid for all quantities. Can swap with every issue from 1946 to 1952. Also require Champions and Film Funs 1940 to 1948.

P. THOMPSON, 2 ALWYNE MANSIONS, ALWYNE ROAD, WIMBLEDON, LONDON.

WANTED: S.O. Libs. 307, 313, 316. Magnets 1930-33. Also Magnet numbers 1589-1598. SALE: Several Gems, Magnets, Collectors' Digest.

J. McQUADE, 31 CLOTHORN ROAD, DIDSBURY, MANCHESTER, 20.

NELSON LEE COLUMN

CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD

EARLY STRUGGLES
THE "NOVEL MAGAZINE" AND "CHUMS"

By R. Blythe

The Novel Magazine
Feb. 21st, 1908

Dear Sir,

I regret to inform you that the story which you submitted for the £10 Prize Story Competition has not been adjudged the prize, nor do I consider it quite suitable for publication in the "Novel Magazine."

Hoping, however, that I may still have an opportunity of seeing more of your work.

Believe me,
Faithfully yours,
The Editor.

With this disappointing, yet encouraging letter, the earliest in the E. S. Brooks archives, the young E. S. B. seems to have set his feet on the literary path as a career. Indeed, we have no evidence that he ever contemplated any other than writing at any time.

The year 1908 must have been one of disappointments and hardships. Disappointment because his stories were being returned - with the single exception of "The Phantom Volcano" in "Yes or No" in November he had had nothing published. Hardships, because, being determined to make a thing by his writing he was forced to live on money borrowed from his parents.

In a letter to his brother Arthur he says "For the last 5 or 6 months I've been entirely on my own..... all the money I've had I've drawn from Father. Once I get a few stories accepted, however, I'll soon wipe off this debt. For the last 6 weeks I've been slack, what with being in lodgings and so on, but I mean to get not less than 3 short stories written and sent out a week now. At the present, however, I have to go to Dad for every penny I need, (my sole wealth at the moment is 3d!) and as you know, nothing is more irritating. If I want to go to the Ipswich Hippodrome I have to borrow 6d to get in; every time any papers

and mags. come out I have to borrow so much to purchase them. It matters, I tell you frankly!"

As we now know it was Arthur who gave Edwy the chance he wanted by commissioning him to write every week for the Magazine Programme.

In 1909 his luck finally turned, and so we find early in Jan. 1909 that a story written the previous year entitled "Jim Goodwin's Homecoming" had been accepted for publication in the "Novel Magazine." However, the excitement that this must have caused must have been dampened by the fact that it did not appear until July of that year, and of course, he did not get paid until it did.

This story was described in the magazine as follows: "One of the most baffling mysteries ever written" etc. etc. After this modest opening, the plot of the tale is this. Two friends love one girl. One marries her. The other (Jim Goodwin) leaves the district threatening dire consequences. Years later he returns. All is forgiven. Jim leaves. Later the couple's young child is found unconscious and bleeding from the head. A broken beer bottle (!) is found nearby. Jim is accused. Detective arrives, and after much suspense Jim is proved to be innocent. It had been a very hot day and the child had been playing in garden. Several beer bottles about, one of which, being corked, had exploded by internal combustion, or something. Flying glass had struck child.

The plot may sound rather corny but it reads well, which is the main thing. In any case one must assume that the readers of the "Novel Magazine" in 1909 were not very critical.

There is an interesting sidelight to the social norms of the time in this story, inasmuch as the young couple were in the habit of leaving empty beer bottles lying about in their garden. Obviously Edwy thought nothing of it. Equally, the editor accepted the story without reservation and he would have known what was acceptable to his readers.

In spite of his success with this story he did not manage to get any more published in the "Novel." There was an exchange of letters later on in the year concerning the mss of "Dardy" which had apparently got mislaid but which finally turned up, but was not accepted for publication.

We must now turn our attention to some correspondence with Cassells, the publishers of "Chums."

Chums
March 2nd, 1909.

Dear Sir,

In reply to your letter of recent date, I shall be glad if you will submit the school story you mention and I will give you an early decision thereon.

Yours faithfully,
The Editor.

The story referred to here is a 70,000 word school yarn entitled "Oswald Raymond's Peril."

This story was duly submitted and called forth the reply that Edwy quoted in his letter to his brother (see Feb. C.D.) This was in March 1909.

Early in 1910 Edwy had another try.

Four Elms,
Stoneham Parva,
Suffolk.

Jan. 19th, 1910.

The Editor
"Chums"

Dear Sir,

I herewith beg to enclose a 3,300 word adventure story which I trust will prove acceptable for publication in "Chums." I also beg to remind you that in a previous letter you said you "would always be pleased to consider stories from my pen" and that you principally required short stories of 3,000 to 3,500 words in length.

Awaiting the favour of your early decision.

I am, dear sir,
Faithfully yours,
E. S. B.

Whether or not this story was ever published I have not, as yet, had the opportunity to investigate. Come to think of it, I don't even know the title of the story! Anyone who has a volume of "Chums" for 1910 might care to see if he can find anything.

Whatever happened Edwy had another go in April 1910. A letter to the editor reads as follows.

April 9th, 1910.

Dear Sir,

I beg to enclose the mss. of a 60,000 word adventure story entitled "Among The Solar Planets."

May I ask you to give special attention to this mss?

I have written the story especially for "CHUMS" and as you know something about my work (having read "Oswald Raymond's Peril")

the style of which you said was "quite nice") I should esteem it a favour if you would let me have an early decision as possible. I enclose a stamped and addressed postcard for acknowledgment
I am etc.

Edwy was no more successful with this story than with the other - at least with "Chums" - for as we know, it was eventually published in The Nelson Lee many years later. Still, Edwy was persistent for we find another letter from the Editor later in the year.

Chums. August 8th, 1910

Dear Sir,

I am returning your story "Caravan and Canvas" herewith.

I was very interested in it as I have been looking for some time for a story with a circus environment, and have recently asked another author to prepare a synopsis. Your story, I am sorry to say, seems to fall short of my requirements, and therefore I am unfortunately unable to use it.

Yours etc.

Once again he had been turned down, but the story was eventually published in the "Boys" Friend" as "Canvas and Caravan" and was possibly serialised in one of the papers before this. All this time he was writing for the "Gem" as well as for other papers and I will be telling you about these in due course. As far as "Chums" is concerned he tried again in August 1911.

August 12th, 1911.

Dear Sir,

You will find enclosed the synopsis of a school story, which I trust you will read. I shall be glad if you will kindly let me know whether it is suitable for "Chums" and whether I can write the first instalment.

I am etc.

I have no record of a reply so have no knowledge whether a story was eventually written. Doubtless a perusal of the volumes for 1911/1912 will prove something.

There is one more reference to "Chums" among the records. In a letter dated Dec. 22nd, 1914, Edwy refers to a story he had submitted called "Bensons Blunder," which had not been published at that time.

And there E.S.B.'s connection with "Chums" ended - if indeed it had ever begun. Edwy, of course, really had the last laugh, for nearly everything that the editor of "Chums" had turned down

was later published by the A.P.

Did I hear you say "What about 'Oswald Raymond's Peril' then?"
 Oh yes! I forgot! This appeared ten years later, in 1920, as a
 serial in the "Union Jack" and then in 1921 was reprinted in the
 "Boys' Friend Library." Title - "Curtis of the Fifth."

HAMILTONIANA

Do You Remember?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 70 - Magnet No. 305 - "The Four Heroes"

The year 1913, which produced "The Mystery of the Painted Room" as the Christmas double number for the Gem, must surely rank as one of Charles Hamilton's outstanding periods. The Magnet double number followed a fortnight later (it would never have done to have double numbers competing against each other), and collectors who might reasonably expect a Greyfriars story of the same calibre as the Eastwood House thriller would be disappointed on reading "The Four Heroes." It has never achieved anything like the fame of its Gem counterpart, and rightly so. But it has some unpretentious merits of its own and, if "The Mystery of the Painted Room" is put out of one's mind for a time, "The Four Heroes" is capable of giving a certain amount of pleasure to the reader.

The story seems to veer around unpredictably, but it has more essential unity than might at first be supposed. It begins with seasonable snow, and a football match from which Vernon-Smith is dropped because he cannot be trusted. His revenge on the footballers arouses such antagonism that a memorable form trial follows.

The story takes its title from the central episode, in which a grateful Colonial gentleman about to sail home writes a letter to Dr. Locke, praising the unknown Removite who has saved his life, and offering £20 reward. The hero is to be identified by a cut sustained on his right arm just below the elbow. When Dr. Locke later assembles the whole school and asks for the hero to stand forth, no less than four Removites walk forward - Bunter, Skinner, Snoop, and Bolsover - each one with a cut in the right spot. Dr. Locke's cross-examination of the claimants is something that undoubtedly deserves a place in legal history. The various strands of the story are drawn together in the Wharton Lodge episode in the last three chapters, and probably readers of the time as well

as present-day collectors must have deplored the brevity of the concluding chapters of a story that is noteworthy more for its ingeniousness than for reasonable atmosphere.

Like most double numbers, Magnet No. 305 had its appropriate embellishments. The coloured cover was drawn by P. J. Hayward, and there was a group drawing of the Remove for the title picture. A Greyfriars verse play "The Spectre of No. 1 Study" completed the Hamiltonian items: it later re-appeared in a Holiday Annual. With 52 pages for twopence, and a 25 chapter Greyfriars story, "The Four Heroes" was indeed remarkably good value for money, even in those far-off days of 1913, and many a young reader must have revelled with unclouded happiness in the last pre-war Christmas double number.

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 125. CAMP, CARAVAN, AND CRICKET

In most of our hearts there is a specially warm corner reserved for Charles Hamilton's summer holiday stories set in England. Those series were filled with charm, whether they told of caravanning, boating, or hiking.

Though, going back to them all these years later, we find them still fresh, delightful, and soothing, it can hardly be denied that the caravan series have dated. People still go caravanning, of course. But it is with a caravan with every mod con, attached to the rear of the family jalopy, wobbling along the A.5. at a steady 45 miles per hour.

The red and green caravan, drawn by a somnolent horse - so dear to the heart of Charles Hamilton - is no longer with us except in our dreams. We used to invite overseas visitors to "Come along and see our unspoiled countryside, our thatched cottages, our dusty lanes, our hedgerows sprinkled with wild roses." All that has changed. Now the travel brochures must say enticingly: "Come and see our motorways, our supermarkets, our blocks of skyscraper flats." Ah, me! How things improve with the passing of time!

That young scamp, Danny, so often reminds us of items which we might have overlooked. Many of the articles in this column result from the fact that Danny sucked his pencil and made entries in that diary of his, long ago. We freely admit our debt to him. This month he makes our memories glow, with mention of that Rookwood caravanning series which appeared in the Boys' Friend exactly

fifty years ago.

Sometimes it seems as though Charles Hamilton wrote a very great many caravanning series. In actual fact there weren't so many of them. It was just that he wrote them so well that they live on. They are so re-readable that we come back to them time and again, and they never grow stale.

The Rookwood series which started in July 1918 and ran throughout July and August was Hamilton's first caravanning series. Of its type, he never surpassed it. It delighted from the first word till the last. For two months the charmed reader followed the adventures of the Rookwood chums in their green caravan drawn by the reluctant horse, Robinson Crusoe.

They had Tubby Muffin with them, an uninvited guest. They met Smythe & Co near Smythe's home, and they discomfited Smythe by playing cricket for a village team which Adolphus had hoped to annihilate. They were joined temporarily by Billy Bunter, and later by Arthur Augustus. Several very funny tales introduced Clarence Cuffy - and Cuffy could always be relied upon to please even the most jaded of readers. They fell in with Tommy Dodd & Co. They even, inadvertently, aided a German spy. It was all great fun.

The holiday spirit ran throughout the series. The stories were inconsequential and only linked with one another by the green caravan, the lazy horse, and the winding lanes.

By the time that another fifteen years had slipped by, there was a subtle change in the English holiday series. Each story was linked by a mysterious happening which recurred regularly. The Magnet hiking series told of somebody's odd desire to acquire a Holiday Annual which was accompanying one of the hikers. In the Water Lily series, Shifty Spooner appeared on the scene in each story so that his appearances failed to be mysterious and became monotonous.

So the earlier English holiday series told of unlinked adventures. The later ones had a connecting theme. I greatly preferred the earlier ones, though you may think differently.

The connecting theme had, in fact, been apparent by 1929 in the trike series, but in this case it was a complete success. The solution was novel and never quite evident till the end, and, most important factor of all, the series was short so that there was never a sense of repetition.

The magnificent Rookwood caravanning series of 1918 was

Hamilton's first caravan series. He had, however, sent the St. Jim's chums caravanning in a single story in 1915. It is odd that it never occurred to him then to extend it into a long series, but the blue Gem is remarkable for plot wastage.

To anyone reading the 1918 caravanning series today it is obvious that it just could not miss being a smashing success. There can be but little doubt that the success of the 1918 series inspired Hamilton to send the St. Jim's chums caravanning the following year, 1919, in a very similar series and with very similar success. Perhaps the only snag would be that a reader of both Rookwood and St. Jim's might have thought "This is where I came in!" But the charm was so marked that readers just lapped it up.

This 1919 series in the Gem ran to eleven stories, and it was Hamilton's longest Gem series up till that time if one considers only series where the stories ran consecutively on the same theme by the same writer. When this series was reprinted in the thirties, two tales, dated by "rationing," were omitted.

For the Magnet's taste of caravanning we pass on to the year 1921. This time, for some reason which has never been apparent, Charles Hamilton's handling of the theme was strangely half-hearted. Though it contains some delicious humour and a certain charm, it never caught the atmosphere of the Rookwood and St. Jim's series. After only three tales, the caravanners went abroad and there was an abrupt change in the style of the series which, even including the two tales on French soil, only ran to five stories all told. It is possible that Hamilton might have feared a charge that he was repeating himself and so sought to ring the changes on a now familiar theme.

Once more, in the middle twenties, the St. Jim's chums were to taste of caravanning. This time they were on a walking tour when they captured and took possession of Coker's caravan. Just as it began to give great promise, these chums too went abroad, and the promise of a memorable series petered out.

It is, perhaps, odd that Charles Hamilton never returned to the caravan theme in the thirties. Is it just possible that even in the thirties, a caravan, drawn by a horse, would have been an anachronism in the British lanes? And Charles Hamilton realised it?

If so, it is strange that he should, in a post-war Bunter book, have sent Billy Bunter & Co caravanning with a brilliant van and a horse to pull it. If it is a question whether a caravan was out-of-date in the thirties, there is no doubt at all that it was in the fifties. Though we read the story affectionately, and it

was competently written and had a minor charm, "Bunter, the Caravanner," loosely based on the Magnet's "billionaire" series, was really a failure. It was quite improbable, to put it mildly, that a criminal, seeking to evade the eye of the law, would have elected to go caravanning with schoolboys in a brightly coloured van drawn by a horse.

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CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

GERRY ALLISON: Congratulations on your article "Which Wing for Billy Bunter?" It needed saying. The greatest charm of our hobby has been its freedom from class distinction. A genuine love of our old boyhood books has been an open sesame to friendships and companionships with people ten times as brainy and fifty times as wealthy as oneself. It is true that on one official notepaper the committee were divided into Esq. and Mr. which I thought unfortunate!

But nowadays it seems that no one should read any book for simple pleasure. Charles Hamilton wrote rubbish with a snob-appeal; P. G. Wodehouse is 'a burbling pixie'; the William books are withdrawn from children's libraries. As for Henty's boyish heroes, and his stories of English history from Beric the Briton to By Conduct and Courage - they should all be burnt.

I have been fortunate in my recent meetings with reporters, photographers and radio producers. None of the young men or women I met were in the least satirical about our hobby. In fact they were impressed with the variety of people in all walks of life who are members of our circle.

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THE SWELL OF ST. JIM'S

It is over 60 years since Charles Hamilton created the one and only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, a character who perhaps won fame nearing that of the immortal Billy Bunter. The story was entitled "The Swell of St. Jim's" and it appeared in the year 1906. Few, if any, C.D. readers have ever come across the story. Just how many copies of it are still in existence today it is impossible to say, but their number must be very small indeed. The story was never reprinted, for by the time that St. Jim's became so popular that the narratives of it merited reprinting, it was Tom Merry whom readers wanted - and Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther had not been created when Gussy first turned up at St. Jim's.

After considerable thought, I have decided to serialise at

least the opening chapters of "Swell of St. Jim's" in Collectors' Digest. The serial will commence next month in these pages. Not only will this give readers the chance to read a story which they are never likely to see elsewhere, it will also give them the chance to compare Charles Hamilton's early work with the later material with which they are so familiar.

I hope and expect that the serialisation will provoke enormous interest, and I shall look forward to publishing brief comments from those who put pen to paper in comparing the early work with the later and in drawing conclusions concerning the very early portrayal of the Swell of St. Jim's. Look out, next month, for the first instalment of this interesting story.

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

MIDLAND

Meeting held May 28th, 1968

There were only eight members present for the Annual General Meeting.

The formal business began with the reading of the minutes of the last A.G.M. and also of the previous meeting in April. It was resolved that Jack Corbett, founder of the Midland Club, should be approached regarding his being president. Since his wife's death Jack has not attended, but members are still mindful of the fact that he was the pioneer who brought into being our club.

As usual, the chairman for the year stepped down after his year of office had expired and proposed that the new chairman should be Edward Davey. This was agreed and the warm thanks of members were afforded to George Chatham, the retiring chairman on a year of very successful meetings under his guidance. The post carries with it a lot of responsibility and George had acquitted himself splendidly.

The question of secretary was deferred and the present arrangements continue with the work being shared.

Norman Gregory was re-elected treasurer after giving a masterly account of the club's financial position and Tom Porter was re-elected librarian. Both of these received from members the warmest thanks for their invaluable services to the club over the past years.

The coffee interval contained a pleasant surprise - a present from the retiring chairman's mother Mrs. Chatham in the form of

scrumptious tarts. It goes without saying that these were much enjoyed. Gerald Allison's scoop in getting himself featured in "Reveille," the news magazine, was mentioned during coffee break and members complimented him on the fact:

The meeting decided to revise a few of the club rules and Win Brown volunteered to get copies made of them to be distributed to members.

With the formal business over Norman Gregory entertained with a number of items, one item, a crossword puzzle, being very much enjoyed. It was decided for him to continue with his items at the next meeting as the time ran out before he had finished.

The two collector's items were this month, No. 267 of "The Rover" and the Wizard No. 234. Both these were Anniversary numbers and 41 years old for both bore the date 28th May, 1927.

The next meeting is on 25th June at the B'ham Theatre Centre.

J. F. Bellfield
Correspondent

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NORTHERN

Meeting held Saturday, 8th June 1968

Though several of our members were on holiday, eleven were present when Chairman Geoffrey Wilde (happily recovered) opened the meeting. He had a special word of welcome for a new member, Miss Arden, and for Roger Jenkins on a visit from London.

The Treasurer-Librarian Gerry Allison had news from postal members, including Cliff Smith, Jim Jayes, and Edwin Hales. A short general discussion followed, covering an appreciation of the P. G. Wodehouse school stories now being published by Armada Books, and the discovery of yet another 'Bunter' in a tale of Ranthorpe School, by Sydney Drew.

Now the company settled down to hear a masterly Hamiltonian talk by Roger Jenkins. Roger had chosen Mr. Ratcliffe of St. Jim's as his subject, and his analysis and comparison of this master's character made very interesting hearing. A warm clap was given at the end of the talk, and the details of discipline led to a long spontaneous discussion of present methods in schools. (With four members of the teaching profession there this was illuminating and lively.)

Papers were now given out by Gerry Allison, and snippets of conversation had to be matched to a list of names provided. These covered most Hamilton schools, and was quite a task. The winners

were Geoffrey 16, Roger 15, and Jack (Wood) 12.

After the refreshment interval we divided into two teams again, to compete in solving a crossword puzzle sent in by Cliff Webb in the manner of last month. (One team have the 'down' clues and the other the 'across' clues.) Once again the Black Team won, with 42 against 37 letters on the board. This game proves a popular one, with the added wit-testing of trying to solves clues you have not, in addition to the ones you have!

Time now to say "Goodnight" and thank all who had provided such a happy and engrossing evening.

Next meeting Saturday, 13th July, 1968.

M. L. Allison

Hon. Sec.

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LONDON

One of the highlights of the June Ruislip meeting held at Friardale on Sunday, 16th, was Winifred Morss' Hamiltonian item "A letter from Tom Merry to Harry Manners, 20 years on." It was well put together and greatly enjoyed by the enthusiastic gathering. At the conclusion there started a good discussion on all the aspects of the letter. Bert Staples rendered a "Greyfriars" quiz with questions taken from the "First Wharton Rebel" series. The one, two, three winners were Don Webster, Bill Hubbard and Laurie Sutton. Ray Hopkins read a paper on "A Survey of the School Friend," during the years 1925-29. Ray evidently knows his subject and here once again a lively debate took place at the end of his reading.

A humorous reading by Millicent Lyle from one of the "William" stories concluded the entertainment side of the meeting. We had had four very good items and thanks must go to the programme organiser, Bill Hubbard for his fine work.

Frank Vernon-Lay had brought along a supply of the first four hard back Sexton Blake stories that have been published. With the authors being Anthony Parsons, Gilbert Chester, Barry Perowne and Donald Stuart, they look like having a good sale.

Holidays now in full swing and it was Don Webster in the chair whilst Len and Josie are away on vacation in Northampton. Another holidaymaker was Nelson Lee librarian, Bob Blythe. But we had a good attendance and splendid hosts, Bob and Betty Acraman. Next meeting at "Greyfriars," Wokingham, Berks, host Eric Lawrence. Let's hope for a good attendance. Sunday, July 21st. Four good

coloured photographs of the recent Surbiton meeting were on show, thanks to Eric for sending them along via Roger.

Uncle Benjamin.

THE POSTMAN CALLED

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

JIM COOK (New Zealand): I would like to offer a suggestion for replacing the editorial heading of "A Word From The Skipper." Do you not think a more appropriate head would be Martial's "To Be Able To Enjoy One's Past Life Is To Live Twice"?

T. G. L. COCKCROFT (New Zealand): The Collector's Digest Annual for 1963 contains (as you know) an article about the story The Lanchester Tradition; this says that there was no edition of this book, after the first, until 1954; this is nonsense, as it was reprinted by John Murray in August 1919 and July 1928. It is also stated that this seems to have been Bradby's only book -- yet he wrote also The Great Days of Versailles, The Marquis's Eye, Joshue Newings, or, The Love Bacillus, Dick: a Story Without a Plot, The Awakening of Bittlesham, For This I Had Borne Him, and a book of poems, Reaping the Whirlwind; all these had been published before 1931, so there could have been others later.

J. TWELLS (Rugby): There is no doubt in my mind that E. S. Brooks' school stories are more consistently humorous than those of any other author and for his main funny characters he chose Edward Oswald Handforth, Willy Handforth and Archie Glenthorne - what "Leeite" will ever forget "The Coming of Archie"? - but of course the chief delight is the obtuse Handy, a creation true to life - I met his counterpart when I was in the army in the last do.

Why, then, are there fellows saying that Handy is obnoxious etc.?

I may not like some of the characters in other school stories but I'm not going to pull them to pieces, there's no point in doing so. I know what I like and my modern daughter, age 16, who has read all my "Lees" over and over again (as I have) agrees with me that Handy is the "greatest."

LEN WORMULL (Romford): Your mention of changed characters in a Greyfriars story (Pyle-Twigg) reminded me of a similar change in a St. Frank's story. The original story, "Handforth Gets The Sack," 1926, appeared again in 1933 under the title, "In the Shadow of Expulsion," also in its original form. The story concerned Handy being saved from expulsion by brother Willy. When the story was serialised as "Shadow of Disgrace" in Film Fun, 1961, much had changed. Mr. Crowell, the Remove master, had become Mr. Benson, a character unknown to me. Instead of Handforth being up for the sack, it was his friend Church in this predicament, with Handy going all out to save him! Obviously, it was a question of simplification to meet the needs of modern youngsters. But the original version was the more plausible one.

T. M. COCKBURN (Ayr): I have just been re-reading the February, 1968, page 26 Review on The Penguin Book of Comics and am still mystified as to the coolness shown therein to what I consider the greatest comic of them all. The reviewer says this book wins on points. Sir, it is a smash-hit, a veritable knock-out. It is only a couple of weeks since I secured a copy of this book, for a combination of your reviewer's "off-putting" comments and local book-shops intransigence in not stocking the volume daunted me from buying it earlier. I finally had to resort to purchasing direct from Penguin.

How dare your reviewer say too much space is devoted to American strips. This is sheer nonsense. A balanced display is given of British comic-papers, newspaper strips, American comic books, American "funnies" sections. And those beautiful reproductions of my beloved Film Fun, Radio Fun, Rainbow, TV Fun, Knock-Out, Comic Cuts of yesteryear

balance perfectly the excellent Superman, Batman and Robin, Blondie, Bringing up Father of my boyhood (in the late 40s and early 50s).

As to the Bayeux tapestry criticism - why, an American book published nearly 20 years ago traces the development of Blondie, Little Orphan Annie and Dick Tracy from the drawings executed by the cave men on the walls of their dwelling places.

RAYMOND TAYLOR (Wolverhampton): I was very interested in the Hamilton Edwards article in the last issue. As you say, the Boys Herald never attained the popularity of the Friend and Realm and it was always a mystery to me for it was indeed a fine paper. Do you remember the for sale and wanted adverts that it used to run. You could get volumes and bundles of boys papers for a shilling or two that would take you many pounds these days. "Chums" was another great paper, although there did not seem to be much demand for it, it ran for many years, until The Fleetway House finally killed it off.

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

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I LIKE TO THINK THEM FINISHED says JIM COOK

The word "saga" as applied to the various papers in our hobby is getting a little out of control. I have just read for the second time W. Howard Baker's "Fire Over India" - a reprint from The Angry Night published in 1960 - and Blake lovers will be alarmed at the ever-growing additional characters to our fixed mise en scene.

We cannot prevent present-day writers giving Sexton Blake a brother and a father but just where is the "stop" area of the Sexton Blake story? The present fifth series of the SBL is a Blake reborn and therefore cannot constitute part of the detailed history of the man from Baker Street. Or can it?

The MAGNET and GEM I like to think finished with the passing of Charles Hamilton and any tales of Greyfriars and St. Jim's since published by ghost writers have no place in our records.

It is easy to determine the history of The Nelson Lee Library since it came to a definite end in 1933. Although Brooks wrote about St. Frank's for the GEM after that year I have always considered this an intrusion and not strictly part of the history of St. Frank's. In other words superfluous.

Obviously if "stories of St. Frank's" do appear in MERLIN books they will be abridged, adapted and "brought up to date" so how can we, the Old Guard, reconcile these ever continuing stories with the basic principles of our hobby.

Let us have a stop-start formula to our particular saga and done with it.

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